

The Russian Quest for Ontological Security:
An Inquiry into the Reconstruction and
Translation of the “Russian Self” in Relation
to the Military Intervention in the Kosovo
and Ukraine Crises

Jonas Gejl Pedersen

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Abbreviations and acronyms

| | |
|--------|---|
| CIS | Commonwealth of Independent States |
| CPRF | Communist Party of the Russian Federation |
| CST | Collective Security Treaty |
| CSTO | Collective Security Treaty Organization |
| EU | European Union |
| FPC | The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation |
| FSB | Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation |
| GRU | Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation |
| G7 | Group of Seven |
| G8 | Group of Eight |
| G20 | Group of Twenty |
| IMF | The International Monetary Fund |
| IR | International Relations |
| KFOR | Kosovo Force |
| LDPR | Liberal Democratic Party of Russia |
| LMSU | Lomonosov Moscow State University |
| LNO | Limited nuclear option |
| MAD | Mutual assured destruction |
| MAP | NATO Membership Action Plan |
| MD | The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation |
| MGIMO | Moscow State Institute of International Relations |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| NSC | The National Security Concept of the Russian Federation |
| NSS | The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation |
| OECD | Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| OSCE | Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe |
| SCO | Shanghai Cooperation Organization |
| SFOR | Stabilization Force |
| UN | United Nations |
| US/USA | The United States/The United States of America |
| USSR | The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics |
| WTO | World Trade Organization |

Referencing

For the sake of readability and transparency, I have placed the references to primary source material (e.g., Russian and foreign newspapers, magazine articles, online resources, radio and TV transcripts, official documents, speeches) in footnotes.¹ Notable exceptions are references to memoirs, which are placed in-text brackets (e.g., Talbott, 2002). The complete body of primary sources is available to the members of the assessment committee in part or in whole upon request.

References to secondary sources (e.g., scholarly books, journal articles, online resources) are placed in brackets (e.g., Götz, 2013) throughout the text. The bibliography contains all of the secondary sources listed alphabetically.

¹ E.g., “Синдром Черномырдина [The Chernomyrdin Syndrome],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Aleksey Konstantinovich Pushkov, June 11, 1999.

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Jonas Gejl Pedersen
Aarhus University
February 12, 2019

Prologue: An Ontologically Insecure “Russian Self”

This dissertation has been motivated by a sense of curiosity about why Russia decided to intervene in Kosovo (1999) and Ukraine (2014) despite the grave risks and predictable adverse impacts on Russian material and ideational security in terms of its well-being and status. Conducting my inquiry into the Russian military interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine, I gradually learned that the interesting question is not *why* Russia intervened, but rather *how* the intervention in Kosovo and Ukraine was rendered meaningful. Indeed, *meaningfulness*—or rather the lack thereof—is central to understanding the Russian paths *toward* and *away* from interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine.

The most central premise of this dissertation is the *loss of existential meaningfulness* in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The final collapse of the Soviet Union not only paved the way for turbulent political, economic, and institutional revolutions in post-Soviet Russia, but also existential chaos as formerly meaningful senses of belonging to a “Soviet Self” collapsed.

A heightened sense of ontological insecurity—a sense of insecurity about what meaningfully defines the “Russian Self”—followed the collapse of the Soviet lifeworld; hence, the Soviet ontology. Consequently, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the imagined Russian community² has been on a fundamental quest for post-Soviet ontological security. This quest has been about answering two fundamental existential questions:

- (I) What defines a meaningful post-Soviet Russian Self?
- (II) How should such a meaningful Russian Self authentically represent itself to “Foreign Others” in foreign politics?

This dissertation is about the aspect of the Russian quest for ontological security concerning Russian foreign policy. Foreign policy is just *one* of several so-called policies of belonging in a mutually constitutive relation to senses of national belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2011).

In the following, I present two illustrative quotes testifying to the experienced lack of existential meaning as well as visions for a more meaningful

² Following Benedict Anderson’s definition, the imagined Russian community denotes “an imagined political community. [...] *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members [...], yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communication” (Anderson, 2006, p. 6).

post-Soviet existence. The first quote I have chosen is from a retired Russian military officer referred to as “The Romanian” in *The Long Hangover*, a book by Shaun Walker (2018). Being the Head of Counterintelligence for the Ministry of State Security of the Donetsk People’s Republic, the Romanian is located at what could be referred to as the implementing level of Russia’s disruptive foreign policy. In an interview, he recounts that his participation in the ongoing fighting in Ukraine was not about resurrecting the Soviet Union he nostalgically mourned the passing of. More fundamentally, the Romanian voiced an existential need

to rebuild the country. The Soviet Union, the Russian Empire, it doesn’t matter what you call it. I want a Russian idea for the Russian people; I don’t want the Americans to teach us how to live. I want a strong country, one you can be proud of. I want life to have some meaning again (The Romanian in Walker, 2018, p. 4).

The Romanian’s testimony is illustrative of a recurring longing for a meaningful sense of a post-Soviet sense of belonging that I have encountered in numerous shapes and forms throughout the body of primary sources used in the writing this dissertation, but also when talking with Russian colleagues and laymen at conferences, courses, and workshops. As the Romanian stresses, this encountered existential search for a meaningful post-Soviet Russian Self does not necessarily include a need to restore the territorial confines of former Russian empires (Czarist or Soviet) but often a wish for meaningfulness to emerge from a distinct—hence, authentic—Russian source.

The longing for meaning from an authentic Russian source leads to the next illustrative quote I have chosen to pinpoint a central theme in the ontological security of post-Soviet Russia. This quote is from Russian President Vladimir V. Putin’s “2018 Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly:”

Challenges and big goals give special meaning to our lives. We must be bold in our plans and actions, take responsibility and initiative, [...] and creating the Russia that we all dream about. Only then will the next decade and the entire 21st century undoubtedly be an age of outstanding triumphs for Russia and our shared success. I believe it will be so.³

I have chosen this quote because the notion that existential meaning is reconstructed in contexts where both significant challenges and grand visions relating to one’s future Russian Self are present is central to the Russian quest for ontological security. Like any other crisis, a foreign policy crisis holds both the

³ “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly,” *The Kremlin*, March 1, 2018: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56957> (accessed October 11, 2018).

potential for a complete breakdown of the existing ontology, but also a breakthrough for one envisioned as more meaningful and authentic. Thus, the Russo–Western foreign policy crises in Kosovo and Ukraine were important episodes in the Russian quest for ontological security, as the antagonism characterizing the Russo–Western encounters provoke inner dialogues among different visions for the Russian Self about what distinguishes authentically Russian from non-Russian meanings. In short, foreign policy crises are important to identify meanings understood as authentically Russian and along which it is suitable to reconstruct the ideal vision for post-Soviet Russian Self.

Beyond this testimony to the experienced lack of existential meaningfulness and authentic way of life—but also hope for more meaningful and authentic ones—in the wake of the dissolved Soviet Self, the more comprehensive post-Soviet Russian quest for ontological security is painted with a broader brush by Nobel Prize winning Svetlana Alexievich in *Secondhand Time* (2016). This book should be read by anyone interested in understanding the fundamental existentialist questions in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and how the fundamental quest for answers to these existential questions influences the formulation of Russian policies of belonging; including foreign policy, which is the dissertation’s theme.

Departing from my conceptual retranslation of ontological security, the core argument in this dissertation is that Russia’s military interventions are symptomatic of a response to the ontological insecurity felt among the Russian custodians interpreting the Russo–Western encounters in Kosovo and Ukraine as existential threats against Russian Self, but—paradoxically—encounters are not solely representing the breakdown of the existing sense of Russian Self, but also opportunities for Russian custodians to advance their respective visions for what constitutes a more meaningful and authentic Russian Self. In short, Russo–Western encounters simultaneously manifest breakdowns of the existing sense of Russian Self as well as breakthroughs for potentially more meaningful visions for the Russian Self.

By bringing the concept of ontological security closer to its original rooting in existentialist thought, my theoretical retranslation aspires to assert the importance of including the human quest for existential *meaningfulness* and *authenticity* into the conduct of inquiry in International Relations. I argue that the ontological lens offers a particularly useful—yet overseen—understanding of the puzzling Russian decisions to intervene militarily in Kosovo and Ukraine despite the high material and ideational costs. More generally, I argue that the ontological perspective offers a useful account of the fundamental Self–Self relations influencing foreign policy. The ontological Self–Self per-

spective supplements existing ideational and material lenses based on assumptions of foreign policy being driven by, respectively, endogenously and exogenously given Self–Other structures.

Echoing Valerie Hudson, a core assumption here is that foreign policy is human “all the way down” (2014, p. 12). Thus, reconstructing and interpreting the inner dialogue among a polyphony of Russian voices uttering a multitude of material, ideational, and ontological security concerns involves aplenty hard work to gather, read, and write based on Russian primary sources, but the task of presenting these inner Russian dialogues trustworthily has been even harder. Trustworthily reconstructing, interpreting, and conveying what different humans find existentially meaningful and authentic is a tricky task.

This is particularly tricky if the analytical goal is to get the point across that the pathways to military intervention in both Kosovo and Ukraine are complex and far from predetermined. How should I convey the highly complex processes manifesting the inner Russian dialogues about senses of ontological insecurity, what defines a meaningful vision for the Russian Self, and how to translate such visions authentically into the foreign policy of Official Russia to readers in a clear and concise manner without reducing the contextual complexity and sensitivity of the meaning-making processes of the specific agents in the settings that I want to highlight the importance of?

While a clear and concise answer to this fundamental dilemma has failed to present itself, I have given it a—hopefully nice—try. I ask the reader to bear with me and exercise patience with the extensive gallery of characters featured in the inner Russian dialogues and their numerous—often contradictory—ways of uttering visions for the Russian Self and Official Russia, constantly going back and forth between the past, present, and future. In that respect, my dissertation shares at least one thing in common with the great works of Russian literature by Fyodor M. Dostoevsky and Leo N. Tolstoy, who are renowned for their extensive galleries of characters and rich portrayals of the inner and outer contexts of the agents and settings introduced in their impressive examinations of human existence.

Having notified the reader of my intention to craft a contextually rich and complex analytical narrative, a brief expression of hope remains in order: I hope my dissertation makes some tentative steps toward convincing scholars, politicians, pundits, and practitioners of the *usefulness* of the ontological perspective in terms of understanding and explaining Russia’s at times puzzling foreign policy drawing on hitherto neglected insights about the underlying Russian quest for ontological security.

Introduction

This dissertation is about the role of the Russo–Western⁴ foreign policy crisis in the reconstruction⁵ of post-Soviet Russian national identity—the “Russian Self”—and its translation into Russian foreign policy. More concretely, how these reconstruction and translation processes unfold in the course of the *more fundamental* Russian quest for ontological security; that is, security about what meaningfully constitutes the Russian Self in the wake of the dissolution of the “Soviet Self.”

Further to the existing ontological security studies of Russian foreign policy (e.g., F. S. Hansen, 2009, 2016), this dissertation offers concrete in-depth examination of how Russian senses of ontological insecurity rendered military intervention to be a meaningful response in the Kosovo (1999) and Ukraine crises (2014). These two interventions represent, respectively, the first and latest major Russo–Western encounters since the end of the Cold War. Afterwards, I investigate how the inner dialogues among Russian custodians before, during, and after the respective military interventions influenced the reconstruction of the Russian Self. Finally, I interpret how Russian custodians translated Russian Self into “Official Russian” foreign policy post-crises.

⁴ For normative and conceptual reasons, “Western” is just as controversial a label as “non-Western.” In *Rethinking Power, Institutions and Ideas in World Politics*, Amitav Acharya stresses that neither Western nor non-Western are homogenous constructs (2014, p. 3). Similarly, Ole Wæver et al. (1989) tried moving beyond the East–West dichotomy in *European Polyphony*. More recently, Wæver argues that the diversity among and between European and non-European states (those normally associated with the West) implies adopting a more differentiated outlook on a world order that is becoming increasingly less liberal (Wæver, 2018). Fully aware of the controversy surrounding the use of the Western Other, I use the concept to denote contemporary NATO and EU member states that directly or indirectly—given their membership in these core organizations—encountered the Russian Self in Kosovo (1999) and Ukraine (2014).

⁵ Following Patrick T. Jackson’s definition, “reconstruction” defines the process “by which a nonactor becomes an actor again” (2006, pp. 2-3). Here, the process of becoming an actor should not be understood in essentialist terms as a process toward something whole and uncontested; rather, this process should be understood in more relationist terms. An actor—here, the Russian Self—is a product of “ongoing constitutive *practices*” driven by various individual and collective agents in “ongoing debate;” hence, without essence (P. T. Jackson, 2004, p. 285).

The fundamental puzzle motivating my inquiry is why Russia, despite the expected adverse material and ideational costs (particularly in terms of military security and economic well-being together with the international status of the country) decided to intervene militarily in the Kosovo and Ukraine crises. My core argument is that military interventions were rendered meaningful by ontological—alongside material and ideational—security concerns; that is, the security of a meaningful post-Soviet Russian Self. The main premise for my core argument is that the Russian custodians are on a never-ending quest to reestablish the sense of ontological security that was lost when the Soviet Union (and therein also the Soviet Self) collapsed. With Russian meaning-making at the center of my way of theorizing the two Russian episodes of military intervention, I crafted a historical interpretivist research design to generate and analyze a comprehensive body of the primary sources of the contemporary inner dialogues among Russian custodians about visions for—and threats against—their respective visions for a meaningful post-Soviet Russian Self.

Adopting the lens of my conceptual retranslation of ontological security, my historical interpretivist inquiry shows how Russo-Western encounters simultaneously manifest anxiety in relation to the *breakdown* of existing visions for the Russian Self and—provoked by Russian senses of ontological insecurity arising from the anxiety of breakdown—a *breakthrough* for inner the dialogues among Russian custodians about how to reconstruct an ideal vision of the post-Soviet Russian Self. In the context of Kosovo, the Russian Self goes from being reconstructed along the vision of *because of* to *in spite of* the “Western Other;” in Ukraine, from being reconstructed *in spite of* to *in opposition to* Western Other. Additionally, I investigate how the reconstructed Russian Self translates into the altered foreign policy of Official Russia after the military interventions. After intervening in Kosovo, what I coin a *disruptive* Russian foreign policy strategy is introduced. Disruption is a second-best strategy, which due to a lack of novel and alternative Russian foreign policy goals—and insufficient means and resources to pursue such goals—aims at preventing “Foreign Others” from realizing their goals in world politics; particularly the Western Other.

How did I end up deciding to write a dissertation about this puzzlement? My personal point of departure for writing this dissertation can be traced back to my interest in the Ukraine crisis. The Russian military intervention and annexation made a lasting impression on me. Being a child of the end of the Cold War and the USA as unipolar superpower, Russia’s intervention and annexation became sources of a personal sense of ontological insecurity about the

authenticity of the victorious “Western Self.” Indeed, the Russian use of military force in Ukraine is a pivotal point in the story about the new era unfolding in the wake of the Cold War.

Contemporarily, I was not the only one feeling my lifeworld coming apart that landmark day when Russia invaded Ukraine in late February 2014. German Chancellor Angela Merkel allegedly told US President Barack Obama that Putin was living in “another world.”⁶ Similarly, then Danish Foreign Minister Lene Espersen confessed in an interview with a Danish newspaper that:

We simply had another mindset. We thought that they [the Russians] had other intentions [...]. We thought that the world had changed, this has proven not to be true.⁷

After (most of) the astonishment settled following the Russian annexation of Crimea in March 2014, a state of surprise gradually led to a number of puzzling questions. How could disagreement about an EU Association Agreement escalate into military intervention? Why did Russia so resolutely resolve to use military and not diplomatic means to settle dispute? Why would Russia undertake military intervention so soon after the Sochi Winter Olympics and jeopardize the seemingly meticulous restoration of its international status after the Russo-Georgian War (2008)?⁸ After all, the Sochi Winter Olympics manifests one of post-Soviet Russia’s most impressive and expensive mega events.

These questions are no less puzzling considering how Russia had only recently strengthened both its economic and political relations to the European Union (EU) and, working together with the United States of America (USA), successfully negotiated the disposal of Syria’s chemical weapons in 2013. Additionally, Obama announced significant cuts to the US military in 2013, which would bring the total number of US Armed Forces down to pre-World War II levels and notably reduce the number of US bases and personnel stationed in Europe.

⁶ “Pressure Rising as Obama Works to Rein In Russia,” *The New York Times*, Peter Baker, March 2, 2014: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/03/world/europe/pressure-rising-as-obama-works-to-rein-in-russia.html?_r=0 (accessed September 28, 2018).

⁷ “Et hjerteligt forhold [A warm relationship],” *Berlingske Tidende*, Jette Aagaard & Carl E. Arnfred, March 21, 2014: <http://www.politiko.dk/nyheder/et-hjerteligt-forhold> (accessed September 5, 2018).

⁸ For studies analyzing the significance of Russia hosting the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi as a so-called case of “assertive nation branding,” see *The Sochi Predicament* (Pettersson & Vamling, 2013).

Juxtaposing the expected adverse impact of intervention on Russian security, economy, and status with prospects of a reduced US presence on Russia's Western frontiers and Russia increasingly integrated in beneficial international economic and diplomatic institutions, I found it difficult to make sense of Russia's sudden intervention—on top of which came a seemingly unnecessary and provocative annexation of Crimea. Writing my PhD proposal, I was left with two fundamental questions: *Why*—and *how*—did Russian decision-makers conclude that military intervention and annexation was meaningful in this context?

Despite the puzzlement surrounding the intervention and annexation, in-depth case studies about the Russian intervention in the Ukraine crisis was scarce; particularly studies examining what interested me: the Russian perspective. Puzzled by Russia's seemingly self-contradicting foreign policy, I consulted the general literature about post-Soviet Russian foreign policy (e.g., Clunan, 2009; Donaldson & Noguee, 2009; Gvosdev & Marsh, 2013; Hopf, 1999; Kanet, 2011; Legvold, 2007; Lo, 2006; Mankoff, 2012; Sherr, 2013; Tsygankov, 2013).

Consulting this literature, I quickly realized that the puzzling questions extended to cases beyond Ukraine. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian foreign policy had been in limbo (Sherr, 2013). Periods of Russo-Western reconciliation were followed by periods of defiance, and the Russian military intervention in Ukraine followed a course of action similar to previous interventions in Georgia (2008) and Kosovo (1999).⁹

The interventions in Georgia and Kosovo were also swift, executed without any explicit forewarning, and occurred in continuation of an ongoing dispute with the West. From the Western perspective, Russia's military interventions in Kosovo, Georgia, and Ukraine were all interpreted as rapid shifts from what had been interpreted in the West as otherwise increasingly conciliatory and working Russo-Western relations.

In the case of Russia's intervention in Kosovo, Russia was even part of the joint NATO-Russian peacekeeping force in Bosnia-Herzegovina (SFOR), when it took the NATO command by surprise and moved into Kosovo. Two years after the Kosovo crisis, Russo-American relations reached unprecedented heights when, following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Vladimir Putin and George W. Bush developed a special personal understanding and common political ground in a united front in the War on Terror. At a press conference, President Bush famously described how he had looked Russian President Putin in the eye and found him

⁹ Special thanks to Tonny Brems Knudsen for bringing Russia's military intervention in Kosovo to my attention.

very straight forward and trustworthy and we had a very good dialogue. [...] I was able to get a sense of his soul. He's a man deeply committed to his country and the best interests of his country and I appreciate very much the frank dialogue and that's the beginning of a very constructive relationship.¹⁰

However, NATO expansion toward Russia's western frontier, NATO's negotiations with Ukraine and Georgia about NATO Membership Action Plans (MAP), deployment of the US missile defense system, the multiple so-called color revolutions in Russia's ближнее зарубежье ["near abroad"¹¹] and the start of the US-led war against Iraq (2003) undermined the seemingly thriving Russo-Western relationship. In 2007, Putin famously criticized US unilateralism at the Munich Security Conference:

Unilateral and frequently illegitimate actions have not resolved any problems [...]. Judge for yourselves: wars as well as local and regional conflicts have not diminished [...]. We are seeing a greater and greater disdain for the basic principles of international law [...]. One state and, of course, first and foremost the United States, has overstepped its national borders in every way. This is visible in the economic, political, cultural and educational policies it imposes on other nations. [...] of course this is extremely dangerous. It results in the fact that no one feels safe. I want to emphasise this—no one feels safe! Because no one can feel that international law is like a stone wall that will protect them. Of course such a policy stimulates an arms race.¹²

Less than a year after Putin's speech in Munich, Russian troops invaded Georgia and aided its two breakaway provinces, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, in gaining independence. Once again, the West was stunned by Russia's military intervention. In light of the Russo-Georgian War, Putin's Munich Speech

¹⁰ "Bush and Putin: Best of friends," *BBC*, Caroline Wyatt, June 16, 2001: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/1392791.stm> (accessed October 3, 2018).

¹¹ Russia's "near abroad" denotes the territory of the post-Soviet republics. The phrase was popularized in 1992 as a consensus translation of ближнее зарубежье [literary translated, "near beyond border"]. The phrase denotes a sense of distance and proximity at the same. From a Western perspective, "near abroad" is often used to denote the Russian reluctance to acknowledge the sovereignty of the former Soviet republics (Toal, 2017, p. 3). For more information about the etymology of the phrase, see William Safire's "On Language; The Near Abroad," *The New York Times*, May 22, 1994: <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/05/22/magazine/on-language-the-near-abroad.html> (accessed November 27, 2018).

¹² "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy," *The Kremlin*, February 10, 2007: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034> (accessed October 3, 2018).

seems to manifest an explicit forewarning about an increasingly assertive Russian foreign policy in response to Western actions. As I demonstrate in my study of Russia's intervention in Kosovo below, however, contours of what I term Russia's disruptive foreign policy was officially introduced into central Russian foreign policy documents throughout 2000.

In 2009, US President Barack Obama proposed a so-called "reset" of Russo-American relations. Russia and the West again found a reconciliatory tone, and Russia finally—aided by the US and EU—obtained long-awaited membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2011.

In February 2014, Russia intervened militarily in Ukraine, and the proverbial circle was complete. Consulting the general literature on Russia's post-Soviet foreign policy left me with more questions than answers. Russia's seemingly contradictory foreign policy limbo was hardly an isolated event and extended beyond the Ukraine crisis. My inability to come up with good answers stimulated my curiosity about the intentions¹³ and processes behind the decisions to militarily intervene in these Russo-Western encounters.

Three Idealized Perspectives

Here, I outline in greater detail what I learned from the existing literature on Russian foreign policy, both in terms of the relevant existing knowledge and determining how I aspire to contribute to this body of knowledge with this dissertation.

Looking beyond the few in-depth case studies about the Kosovo¹⁴ and Ukraine crises,¹⁵ I arrange the existing literature on Russian foreign policy into two idealized types of interpretation. The first ideal-typical interpretation

¹³ Here, following Gertrude E. M. Anscombe, intentions are understood as envisioned outcomes (1957).

¹⁴ Examples of tentative studies of Russia's military intervention in the Kosovo crisis include: Jason M.K. Lyall's *Paths of Ruin* (2005), Robert Brannon's *Russian Civil-Military Relations* (2009, Chapter 4), and Roy Allison's *Russia, the West, and Military Intervention* (2013, Chapter 3). From a first-hand account of the Kosovo crisis, see *Waging Modern War* by Wesley K. Clark (2002, Chapter 15), Strobe Talbott's *The Russian Hand* (2002, Chapters 12-13), and Michael Jackson's *Soldier* (2008, Chapter 12). For a study examining the influence of the Yugoslav War on the reconstruction of Western Self, see Lene Hansen's *Western Villains or Balkan Barbarism* (1998).

¹⁵ Examples of some of the most prominent book-length studies of Russia's military intervention in Ukraine include: *Conflict in Ukraine* (Menon & Rumer, 2015), *Front-line Ukraine* (Sakwa, 2016), *Putin's War against Ukraine* (Kuzio, 2017), and *Everyone Loses* (Charap & Colton, 2017).

adopts an exogenous lens, interpreting Russian foreign policy from the outside-in, and favors a material conception of the intentions underlying foreign policy. The second type of idealized explanation interprets Russian foreign policy endogenously from the inside-out and has in common a veneration for the ideational dimension of politics.

Having reviewed the contributions from the material-exogenous and ideational-endogenous perspectives on Russian foreign policy, I introduce a third idealized interpretation of Russian foreign policy: the ontological perspective. In short, the ontological perspective interprets Russian foreign policy on the basis of Self–Self relations among domestic elites (or “custodians,” as I define the relevant elites below) which fundamentally differs from the Self–Other relation adopted by idealized material and ideational lenses.

Material lens

Through the material lens, political behavior—disregarding the level or unit of analysis—comes down to one exogenously given preference for material security. Fundamentally, the intentions underlying political action are reduced to a matter of survival. States do what they can to survive, autocratic rulers do what they can to survive, democratic rulers do what they can to survive, individuals do what they can to survive, etc.. As the idealized material interpretation goes, survival typically requires the accumulation of resources that can be converted into power to ultimately coerce or even kill opponents. The fundamental existential question as to why people want to live is beyond contestation and irrelevant to further academic discussion. Any behavior deviating from the most optimal way to secure material security (ultimately, survival) is labelled as irrational or—less judgmentally—is understood to be the result of incomplete information. In other words, cases in which collectives or individuals wrongly thought their decision would increase the likelihood of survival but it turned out not to do so because of incomplete information or a lacking will and/or capacity to process the available information correctly.¹⁶

Transferred to the context of post-Soviet military interventionism, Russia therefore intervened in Kosovo and Ukraine because doing so increased the

¹⁶ Within the foreign policy analysis literature, theories based on rational actor models depart from similar core assumptions about the foreign policy actions of states as reflecting the most value-maximizing means to achieve certain goals, which is based on a cost–benefit analysis taking into consideration the given objective or perceived circumstances in which states find themselves. Decreasing and increasing the costs of certain actions decreases and increases, respectively, the likelihood of certain actions materializing (G. Allison & Zelikow, 1999, Chapter 1).

likelihood of its survival. In the following, I outline the three different narratives departing from this basic premise. The first analytical narrative argues that Russian foreign policy is motivated by the survival of political regimes (e.g., Dawisha, 2015; Gel'man, 2016; Gessen, 2012; Hill & Gaddy, 2015; Kuzio, 2017; B. D. Taylor, 2018; Van Herpen, 2015; Zygar, 2016). Russian assertiveness is reflecting a weak and vulnerable political regime that fears being toppled because of its incompetence to stop and turn around the worsening living conditions and its struggling economy.

From this perspective, the Russian military interventions are more about regime than national security. By engaging in foreign policy crises with the West, the regime bolsters its political legitimacy in two ways. First, in times of national crisis, the so-called “rally around the flag syndrome” prescribes that popular support for the existing political regime is (temporarily) increased (Mueller, 1973). Second, the Russo-Western crises provide the regime with a scapegoat, which effectively transfers the political responsibility for Russia's poor economic, social, and political performance from the current regime to the Western Other. In short, the core argument is that the aim of Russia's interventions is neither status-quo nor revisionist, but rather a smokescreen intended to cover—hence, secure—Putin's political regime (e.g., R. Allison, 2014, pp. 1289-1295).

However, even though Putin's popularity hit an all-time low during the so-called “Russian protests” (2011–13), his overall approval ratings have never dipped below 60 percent.¹⁷ Normally, overall approval ratings no less than 60 percent would be perceived as very favorable by most Western politicians. The central counter claim against the usefulness of the regime survival explanations is that the Russian regime is simply not threatened to the extent where risky military interventions—exacerbating the already weak Russian economy—seem like appropriate responses.

The second analytical narrative interprets Russia's interventions as representing a rational response to continued Western encroachment into Russia's sphere of interest (e.g., Mearsheimer, 2014; Walt, 2014a, 2014b). Particularly, the expansion of NATO and the EU—combined with the US-led development of a missile defense system and a senescent Russian nuclear arsenal—are actions Russia must counteract in order to bring the balance of power back into order. Russian interventions are countermeasures intended to engage the Western encroachment into Russia's legitimate sphere of interests in the near abroad.

¹⁷ For a recommendable book-length study of the waves of public protest against Vladimir Putin sweeping across Russia in 2011–2013, see *Protest in Putin's Russia* (Gabowitsch, 2017).

From this second perspective, the main origins of Russian interventions are not found within the Kremlin's thick walls but rather in Washington D.C. and Brussels. Since the end of the Cold War, the Western Other has committed multiple instances of hubris; for instance, by bending the principles of non-intervention and dishonoring the formal and informal arrangements made with Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russia's foreign policy aims at setting the record straight. In short, Russia is simply behaving like any other rational great power would have in the same situation.

A significant challenge to this interpretation is why Russia decided to use military force against Ukraine and—even more compromising—why Russian decision-makers went as far as annexing Crimea. Russia's military intervention seems less defensively motivated, considering how the military expenditures of the NATO members had dropped to an all-time low after the end of the Cold War and neither NATO nor the EU was about to extend Ukraine full membership of their respective organizations.

The third and final narrative is that interventions are offensive and oriented toward revising the post-Cold War order and installing regional hegemony (e.g., Götz, 2013, 2015, 2016a; Mead, 2014; Mearsheimer, 2001). Russia is increasing its survival chances by initially reestablishing the regional hegemony of the former Soviet Union. Russia cannot rely on a defensive strategy of survival; instead, it has to push NATO, the EU, and the US as far back as possible. This perspective is challenged by the fact that Russia is not consistently behaving as aggressively and assertively as expected. Turning the challenge to the defensive and status quo perspective around, how come Russia's military presence in eastern Ukraine has been fairly limited and support for the pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine half-hearted (Götz, 2016b, p. 257)? More generally, the lack of consistently offensive Russian foreign policy reveals a more fundamental problem related to the use of offensive structural realist theories to explain—and predict—the concrete foreign policy actions of states.¹⁸

To understand these inconsistencies between alleged offensive and defensive behavior, John Mearsheimer offers an interesting observation foreshadowing the insights offered by the ideational lens. As a rule of thumb, states act “like units” in accordance with the survival logic outlined above given the anarchic structure of the international system (Waltz, 1979, p. 93). However, Mearsheimer argues that the Ukraine crisis offers an important observation

¹⁸ For a more elaborate theoretical critique of offensive structural realist core assumptions together with an analysis of world politics, see “The tragedy of offensive realism” (Kirshner, 2012).

and reminder. The Western Other and Russian Self played by different playbooks; while Russia played the game of survival, the West played the illusory game of liberal world order. Mearsheimer explains:

In essence, the two sides have been operating with different playbooks: Putin and his compatriots have been thinking and acting according to realist dictates, whereas their Western counterparts have been adhering to liberal ideas about international politics (2014, p. 84).

While I disagree with Mearsheimer that the West's liberal ideas caused the Ukraine crisis, I agree that their respective internal playbooks influenced the Western and Russian decision-makers and elites differently. In addition, I agree that the Ukraine crisis plays an important role in disclosing that within the Russian and Western lifeworlds. Within these two lifeworlds, markedly different ideas about what constitute meaningful senses and politics of belonging—and the willingness to defend these—exist.

Russia's foreign political limbo seems to have been accompanied by a national ideational limbo within Russia. Consequently, I consult the exiting literature about the mutually constitutive relationship between the Russian national identity and foreign policy.

Ideational lens

Taking seriously the ideas, norms, and identities influencing foreign policy actions is pivotal to scholars departing from an ideational-exogenous perspective. The underlying premise is that the origin of states' foreign policy actions is found within the state itself. Foreign policy action is an outcome of an endogenous process and not exogenously given by a universal survival logic assuming states to act "like units."

To scholars departing from the ideational perspective, it is the fundamental questions like *who*, *what*, and *where* Russians' *are*, *were*, and *ought to be* that are central to foreign policy analysis (e.g., Checkel, 1997; Clunan, 2009; Herman, 1996; Hopf, 2002; Neumann, 1996, 1999; Prizel, 1998; Tolz, 2001; Ivan; Tsvetkov, Timofeev, & Indina, 2016; Tsygankov, 2013; Zevelev, 2016). With regard to these studies focusing on national identity, the underlying assumption is that foreign policy and national identity are mutually constitutive: Foreign policy action is given by national identity and national identity is influenced by foreign policy. In short, Russian interventions are caused by a national identity favoring military intervention.

Ideational studies are primarily occupied with identifying which idealized national identities dominated foreign policy historically and how the foreign policies caused by certain identities vary. In other words, the main goal is

demonstrating that national identity matters for foreign policy. This goal is most rigorously pursued by Ted Hopf. In *Social Construction of International Politics* (2002), Hopf suggests analyzing the relationship between national identity and foreign policy in three steps: (I) Identify identities and associated interests, (II) generate hypotheses about the interests and actions of the state vis-à-vis other states, and (III) test if the generated hypotheses can be supported empirically by manifestations of Russian foreign policy motives and actions (Hopf, 2002, pp. 19, 23-24 & 37).¹⁹

Less systematically—but with the same ambition as Hopf—Andrey P. Tsygankov aspires to contribute to

our understanding of the national interest formation in Russia's foreign policy [and explain] Russia's foreign policy turns by changes in the nation's identity (2013, pp. xxv-xxvi).

Tsygankov's core argument is that depending on which of the three idealized schools of thought—*Statist*, *Civilizationist*, or *Westernist*—that dominates Russian decision-makers in the spatiotemporal context, a certain national identity (with associated national interests) guides Russia's foreign policy within that context (2013, pp. 4-8). Tsygankov claims that the origin of each of these three schools of thought can be traced back to seminal historical Russian figures like Ivan the Terrible (1530–1584) and Peter the Great (1672–1725). As such, Tsygankov assumes that these schools of thought have endured over the course of the Czarist, Soviet, and Federal eras.

Despite the difference between favoring the material versus an ideational dimension of politics and adopting an exogenous or endogenous perspective on the foreign policy of states, both idealized material and ideational interpretations primarily understand foreign policy as a relation between a more or less unitary “National Self” or “State A” and Foreign Other or “State B.” Whereas materialists interpret Russian foreign policy—like any other state's foreign policy—as reaction informed by an exogenously given structure of the international system, ideationalists reject the notion of states acting like units in accordance with an exogenously given structure. However, both ideationalists and materialists agree that structure—either endogenously or exogenously given—is key to explaining the foreign policy pursued by the individual state.

Less ambiguous about establishing a causal relationship between national identity and foreign policy than Hopf and Tsygankov, Iver B. Neumann—a third prominent ideational scholar—notes that the French Revolution (1789)

¹⁹ In *Reconstructing the Cold War*, Ted Hopf further formalizes his theory and analysis accommodating the ambition to test of the “hypothesized causal link between discourses, perceptions, and behavior” (2012, p. 24).

was a game changer for how Russians discussed the “European Other” and—consequently—the construction of the Russian Self in *Russia and the Idea of Europe* (1996). Both militarily and politically, Neumann finds that the revolution and its violent rejection of absolutism challenged the predominant, existing notions of by whom and how states should be ruled in Russia. Neumann’s empirically rich analysis does, however, mainly focus on the development of the Russian Self through shifting discourses about the “European Other” from the Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815) until the collapse of the Soviet Union. In spite of the contextual richness, Neumann’s way of theorizing and examining the mutually constitutive relationship between national identity and foreign policy actions remains structuralist and leaves little room for agency.

A consequence of emphasizing structural development over time by writing the human agent out of the equation is that ideational perspectives essentialize foreign policy decision-making and neglect to demonstrate how the mutually constitutive relation between foreign policy and national identity intersubjectively unfolds between human agents. In short, State A says and does what it does at t_1 because of the predominance of an exogenously or endogenously given structure at t_1 .

The merit of the theoretical and analytical work carried out by Hopf and Tsygankov, respectively, speaks for itself. However, I find the seemingly uncritical reliance on an essentialist notion and depiction of Russian national identity and foreign policy problematic for at least two related reasons. First, understanding and explaining a socially complex world mono-causally leads to a situation where, in my case, Russian national identity and foreign policy are less dynamic and deterministic than what is the case when embedding oneself in the *relational soup* that is constituted by a foreign policy crisis. A relationist approach denotes a social-theoretical middle road between radical structuralist or agency-driven explanations of social phenomena. Instead of writing the influence of structure and agency out of the equation or proving the dominance of the one over the other, a relationist way of theorizing about the social world focuses on how configurations of structure and agency in case-specific settings proceed and bring about certain outcomes. Important to the relationist conduct of inquiry is avoiding the reducing of the role of structures and agents to manifestations of substantial essences (e.g., Abbott, 1995; Emirbayer, 1997; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).²⁰ Echoing Jean-Paul Sartre,

²⁰ Within International Relations, Patrick T. Jackson and Daniel H. Nexon have written about conducting relational inquiry about world politics, e.g. “Relations Before States: Substance, Process, and the Study of World Politics” (P. T. Jackson & Nexon, 1999) and “Relationalism and New Systems Theory” (Nexon, 2010). More recently,

“*existence comes before essence*” is pivotal to the relationist conduct of inquiry from which this dissertation departs (Sartre, 2007, p. 27).

For instance—in Tsygankov’s own terminology—Putin utters a multivocal flow of interconnected views within a single speech that can be identified as both sympathetic to a Western, statist, and civilizational school of thought.²¹ Scientific endeavor aspiring to reduce Russian foreign policy to a representation of the essence of one of three predominant theoretical schools of thought is at best producing inaccurate and simplistic accounts of the multiplicity of intentions underlying Russian foreign policy, which would be disclosed upon empirical scrutiny. At worst, stereotypical understandings of what guides Russia’s foreign policy may convince politicians and policy-makers that Russia is essentially driven by a Western, civilizational, or statist logic manifesting itself 1:1 in its foreign policy. Reducing the complexity of an opponent by adopting stereotypical depictions prevents alternative views and interpretations. In a heated moment of crisis, such reductionism can prove fatal. By repeatedly reminding scholars and practitioners of the complexity a social world manifests, the relational approach serves as a vanguard against the pitfalls of reductionism and stereotypes as well as a reminder of how that which appears to be stable can indeed be changed for better or worse. As Andrew Abbott notes, if

we would explain change at all, we must begin with it and hope to explain stasis [...]. That some events have stable lineages [...] is something to be explained, not something to be assumed (Abbott, 1995, p. 863).

In sum, from a relational point of view, it is not puzzling why the world is changing, but rather what makes it appear so deceptively stable. I will elaborate on the social theoretical foundation of how the mutually constitutive relationship between national identity and Russian foreign policy action is theorized in Chapter 1.

David M. McCourt also ventures out into the conduct of relational inquiry within International Relations (e.g., 2016).

²¹ Charles Tilly makes a similar claim in “International communities, secure or otherwise” (1998) when writing “any actor deploys multiple identities, at least one per tie, role, network, and group to which the actor is attached” (1998, pp. 400-401). The claim hints at an often overseen, yet fundamental, debate about the theoretical as well as analytical implications of understanding identity as dialogical versus dialectical, which will not be pursued further here. For studies discussing these implications, see: “Manifesto for a Relational Sociology” (Emirbayer, 1997, pp. 300-301), *International Relations and Identity* (Guillaume, 2011), *Dialogism* (Holquist, 1990), and *Uses of the Other* (Neumann, 1999, pp. 11-12).

An absence of ideational perspectives on foreign policy crisis

Ideational perspectives have devoted little analytical effort to understanding why and how agents act like they do in context, particularly in foreign policy crises; that is spatiotemporal contexts characterized by case-specific configurations often produced in rather idiosyncratic ways. The consequence of writing the role of agency situated in contexts characterized by case-specific configurations makes directing further analytical effort toward the inner dialogue among agents with different visions, intentions, and perceptions redundant.

So why an absence of studies examining the concrete relation between foreign policy and the reconstruction of national identity in context? Should absence be interpreted as an indication of a scholarly consensus about the irrelevance of such studies? This does not seem to be the case. For instance, Ole Wæver and Morten Kelstrup argue that the context of crisis makes collective and individual agents increasingly aware and sensitive to issues concerning identity, be it gender or national, which would normally not be debated and simply assumed to “be there” (1993, pp. 81-82). Similarly, Nira Yuval-Davis notes that a national sense of belonging “tends to be naturalized and becomes articulated and politicized only when it is threatened in some way” (2010, p. 266).

Given the antagonism they spur, several scholars subscribe to the argument that traumatic events like wars and major foreign policy crises render it difficult to maintain an unaltered narrative of National Self (e.g., Bleiker & Hutchison, 2008; Rumelili, 2004, 2007). Regardless of whether the nation suffers a shattering defeat or enjoys the sweet fruits of victory, the national community’s perception of National Self would be reconstructed more or less fundamentally during and after formative events. Bahar Rumelili notes that traumatic events help individuals and collectives

address fundamental anxieties of death, meaninglessness, and condemnation by providing objects of fear, and a stable set of meanings and standards of orality that revolve around the construction of the other conflict as the enemy (2015, p. 193).

From the perspective of politics in practice, former White House Chief of Staff Rahm I. Emanuel notes that the opportunities presented by crisis must never “go to waste.” According to Emanuel, crisis enables agents to do things which had otherwise been

postponed for too long, that were long-term, are now immediate and must be dealt with. This crisis provides the opportunity for us to do things that you could not do before.²²

Bringing Emmanuel's quote back into the context of post-Soviet Russia, the crises following Russia's military interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine might represent reactions to what were perceived as Western threats to Russia's material and ideational senses of security, but they also represent unique *windows of opportunity* to fundamentally reconstruct a more authentic sense and foreign policy of Russian Self than possible in the absence of crisis. I will elaborate on the two-dimensional understanding of crisis as breakthrough and breakdown adopted here in Chapter 1.

Going from the theory and practice of politics to historical manifestations hereof, world history provides numerous examples of why we should increasingly examine how the nexus between foreign policy and national identity plays out in case-specific events. For instance, German history illustrates both the deconstructive and constructive consequences of the most urgent kind of existential crisis: war. Before the German Empire could be proclaimed in Versailles' renowned Hall of Mirrors, a coalition of German states under the leadership of Prussian Ministerpräsident Otto Von Bismarck successfully fought and won three wars within five years. These wars denote the *Deutsche Einigungskriege* [which roughly translates to "German Wars of Unification"].²³ The intense, antagonistic context of war fostered an unprecedented sense of national belonging that united the different imagined German communities around a common national narrative disseminated throughout the German Confederation. In short, the increasing awareness of a distinct German national identity went hand in hand with an aggressive foreign policy. Stefan Berger concludes that the "wars of unification led to an idealization of war in German historiography" (2003, p. 30).

Berger's conclusion is a convenient transition to the German example of how war can deconstruct an existing sense of national belonging. The immediate period following Nazi Germany's unconditional surrender in 1945 and the reset of German national identity is characterized as *Stunde Null* [Hour Zero]. After the defeat of Nazi-Germany, the national socialist elite collapsed and new groups of politicians and intellectuals found themselves with a

²² "In Crisis, Opportunity for Obama," *The Wall Street Journal*, Gerald B. Seib, November 21, 2008: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB122721278056345271> (accessed June 3, 2018).

²³ The German Wars of Unification denotes three wars. First, the Danish–Prussian War (1864), then the Austro–Prussian War (1866), and finally the Franco–Prussian War (1870–71).

unique chance to fundamentally reconstruct the “German Self.” Under the banner of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (roughly translates to coping with the past), one of the first orders of the day was to erase the ties between German militarism and national identity mentioned earlier by Berger (e.g., Evans, 2018; Longhurst & Hoffmann, 1999).

Second, Denmark’s victory in the First Schleswig War (1848–52) revived romantic senses of national belonging that blurred the mind of the Danish decision-makers. The reconstructed romantic national identity led to a foreign policy whereby Denmark defied Prussian threats to declare war on Denmark if the duchy of Schleswig-Holstein was annexed to the Danish Kingdom. The outcome of defying Prussia was a resounding Danish defeat in the Second Schleswig War (1864). More than “just” harming the Danish material and ideational well-being, the defeat spurred a fundamental reconstruction of the Danish national identity and foreign policy toward, respectively, inwardness and neutrality.

Besides the defeat in 1864, the Nazi-German occupation of Denmark (1940–1945) remains a contested element in the Danish Self. More than 60 years later, in 2003, Danish Prime Minister Anders F. Rasmussen actually made reference to the weak resistance to the Nazi-German invasion when legitimizing the government decision to participate in the Second Gulf War (2003). This intensified a general shift in foreign policy toward military activism (Kirchhoff, 2015, pp. 193-209). According to Rasmussen, contemporary Denmark had to make up for past Denmark’s lacking will to fight totalitarianism in the morning hours of April 9, 1940. Rasmussen’s argument for military activism went hand in hand with a reconstruction of national identity under the banners of the so-called *Værdikamp* initiated after The Danish Liberal Party (Venstre) and The Conservatives formed government in 2001.²⁴

Germany and Denmark are just two of several examples of imagined national communities where the reconstruction of national identity and foreign policy has gone hand in hand. The 9/11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon in September 2001 sparked fundamental debate about what constitutes American, Western, and Middle Eastern identities—and the relation between these (Huntington, 2004). Stating that:

²⁴ The Danish term *Værdikamp* roughly translates to “Struggle of Values.” It denotes the period since 2001, where issues concerning national identity moved to the center of discussion in Danish politics. Recent mass-migration to Europe (including Denmark) seems to have pushed discussions about the sense of national identity—and the policies aimed at safeguarding identity—to the forefront of European and Danish politics.

Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.²⁵

George W. Bush cemented a fundamental ideational distinction, which still serves as a fundamental demarcation distinguishing the Western Self from “non-Western Others” (e.g., Croft, 2006, 2012). Consequently, the Danish *Værdikamp* and general rise of populist parties across Europe can be seen as symptomatic for a wider crisis of civilization across imagined Western communities.

Introducing the ontological lens

The material and ideational lenses have contributed with many important insights about how exogenously and endogenously given Self–Other relations influence Russian foreign policy decision-making and action.

However, important insights into Russia’s seemingly contradictory foreign policy actions in Kosovo and Ukraine await beyond the material and ideational point of departure in Self–Other relations. I argue that devoting more analytical attention to the fundamental ontological Self–Self relation promises to enhance our understanding and capacity to understand and explain why Russia—in spite of grave material and ideational costs—decided to militarily intervene in Kosovo and Ukraine and how these interventions reconstructed the Russian Self; and subsequently, how the reconstructed Russian Self fed into the revision of Russia’s official foreign policy.

Employing an additional ontological lens on Russian foreign policy, I argue that otherwise neglected inner dialogues among a polyphony of different Russian voices about the meaningfulness of concrete foreign policy actions await elucidation. The ontological lens interprets foreign policy actions as the outcome of an inner dialogue among multiple visions for National Selves concerned with two existential questions: Do you know who you are? And are you an authentic version of what you want to be? In short, ontological security is concerned with questions related to awareness and authenticity of “Self.”

Whereas the material and ideational perspectives downplay the importance of human agency on foreign policy, the ontological perspective insists on foreign policy being human “all the way down.” Beginning with the

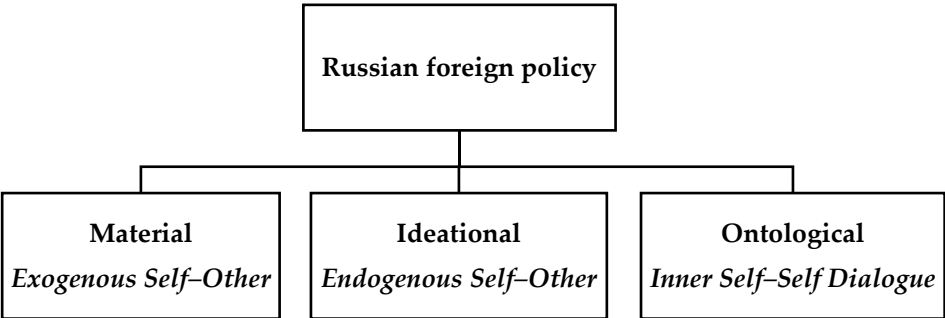
²⁵ “Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People,” *The White House Archives*, September 20, 2001: <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html> (accessed August 28, 2018).

ontology of human agents, the ontological perspective operates at an analytical level more fundamental than the material and ideational ones, where human actions depart from exogenously or endogenously given structures emerging from Self–Other relations; social structures reducing human action—and understanding and explanation hereof—to a more or less successful manifestation of the structural logics inherent to these. The ontological perspective does not operate with an assumption of linear causation; rather, it operates with subject and object as interdependent. Hence, “actions taken in light of beliefs alter the nature of the system itself” (Blyth, 2011, p. 15). Indeed, the social world is mutually constituted by human agents living in accordance with their respective ontological mind-world hook-up, including—and of particular interest to this dissertation—how agents experience a sense of loss in relation to what they envision as a meaningful ontology securing their sense of Self.

The ontological lens adopted here is based on a relationist understanding of political action interested in the case-specific process of how a political outcome came about instead of assessing if and to what extent the endogenously or exogenously given structures correspond—more or less successfully—to the observed outcome. In short, the ontological perspective examines foreign policy decisions from a stance emphasizing relations between agents in context and how these relations influence what constitutes meaningful action in that context; that is, agents who use their knowledge and resources to act and render certain actions meaningful to themselves and others in a specific setting, which is assumed to be far from inherently stable or predictable (and, hence, without essence).

Seen through an ontological lens, foreign policy is an outcome of an inner dialogue among multiple agents representing multiple visions for what constitutes an authentic National Self. In short, the actions of Self are interpreted with reference to Self, whereas in ideational and material interpretations the actions of Self are interpreted with reference to “Other.”

Figure 1: The material, ideational, and ontological perspectives on Russian foreign policy



Supplementing the existing material and ideational lenses with an ontological one offers both substantial and theoretical contributions. These contributions enhance our knowledge of how interventions became meaningful to undertake, how interventions reconstructed the Russian Self, and finally how the reconstructed Russian Self was subsequently translated into alterations of the foreign policy officially representing Russia.

I will briefly illustrate the main difference between the three idealized lenses to interpret Russian foreign policy by evoking an everyday example: choosing a restaurant. An ideal material choice of restaurant comes down to where to get the most nourishing and healthy meal at the cheapest price in competition against Others trying to find the same restaurant. An important materialist premise is that restaurants have limited seating to assign Self and competing Other. The ideational choice comes down to which restaurant and cuisine is recognized as most status-giving in the eyes of the dominant in-group Self and out-group Others which the in-group wants to align itself with or against—and, hence, be recognized by. An important ideational premise is that recognition and status are based on social structures that have been socially constructed by the Self and Other. Finally, an ideal ontological choice of restaurant concerns not where to get the most nourishing, healthiest, or status-giving meal vis-à-vis Others, but more fundamentally which restaurant and cuisine most authentically represents a meaningful vision of Self in a given context. A central premise is that the Self is coreless and in itself meaningless, but on a perpetual quest for existential meaningfulness. Thus, in the eyes of Others, the choice of a certain restaurant may be preferable for exogenously material and endogenously ideational given reasons, but it may undermine ontological security because it represents an unauthentic vision for Self seen from a vision for Self experienced as meaningful. In short, the ontological choice of restaurant involves a more fundamental existential Self–Self relation than the material and ideational perspectives departing from Self–Other relations.

Saving the concrete substantial and theoretical contributions for later, I foreshadow what I see as the most significant contribution offered by the ontological security perspective vis-à-vis the material and ontological ones. The ontological perspective offers an understanding of why Russia, despite highly anticipated risks involving significant adverse impacts on its material and ideational security (e.g., physical and economic well-being as well as international status and reputation), still decided to intervene militarily.

Supplementing the existing material and ideational understandings of security with an ontological one—adding the security of the Self as a concern taken into account by decision-makers—it becomes clear that Russian decision-makers faced a crossroads entailing a paradox: Intervene to secure the

sense of authentic Russian Self and undermine the material and ideational security, secure material, and/or ideational well-being at the expense of the authentic Russian Self.

Adding a time dimension to the paradox only intensifies it further. Intervening might secure the authentic sense of Russian Self in the short run, but the adverse impacts on the material and ideational security might undermine the capacity to maintain this sense of Russian Self in the long run. Similarly, refraining from intervening might secure material and ideational security in the short run but might jeopardize the ontological security of the Russian Self in the longer term.

Whether the Russian Self has become increasingly ontologically secure or not is a contested issue among Russian scholars. In the wake of the Ukraine crisis, Flemming S. Hansen concludes that despite the adverse impacts caused by the Russian interventions, foreign policy crises have

given the Russian population a more well-defined identity—or stronger sense of being or, to use the key term of this study, greater ontological security. Much more so now than in earlier phases of the post-Soviet development may the Russians now provide relatively clear answers to the questions asked earlier: “Who are we?”, “where are we going?”, and “in what kind of society do we want to live?” (Hansen, 2016, p. 369).

Similarly, Dmitry Trenin observes a turn in Russian domestic and foreign policy toward increasingly being intertwined in the deliberate attempt to rebuild a post-Soviet sense of national identity to secure Russia’s “mental self-determination” free from decadent, profane values imposed on Russia by the West (Trenin, 2015, pp. 36 & 38). According to Trenin, this turn toward intertwining Russia’s domestic and foreign policy to reconstruct a Russian nation distancing itself from the West began around the Second Gulf War (2003), when Russia decided to leave the “Western orbit” for good (Trenin, 2006). At the start of Putin’s third presidential term, this turn away from the West culminated in the Ukraine crisis, which disclosed a fundamental discrepancy between the Western and Russian ways of life (Trenin, 2015, pp. 33-35). Aleksandr Sergunin makes a similar argument in *Explaining Russian Foreign Policy Behavior* (2016). He concludes that the “national security debate has been a rather effective way of nation-building and constructing a new Russian identity” (Sergunin, 2016, p. 206).

Contrary to Hansen and Trenin, and Sergunin, Paul A. Goble leans toward the weakening of the Russian Self as a consequence of Russian military interventionism.²⁶ The Ukraine crisis has intensified the

fundamental weakness of Russian identity, the tensions inherent between identities the state supports and those it fears, and the reactions of the increasingly numerous non-Russian nationalities to any ethnic Russian identifications (Goble, 2016, p. 37).

One group of scholars sympathetic to the material perspective suggests that Russian military interventionism is symptomatic of a Russian quest for regional hegemony (e.g., Götz, 2013; Mearsheimer, 2001). Another group of scholars, adopting an ideational perspective, argues that Russian foreign policy is a mirror-like reflection of a Western Other who has failed to acknowledge Russia as an independent and equal great power (e.g., Sakwa, 2016; Tsygankov, 2013). To this group of scholars, Russian foreign policy reflects a quest for recognition.

In this dissertation, I argue that there is more to Russian interventionism than material and ideational security concerns. The Russian interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine are symptomatic of the continued Russian quest for ontological security; a quest to reestablish a sense of security about the post-Soviet Russian Self, meaningfully realigning the present with past and future.

This quest for ontological security is not solely a Russian phenomenon, but part of the basic human condition of existence. All humans find themselves in a world without meaning, without essence, and embark on a quest for ontological security; a quest toward an idealized state of mind in which a vision of the authentic Self aligns with how one and others experience the Self in context. One will never reach this state of complete ontological security about the Self. However, whereas some felt more secure about their alignment between envisioned and experienced Self, others are more insecure than secure about the authenticity of their alignment between Selves. I argue that Russia belongs to the latter category.

Historically, Russia is a nation that has been most preoccupied with the fundamental existential questions of “*Who are we?*” and “*What do we want to be?*” (Billington, 2004). One central reason for the omnipotence of this question is found in the turbulent and traumatic history of Russia, permeated with crises and transformations of society. I argue that one of the gravest of these crises is the collapse of the Soviet Union, which manifests not one, but

²⁶ For an earlier and more elaborate argument about the inherent weakness of the Russian national identity, see Paul A. Goble’s “Sowjetstaat und russischer Nationalismus” (1990).

at least four fundamental transformations: (I) From empire to federation, (II) from planned to market economy, (III) from authoritarian to democratic political rule, and (IV) from Soviet to post-Soviet human. In short, the collapse of the Soviet Union constitutes an ontological breakdown.

On Russia's quest for ontological security, the general state of existential anxiety of losing the Russian Self entirely is more pronounced than the majority of the Foreign Others encountered, particularly the Western Other. The outcome of this heightened sense of ontological insecurity has been Russian military interventionism and the reconstruction of the Russian Self.

To varying degrees, all of the 15 post-Soviet societies have been struggling with the fundamental existential question of "Who are we?", looking back at the Soviet visions for themselves and toward the post-Soviet Selves they may become. Unlike the other 14 post-Soviet states, Russia did not have an alternative national identity or set of nation-specific institutions to fall back on. The Soviet Union was Russia, and Russia the Soviet Union. From whom and what had Russians won their independence from and freedom to independently define what? Should Russians pick up the Czarist sense of Self that had been dismantled with the Russian Revolution? Should they revive the Soviet sense of Self dismantled with its collapse? Adopt a Western sense of Self? Or something somehow distinctively Russian?

As Svetlana Alexievich demonstrates in her splendid authorship about the transformation of the Soviet human (particularly *Secondhand-Time* (2016)), members of the imagined Russian community have been and are still struggling with a way out of this ontological limbo between Soviet and post-Soviet society. As I demonstrate, this ontological limbo is mutually constitutively tied to the limbo characterizing Russian foreign policy. In short, to understand Russian military interventionism, we need to understand the ontological dimension of security and vice-versa.

In the dissertation, I argue that the tipping point for this Russian interventionism should be moved further back to Kosovo rather than the Russo-Georgian War (2008) or Putin's famous Munich Speech (2007). The increasingly disruptive Russian foreign policy is not merely caused by material and ideational concerns in the encounter between Russia and the West, but a consequence of the inner dialogue among Russian custodians about what authentically constitutes the post-Soviet Russian Self and its foreign political representation.

Tentative studies of the Kosovo crisis support that the Kosovo crisis represents a critical turning point in Russo-Western relations from benign to antagonistic and toward a reconstruction of the Russian Self in contrast to the Western Other (e.g., Brovkin, 1999, p. 319; Lukyanov, 2016, pp. 111-112; Lyall,

2005, pp. 226, 288 & 319; Zimmerman, 2002, pp. 196-198). Prior to the Kosovo crisis, anti-Western sentiments did not increase to a level above 10–15 percent of the Russian population, but NATO bombings allowed renowned voices from a forbidden (but not forgotten) Soviet past to suddenly resonate among Russians. Suddenly, senses of belonging to a vision of Russian Self quickly integrating into the economic and political institutions of the Western Other proved immature and increasingly unauthentic (Ivan Tsvetkov, 2016, p. 7). Similar to Tsvetkov, Jason M.K. Lyall concludes:

The Kosovo crisis may have been the “heat” that fused the existing hierarchy of identities into place, resulting in the cementing of statist dominance and a rise in grievances and hostile images of world politics [...]. And it is apparent that the choice set for Yeltsin and his successor also narrowed. Gone, for example, was the prospect of deeper cooperation between NATO and Russia (Lyall, 2005, p. 319).

In a contemporary analysis, Vladimir Brovkin concludes that the context of crisis provided a speakers’ corner to fundamentally change not only the balance of power within Russian domestic politics but the whole philosophy guiding post-Soviet Russian society and politics until then (Brovkin, 1999, pp. 547-550). In short, the Kosovo crisis demonstrates that Russia had “not found itself” (Brovkin, 1999, p. 559).

The Russian military interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine demonstrate two important findings. First, a nation finding itself at a paradoxical crossroads between different visions for the Russian Self encountering the Western Other. Among other concerns, the sense of ontological insecurity provoked by the Russo–Western encounter rendered risky and costly military interventions meaningful.

Despite the costs inflicted, Lyall shows how the number of Russians who believed that the future should be grounded in a distinctly “Russian idea” increased significantly despite the worsening economic and political relations with the West after Kosovo (Lyall, 2005, pp. 226, 288 & 319). Similarly, Maria Lipman concludes in the wake of the Ukraine crisis:

The Russian people are not optimistic about Russia’s economic prospects, but never since the collapse of the Soviet Union have they been so proud of Russia’s military might and global influence (Lipman, 2016).

Second, the ontological insecurity caused by Russo–Western encounters provoked “inner dialogues” among a polyphony of Russian voices about what meaningfully constitutes the post-Soviet Russian Self and how Official Russia represents the reconstructed Russian Self authentically in foreign policy—in

its foreign policy of belonging. In short, the core argument is that Russia's military interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine *also* reflect a young federation simultaneously anxious to lose and on a quest to become an authentic version for the post-Soviet Russian Self. In other words, the military interventions offer evidence of a Russian Self simultaneously in the process of breaking down its former Soviet Self while reconstructing its post-Soviet sense of National Self.

The intensity sparked by the Russo–Western encounters in the Kosovo and Ukraine crises facilitated the necessary ideational awareness and sensitivity to gradually reconstruct Russia's post-Soviet national identity. Initially, Russia's military interventions were intended to safeguard a relatively low threshold of ontological security against perceived Western engulfment. The crises, however, provided the custodians of Russian identity with opportunity to reconstruct a more certain and authentic Russian Self, which over time has made Russia feel increasingly ontologically secure.²⁷

Former Russian Defense Minister Sergey B. Ivanov elegantly summarizes my argument. According to Ivanov, Russia's foreign policy encounters facilitate a Self-awareness process toward a more meaningful sense of national belonging:

Today we not only have the means to defend ourselves but also—and this is far more important—something to defend.²⁸

Participating at my first conference as a doctoral student—hosted by The Royal Danish Defence College in mid-June 2015—a participant jokingly summed up what I also personally made of as Russia's seemingly contradictory foreign policy:

Russia repeatedly shoots itself in the foot. Luckily, this means that Russia will not be going anywhere.

Approaching the end of almost four years of research on Russia's post-Soviet foreign policy, Russia's interventions definitely inflicted significant material and ideational losses—physical and economic well-being and international status and prestige—while also entailing gains in terms of ontological security. While the Russian intervention has inflicted material and ideational harm to the Russian population and its status abroad, it has simultaneously increased awareness about what constitutes an authentic Russian Self.

²⁷ Mark Bevir notes that it is exactly in these dilemmatic and problematic contexts where agents, in response to deviations from what they expected, have to “adjust his existing beliefs to make way for the newcomer” (2006, p. 288).

²⁸ “Триада национальных ценностей [Triad of national values],” *Izvestiya*, Sergey B. Ivanov, July 13, 2006: <https://iz.ru/news/315377> (accessed November 26, 2018)

The single most important contribution of adopting an ontological security perspective is enhancing our knowledge of the seemingly contradictory Russian foreign policy, which keeps puzzling scholars, politicians and practitioners interested in Russia: Why and how Russian decision-makers are ready to make seemingly costly material and ideational decisions.

Often quoted in studies of Russian foreign policy, Winston Churchill famously expressed his puzzlement on the subject in a 1939 BBC Broadcast; that the intentions guiding Russian foreign policy originate out of “a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.” In the same broadcast, Churchill suggested the key to understanding Russian foreign policy was its national interest. Since then, scholars have added multiple keys. My key contribution to this ever-growing bunch of keys is ontological security.

Thanks to the self-esteem and vigor of a fledgling academic, I cannot help but think that George F. Kennan would have endorsed my ontological perspective on Russian foreign policy. Kennan foreshadowed the importance of adopting a multicolored perspective on security, particularly when dealing with Russia. In the “Long Telegram” (1946), Kennan concludes that at the bottom of the Kremlin’s “neurotic view of world affairs” was a

traditional and instinctive *Russian sense of insecurity* [italics are mine]. Originally, this was insecurity of a peaceful agricultural people trying to live on vast exposed plain in neighborhood of fierce nomadic peoples. To this was added, as Russia came into contact with economically advanced West, fear of more competent, more powerful, more highly organized societies in that area. But this latter type of insecurity was one which afflicted rather Russian rulers than Russian people [...]. For this reason they have always feared foreign penetration, feared direct contact between Western world and their own, feared what would happen if Russians learned truth about world without or if foreigners learned truth about world within. [Rulers] learned to seek security only in patient but deadly struggle for total destruction of rival power, never in compacts and compromises with it.

Following along the lines of Kennan’s interpretation of the fundamentally Russian sense of insecurity, the traditional sense of material insecurity gradually transformed into an insecurity about the authenticity of the Russian Self encountering a seemingly Self-confident Western Other. Anxious about the prospect of the Russian people turning their backs on their rulers, successive ruling Russian elites have throughout history favored destructive struggle over constructive engagement in order to “Self-deceivingly” prove that the isolating distinctiveness of Russia was something forced upon it, unrelated to its own cause of action.

Whether the material and ideational losses caused by Russia’s interventionistic foreign policy will make Federal Russia implode—as Paul Kennedy

(1989) and George F. Kennan (1946) remind us Czarist Russia did and Soviet Russia eventually would—before it becomes sufficiently ontologically secure to become Self-contained is a question awaiting over the horizon of this dissertation. For now, the reader has to settle for how senses of ontological insecurity rendered the Russian military interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine meaningful, how these Russo–Western encounters reconstructed the Russian Self, and subsequently how they were translated into the foreign policy of Official Russia.

Three Key Research Questions

This section outlines the three key research questions guiding my inquiry. Adopting an ontological perspective, I ask:

- (I) How do ontological security concerns render military intervention a meaningful Russian response to the Russo–Western encounter in Kosovo and Ukraine?
- (II) How was the Russian Self reconstructed before, during, and after intervention?
- (III) How was the reconstructed Russian Self subsequently translated into Official Russian foreign policy?

The analytical aim of the dissertation is threefold. First, I want to enhance our knowledge of how military intervention became a meaningful way to encounter the Western Other at the height of the Kosovo and Ukraine crises. Encountering the Western Other, who felt increasingly ontologically insecure and secure about the viability of the existing Russian Self, who felt that military intervention was a meaningful way to react to a sudden sense of losing the Russian Self? Second, realizing that the existing sense of Russian Self was undergoing change, how did the Russian custodians reconstruct visions for what constitutes an authentic Russian Self before, during, and after Russia militarily intervened in Kosovo and Ukraine? Third, how was the reconstructed sense of Russian Self subsequently translated into foreign policy in terms of representing Official Russia after the interventions? Which parts of official Russian foreign policy had to change, and which were aligning with how reconstructed Russian Self ought to represent itself authentically in world politics?

Delimitations

Having stated what, why, and how I am going to conduct my inquiry, I now turn to delimiting the scope of inquiry. First, I delineate the agents and set-

tings of interest. Afterwards, I justify four substantial exclusions of this inquiry. In short, the aim of this section is clarifying what *I intend to do* and—importantly—*not intend to do* in this dissertation.

Settings: Kosovo and Ukraine

The settings of interest for this inquiry are the Kosovo (1999) and Ukraine crises (2014). More precisely, the period of interest is about a week before Russia militarily intervened to a week after the active part of military intervention or annexation ended. In the following, I elaborate on the more precise time frames for the examinations of the interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine.

The timeframe for my investigation of how intervention was rendered meaningful and the Russian Self reconstructed in connection with the Kosovo crisis is June 2 to June 25, 1999. In Kosovo, the discussion about whether to intervene or not began after a public showdown between the military and civilian leader of the Russian delegation, who had just arrived from tripartite negotiations in Bonn. The Russian military intervention started after midnight June 12, 1999, when a contingent of about 250 Russian soldiers entered Serbia and occupied Slatina Airbase—near Pristina in Kosovo—ahead of the planned joint NATO–Russian peacekeeping mission. The military occupation of the airbase ended a week later, on June 18, when Russia and the USA concluded an agreement about Russia’s future role in the joint NATO–Russian KFOR operation at the Helsinki Summit. As regards the translation of the reconstructed Russian Self into the foreign policy of the “Official Self,” I include foreign policy actions from June 2 to June 25, 1999, as well as the revisions made to Russia’s foreign policy, military, and national security strategies published throughout 2000. The strategies were undergoing revisions during the Kosovo crisis (Donaldson & Noguee, 2009, pp. 117-121).

Defining the relevant time frame for the Ukraine crisis is a less straightforward task. After all, Russo–Ukrainian and–Western hostilities are still ongoing. Russia militarily intervened with unmarked Russian forces in Crimea on February 27, 2014. The pretext for this crisis was months of violent clashes between the Euromaidan protesters and the Ukrainian government, culminating on February 21 with the ousting of Viktor Yanukovich. The Russian military intervention ended on March 18, 2014, when Crimea officially joined the Russian Federation after a controversial referendum in Crimea held two days earlier. Thus, the period of interest is February 21 to March 25, 2014. Regarding the analysis of the translation of the reconstructed Russian Self into the foreign policy of Official Self, I include foreign policy actions from February 21 to March 25, 2014 together with amendments to Russia’s foreign policy,

military, and national security strategies published throughout December 2014 to November 2016.

Agents: Russian custodianship

This section is dedicated to delineating *whose* meaning-making processes about military intervention, reconstruction, and the translation of the Russian Self are of interest to this dissertation; hence, the agents of interest.

Identifying whose senses of ontological security, visions for the reconstruction of the Russian Self, and influence of the translation into Official Russian foreign policy is no straightforward task. As Marlene Laruelle notes, those who discuss national identity and foreign policy publicly and those who actually make foreign policy decisions and sanction a certain vision for the Russian Self are not necessarily overlapping (2015, pp. 95–96). Though situated differently within the given Russian context, those who discuss and those who act are—however—within the same spatiotemporal context. In this context, opinions about what is a meaningful way to respond in the Russo–Western encounter, what constitutes the authentic Russian Self, and how such Self should be represented in official foreign policy emerges out of what I denote an amorphous blob of meaning, which shifts as spatiotemporal context changes before, during, and after military intervention.

Consequently, establishing a monocausal relationship between discussions of national identity and foreign policy decisions—and vis-versa—is not possible or desirable here. Rather, senses of ontological security, decisions to intervene militarily, and the reconstruction and translation of the Russian Self materializes in ways not clear to me or the agents situated in context.

However, some agents are more central in the inner dialogues about national identity and foreign policy than others. In this dissertation, I adopt an elitist approach. I am interested neither in learning about the senses of ontological insecurity, visions for the Russian Self, nor thoughts about what constitutes an authentic foreign policy voiced by the average Ivan or Natasha.

Instead, I am interested in those individual and collective elite members of the imagined Russian community who hold membership in Russia's foreign and security policy scene and those who compete for the *custodianship* of the Russian Self. The understanding of custodianship used here builds on Ilya Prizel's definition in *National Identity and Foreign Policy* (1998) as the imagined community's

intellectual center of gravity which [...] determine their [Russians] relations with one another, their foreign policies, and ultimately, their profile within the European order and in the world (Prizel, 1998, p. 11).

So who can be a custodian? According to Prizel, intellectuals, politicians, and the masses can, in theory, all be a custodian of Russian national identity. Russian intellectuals have traditionally played the lead role as “curators of collective memory” and bridge-builders between political elites and the Russian people, who are divided by a “permanent schism between the identity of the elites and that of the masses” (Prizel, 1998, p. 3).

Unlike Prizel—and as I have already argued above in terms of a relationist and essentialist conception of identity—I do not understand the relation between one elite’s sense of ontological insecurity or national identity as determining foreign policy outcomes that are coming about in fairly idiosyncratic ways.

As demonstrated in my two in-depth studies in Chapters 3 and 4, there are considerable differences regarding the sources of ontological insecurity, what meaningfully constitutes Russia’s post-Soviet Russian Self, and the foreign policy representing it among Russia’s political, economic, and intellectual elites. Custodianship is not something held by one individual or collective elitist agent; rather, it is subject to ongoing inner dialogue among several elites and the polyphony of visions they voice. The Russian elites are far from unitary actors with uniform visions of the Russian Self.

During a foreign policy crisis, the hierarchy within the Russian imagined community is challenged and existing contestations and commonplaces subject to transformation. Due to the transpositions of the meaning of existing schemas and resources, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain the sense of Russian Self prevailing prior to the crisis. As mentioned above, foreign policy offers aspiring and existing custodians a “window of opportunity” to move relatively closer to the community’s center and increase the relative weight of their own voice—hence, relative influence—in the inner dialogue about the sense of ontological insecurity, reconstruction of national identity, and foreign policy.

Despite this difference, I find Prizel’s notion of custodianship appealing. A custodian is not merely a member of Russia’s economic, political, cultural or security elite communities; instead, they are someone who participates in the ongoing dialogue about what constitutes a meaningful Russian Self and how such meaningfulness can express itself authentically in its foreign policy.

Custodians are in charge of the imagined community’s collective memory, which is comparable to an immaterial national museum in which the current display of artifacts and their interpretations influence how the remaining community thinks about “who we are” in terms of “who we were” and “who we will be.” Using custodians instead of intellectuals denotes that the agents of interest in this inquiry are not solely Russian intellectuals, instead cutting across Russia’s various elite communities.

Until the collapse of the Soviet Union, the powerful political and intellectual Russian elites' "messianic notions of society" prevailed over the masses' nativist nationalism due to the absence of political institutions and civil society to moderate the elitist notion of nationalism, Prizel argues (Prizel, 1998, p. 408). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, custodianships across Central and Eastern Europe transferred from existing political and intellectual elites to the masses. Their "nativist understanding of nationalism has replaced the messianic version of the past" (Prizel, 1998, p. 422).

When Prizel wrote his book in the late 1990s, the question of whether custodianship would be transferred to the masses or elites remained open. Both the loss of historically important territorial possessions like Crimea, the sense of duty toward the sizeable Russian diaspora in the near abroad, and rapidly accelerating regionalization within the Russian Federation made it hard to tell whether the elites would succeed in restoring former notions of messianic nationalism and the associated aggressive foreign policy to support them (Prizel, 1998, pp. 422-425).

Unlike the situations in Poland and Ukraine, a popular clean break with the messianic visions of the Russian elites for the Russian Self never materialized (Prizel, 1998, p. 416). Consequently, the Russian imagined community was stuck in limbo, where multiple distinct visions for

Russia and its mission in the world, [making] the search for a consistent Russian foreign policy an elusive proposition. The conduct of Russia's foreign policy continues to be a hostage to Russia's own self-definition (Prizel, 1998, p. 299).

This unresolved custodianship between the Russian masses and elites aggravated after the humiliating defeat in The First Chechen War. After this defeat, large segments of the Russian population were somewhere between "passive indifference to the Russian state and outright hostility" toward it on issues concerning the treatment of the Russian diaspora (Prizel, 1998, pp. 426-427).

In spite of the rather chaotic Russian context in the late-1990s, I argue that the custodianship gradually transferred back into the firm hands of Russian elites. I find support for this argument in the literature on Russian national identity (e.g., Kolstø & Blakkisrud, 2017a; Petersson, 2001; Tsygankov, 2013).

In sum, despite the temporal uncertainty surrounding the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's national identity and foreign policy has historically been (and remains) an elitist undertaking. I interpret the voices of those members of Russia's various elites aspiring to influence what constitutes a meaningful vision for the Russian Self, what threatens and supports this vision, and how such vision authentically represents itself in the foreign policy of Official Russia. These members present themselves when—in their role as senior civil

or military servant, politician, intellectual, businessman, journalist, or member of the clergy—they voice their visions for the Russian Self and Official Russia.

Exclusive focus on Russo-Western encounters

I exclusively focus on two specific Russian military interventions in which the Western Other represented the “Primary Other” encountering the Russian Self. This choice does not imply that the West is the “Sole Other” in the Russian ideational landscape. As Bo Petersson finds in his study of national self-images across Russian regions, Russian elites increasingly use China, the Islamic World, and other post-Soviet states to define what Russia is and is not (2001, p. 191).

Moreover, the construction of “Internal Others” (e.g., Chechens) also plays an important role in creating the encounters provoking the reconstruction of the Russian Self (e.g., Petersson, 2001; Schlapentokh, Levita, & Loiberg, 1997). Particularly in the first decade after the Soviet Union’s dissolution, strife about who constituted the Internal Others on the regional and state levels was crucial to promote a collective sense of national belonging in Russia, because the conventional role that the Western Other had previously played had become redundant. In other words, Moscow and Chechnya replaced the roles previously played by Washington and the West as the most “Influential Others” (Petersson, 2001, pp. 186-195). As argued and demonstrated below, however, the Kosovo crisis seemed to represent a tipping point back to the sense of reconstruction of Russian Self in contrast to and despite the Western Other.²⁹

Excluding Russia’s military intervention in Georgia 2008

I have decided not to include an in-depth study of Russia’s military intervention in Georgia in August 2008. Some readers might find dropping the Russian activity in Georgia to be a puzzling choice. After all, would it not be nice to know something about how heightened senses of ontological security rendered intervention meaningful as well as how the Russian Self was reconstructed and translated into the foreign policy of Official Russia in the intermediate period between Kosovo and Ukraine?

²⁹ Petersson also notes that frustration over lacking Western recognition of Russia’s special role in the Balkans and its historically fraternal relationship with Serbia began increasing in early 1999 (2001, p. 190).

Yes, it would. However, there is good reason for not including a clear-cut example of a major post-Soviet Russian intervention. The most important reason for excluding the Russo–Georgian War is that there was no Russo–Western encounter preceding Russia’s intervention in Georgia; nothing comparable to that which occurred in connection to the intervention in Kosovo and Ukraine, at any rate.

Some scholars claimed that the NATO Summit in Bucharest in April 2008—where Georgia, Macedonia, and Ukraine all expressed hope of joining the NATO Membership Action Plan—was decisive for the Russian decision to intervene (e.g., Asmus, 2010; Cornell & Starr, 2009; Mouritzen & Wivel, 2012; Toal, 2017). However, despite US President George W. Bush supporting the extension of MAPs to Georgia and Ukraine, this was dropped and the decision postponed to December 2008; that is, after Russia’s intervention in August. The decision was primarily postponed due to German and French opposition.³⁰

Counterfactually, extending MAPs to Georgia and Ukraine might have triggered a Russian reaction, but—and this is an important detail—such MAPs were not extended prior to the intervention. In Kosovo, Russian disagreement about the Bonn Agreement provoked an internal dialogue rendering military intervention meaningful. In Ukraine, the ousting of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich after public protests about turning down the EU Association Agreement coincide with attempts to abolish the right to Russian as an official language in areas with at least 10 percent of the population speaking Russian, which provoked the inner Russian dialogue about intervention in Ukraine.

Unlike Kosovo and Ukraine, Russia’s military intervention coincided with Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili’s order to send the Georgian Armed Forces into South Ossetia around midnight on August 7, 2008. After Georgian troops took control of Tskhinvali on August 8, they were engaged by a mix of Russian and South Ossetian forces, and Russia later opened a second front, advancing into Georgia from Abkhazia on August 9. Saakashvili had been warned that advancing into South Ossetia could potentially provoke a military response from the Russian armed forces already stationed in the Georgian breakaway regions.

³⁰ “Nato denies Georgia and Ukraine,” *BBC*, April 3, 2008: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7328276.stm> & “NATO Allies Oppose Bush on Georgia and Ukraine,” *The New York Times*, Steven Erlanger & Steven L. Myers, April 3, 2008: <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/03/world/europe/03nato.html?page-wanted=all> (both accessed August 24, 2018).

In contrast to Kosovo and Ukraine, the Western counter-reaction to the Russo–Georgian War was limited. Already in 2009, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton suggested “resetting” Russo–American relations. Aided by the joint efforts of the USA and EU, Russia even obtained WTO membership in 2011.

In sum, Russia’s intervention in Georgia is one of a total of eight unilateral military interventions Russia undertook beyond its external frontiers after the collapse of the Soviet Union, but does not qualify to be counted as a military intervention in a Russo–Western encounter similar to those in Kosovo and Ukraine.³¹ Based on the sequence of events preceding as well as the subsequent Russian and Western counter-reactions to the respective Russian interventions, the military intervention in Georgia is more a Russo–Georgian than Russo–Western encounter; particularly when taking the previous Russian military interventions in the Georgian Civil War and the Abkhazian War (1991–93) into consideration.

Not about general trends in Russian foreign policy

This dissertation is not accounting for the general trends tied to the reconstruction of the Russian Self or foreign policy developments from 1999 to 2014. While I examine how Russian national identity was reconstructed and translated into post-crisis foreign policy, I do not provide a comprehensive account of the general developments.

This choice does not reflect any perception of that which occurred before and in-between the two crises as being unimportant. Indeed, the foreign political developments before, in-between, and after these crises provide important context for what led to and followed from them. After all, nothing happens in a vacuum, and everything comes with and in turn writes history. In that regard, Russian the military interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine can be seen as two episodes in an entire series of interconnected events constituting Russia’s post-Soviet foreign policy. I will elaborate on the interconnectedness of Kosovo and Ukraine when perspectively contrasting the two episodes of military intervention in Chapter 5.

However, the analytical scope is narrowed down to an in-depth examination of the Kosovo and Ukraine crises, because these are crucial tipping points to understand from where the current, increasingly antagonistic Russo–Western relations developed. As written above, there has been insufficient research

³¹ Depending on the definition of unilateral military definition, post-Soviet Russia has militarily intervened eight times in total: Georgian Civil War (1991–1993), Abkhazian War (1991–1993), Transnistria War (1992), Tajikistani Civil War (1992–1997), Kosovo Crisis (1999), Russo–Georgian War (2008), Ukraine Crisis (2014–present), and latest the Russian military support of Syria (2015–present).

activity toward understanding the complex and idiosyncratic processes before, during, and after two of the most significant encounters between Russia and the West after the Cold War; particularly, studies focusing on the Russian perspective.

Not about general trends in Russian domestic policy

Delimiting the scope to Russian military intervention in the Kosovo and Ukraine crises also means an exclusive focus on the foreign policy aspects of contemporary Russian society. This dissertation does not provide the reader with a full account of the developments in the domestic sphere of post-Soviet Russia.

This choice must not be mistaken for the position that domestic and foreign policy are to be understood as two separate spheres. Indeed, domestic and foreign policy are birds of a feather and manifest policies of belonging in a mutually constitutive relation with the senses of national belonging.

Analyzing contemporary Russian primary sources from the Kosovo and Ukraine crises, I constantly stumbled over issues in domestic Russian politics that were somewhat related to the foreign political context in which Russia found itself. Both during the Kosovo and Ukraine crises, Russian voices were concerned with how foreign political developments would influence domestic ones. In the case of Kosovo, Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov expressed harsh criticism of President Boris Yeltsin's administration. Positioning himself as an opponent to the presidency, Luzhkov wisely attacked Yeltsin, who was pinned down by fierce debates in the Russian press and State Duma about whether the recently concluded Bonn Agreement reflected the Russian Self authentically. Similarly, the contemporary Russian opposition used the crisis context to instrumentally promote their political agendas and strength.

While these instrumental ways of using the foreign political context to promote political goals deserves further scholarly scrutiny,³² the analytical scope of this dissertation is on the mutually constitutive relation between national identity and foreign policy as interpreted through the lens of ontological security in the context of military interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine.

³² For an illustrative example of a study examining the more instrumental political aspects of the Kosovo crisis, see Vladimir Brovkin's "Discourse on NATO" (1999).

Methodological and Epistemic Commitments

Having clarified what this dissertation is (not) about, I now turn to the methodological and epistemic commitments constituting the logic guiding my inquiry.

Unlike *methods*, which concern the various concrete ways of generating and analyzing data to answer a research question, *methodology* deals with the fundamental question of how to produce scientifically valid knowledge. But how do we know what demarcated scientific from non-scientific inquiry when no universally agreed upon definition hereof exists?

In *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations* (2016), Patrick T. Jackson provides a pluralistic definition of what defines scientific inquiry in terms of four idealized methodologies: neopositivism, critical realism, analyticism, and reflexivity (see Table 1, below). The single most important demarcation criteria distinguishing between what constitutes scientific and non-scientific inquiry is internal validity (P. T. Jackson, 2016, p. 24). Internal validity is defined by the degree of how systematically a knowledge claim is “related to its presuppositions” (P. T. Jackson, 2016, p. 213). According to the second demarcation criteria, besides internal validity, a scientific knowledge claim has to be capable of public criticism intended to improve the knowledge claimed about (which is the third demarcation) worldly facts of interest to researcher. In sum, scientific knowledge claims are systematically subject to public criticism and about worldly knowledge (P. T. Jackson, 2016, pp. 213-217).

Back to the internally valid link between researchers’ predispositions and conclusions about worldly facts: Predispositions denote the individual researcher’s philosophical ontology; that is, the researcher’s connection to the worldly phenomena of interest to inquiry. The connection between researcher and world is understood in terms of two “core wagers” (see Table 1, below).

Table 1: Four idealized methodological commitments

| | | Relationship between knowledge and observation | |
|---|---------------------------|--|------------------------|
| | | <i>Phenomenalism</i> | <i>Transfactualism</i> |
| Relationship between the knower and the known | <i>Mind-world dualism</i> | Neopositivism | Critical Realism |
| | <i>Mind-world monism</i> | Analyticism | Reflexivity |

Source: P. T. Jackson, *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations* (2016, p. 41).

The first wager is about whether the relationship between the knower and the known is conceived of in a monist or dualist manner. The second wager denotes whether the relation between knowledge and observation is understood

in terms of phenomenalism or transfactualism (P. T. Jackson, 2016, pp. 35-40).

Consequently, it is not whether a knowledge claim is falsifiable or not that demarcates the scientific from the non-scientific; falsification is merely one of four equally valid methodological logics to evaluate a knowledge claim. Falsification is denoting what Jackson coins a neopositivist way of evaluating the scientific quality of a knowledge claim (P. T. Jackson, 2016, pp. 63-65). Although falsification is the most predominant demarcation criteria in the social sciences (including political science and IR) the neopositivist conduct of inquiry is merely one of four idealized, methodologically valid ways of producing scientific knowledge regarding worldly phenomena.

Besides the neopositivist way of producing scientifically valid knowledge, Jackson identifies a critical realist, analyticist, and reflexivist methodology (see Table 1, above). It is beyond the scope of this section to elaborate on each of Jackson's four idealized methodologies. Here, suffice it to briefly condense each of the four idealized understandings of what warrants a knowledge claim scientifically valid. Unlike a neopositivist understanding of the scientific validity of knowledge claims in terms of falsification, a critical realist sees valid knowledge claims as the best available approximations of the world given the dispositional properties discovered. An analyticist warrants a knowledge claim scientifically valid in terms of the analytical narrative's instrumental usefulness in elucidating the configurations crucial to understand and explain the process and outcome of a specific case of interest. A useful analytical narrative enhances our knowledge of the *particular* configurations essential to understanding a specific social phenomenon by instrumentally differentiating it from the *general* ideal-typical depiction of the social world (P. T. Jackson, 2016, p. 169). Finally, a reflexivist warrants knowledge claims scientifically valid in terms of their capacity to disclose otherwise-naturalized social injustices and provoke changes hereof by increasing the critical self-awareness of researchers and readers alike (P. T. Jackson, 2016, pp. 217-222).

Importantly, it is not the choice of methodology that determines the scientific quality of an inquiry, but rather how successful the researcher aligns the specific logic of inquiry with the choice of methods generating the data analyzed and the conclusion that follows in an internally valid way. Consequently, for researchers and others to assess the scientific validity of knowledge claims (on appropriate methodological grounds) researchers must explicitly state the methodological commitments informing their conduct of inquiry (P. T. Jackson, 2016, pp. 209-210). Consequently, I now profess my methodological commitments below.

Professing my methodological commitments

I profess my methodological commitments to analyticism. From the analyticist stance, knowledge is produced by applying an idealized depiction of the world to the researched world. In short, analyticists employ ideal types to produce scientific knowledge claims. Max Weber defines an ideal type as

a one-sided *accentuation* of *one of more* points of view and through bringing together a great many diffuse and discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent *concrete individual* events, which are arranged according to these emphatically one-sided points of view in order to construct a unified *analytical construct* [*Gedanken*]. In its conceptual purity, this analytical construct [*Gedankenbild*] is found nowhere in empirical reality; it's a utopia. (Max Weber as quoted in P. T. Jackson, 2017, p. 81)

In short, an ideal type is a utopian depiction of the world deliberately constructed by and for the researcher to interpret a researched worldly phenomenon of interest. Firmly rooted in Friedrich Nietzsche's understanding of knowledge as power, an analyticist producing knowledge claims using ideal-typification maintains neither that knowledge is value-neutral nor an objective depiction of the world as it is (P. T. Jackson, 2016, pp. 132-136). In short, knowledge is produced by someone, for someone, and from somewhere.

Personal value commitments inescapably influence the analytical narrative produced and the conclusions that follow from the use of ideal types to produce worldly facts. To an analyticist, believing it is possible to shove away the social scientist's subjective perspective is illusory; there is and cannot artificially be created a distance between an objective world existing *out there* and a subjective sphere of the individual researcher inquiring. Researcher and researched is part of the same world and scientific knowledge produced via practical encounters between researchers and researched (P. T. Jackson, 2016, p. 125).

Knowledge is instrumental, and it is produced to enhance our understanding of a worldly phenomenon of interest. Eager to enhance our knowledge of why and how something happened as it did, the analyticist applies an idealized understanding hereof and learns from the similarities and differences elucidated when researchers contrast ideal-typified—or envisioned—and experienced worlds. Constructing an ideal type is by no means an end unto itself, but rather a means for crafting an analytical narrative to arrange “empirical material of specific cases into a coherent story that differentiates between analytically general and case-specific factors” (P. T. Jackson, 2016, p. 169).

Consequently, while it is not meaningful to evaluate an ideal type itself in terms of how “valid” or “invalid” its depiction of reality is, the *usefulness* of the analytical narrative is what warrants the scientific validity of the

knowledge claims (P. T. Jackson, 2017, pp. 84 & 87); particularly, usefulness understood in terms of pinpointing those historical moments and elucidating the case-specific configurations central to the processes and outcomes of interest. Following Max Weber, case-specific processes and outcomes are not thought of in a monocausal way as a cause of “any one factor, but instead from a number of factions coming together” in a complex way particular to the case of interest (P. T. Jackson, 2016, p. 160).

Here, I have deliberately chosen to adopt ontological security as my idealized way of producing knowledge of why and how military intervention was rendered meaningful and reconstructed the Russian Self, which subsequently translated into alterations of Official Russian foreign policy. Adopting ontological security as my idealized theoretical lens, I intend to produce an analytical narrative that supplements the existing material and ideational ones with new insights about Russia’s interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine.

Admittedly, this idealized means of inquiry oversimplifies a very complex issue, and this is the very point of conducting inquiry using one or multiple ideal types. Analyticism is not about attempt to “capture the whole of actuality;” rather, it is about bringing some “analytical order to our experiences” (P. T. Jackson, 2016, p. 169). Paradoxically, it is discovering the limitations of an analytical narrative, which enhances how researchers understand the case-specific configurations central to explaining why processes and outcomes unfolded how they did (P. T. Jackson, 2016, p. 170).

Professing my epistemic commitments

Knowledge is produced through the researcher’s practical involvement with a case-specific context of interest. Involvement is influenced by the researcher’s engagement with specific research communities founded on certain norms, values, and traditions about what is interesting knowledge and the methods for generating and analyzing data. In Chapter 2, I outline and discuss the specific interpretivist-historical method I used to generate and analyze the data used.

The aim of this section is outlining the philosophical roots of the interpretivist research community to which I profess my allegiance. The common denominator for interpretivists is the preoccupation with research revolving around human meaning-making; hence, understanding the lifeworlds and lived experiences of other beings. Human meaning-making is accessed through the careful interpretation of its many different manifestations, whether they be sayings and doings or cultural artifacts (e.g., text, art, and

architecture). Through the careful interpretation of these expressions and cultural artifacts, the relevant agents' meaning-making processes within the confines of a specific spatiotemporal setting are gradually elucidated.

Meaning-making, lifeworlds, and lived experience are all signal words revealing that the intellectual roots of interpretivism are firmly grounded in hermeneutics and phenomenology. Within the realm of the modern social sciences, Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's introduction of the concept of "social construction" to the social sciences in *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), Charles Taylor's problematization of the empiricist epistemology hindering the social sciences in examining intersubjective meaning-making embedded in social reality, but beyond the ideal of "a science of verification" in *Interpretation and the Sciences of Man* (1971), and Clifford Geertz's distinction between "thin" and "thick" description in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973) revived the hermeneutic and phenomenological line of thought presented by Wilhelm Dilthey, Max Weber, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Paul Ricoeur, as well as alternative research orientations and evaluative criteria for research to the field (Schwartz-Shea, 2015, pp. 2-4).³³ More recently, Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea's authorship and collected volumes have contributed greatly to the dissemination and internal development of the growing interpretivist research community (e.g., 2012, 2014).

Most importantly, Interpretivism offers a change of research orientation toward contextuality from generalizability and reliability, and replicability is replaced with trustworthiness as the main evaluative standard (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2012, Chapter 6). I will return to the implications of these changes for how I have designed my inquiry to produce contextualized and trustworthy knowledge claims in Chapter 2.

Unlike interpretivists committed to a reflexivist methodology, I am not interested in warranting the scientific validity of my knowledge claims in terms of denaturalizing unjust meaning structures in relation to my case studies about Kosovo and Ukraine. I confine my interpretive-analyticist inquiry to understanding how individual and collective senses of ontological insecurity rendered military intervention meaningful and provoked a reconstruction process of the Russian Self, which was subsequently translated into Russian foreign policy.

This does not mean that I reject the existence or importance of the normative problématiques revealed by my interpretations and related to my personal value commitments influencing my encounters with researched settings. In

³³ For a more elaborate account of the philosophical rooting of Interpretivism in phenomenology and hermeneutics, see Dvora Yanow's "Thinking Interpretively" (2014).

this dissertation, however, I am more interested in enhancing our understanding of Russia's military interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine as well as the reconstruction and translation of the Russian Self before, during, and after interventions by systematically elucidating the meaning-making processes and disclosing the configurations tied to case-specific processes of intervening, reconstructing, and translating. Unlike a reflexivist, the intention underlying my logic of inquiry is not to know the world to change it (P. T. Jackson, 2016, p. 176).³⁴ In short, I leave it to future reflexivist research to disclose and de-naturalize the implications of Russian meaning-making processes and how I inquire about them, while I devote my dissertation to elucidating the case-specific configurations of relevant agents' meaning-making processes in bringing about the observed outcomes.

Contributions

This section briefly outlines the dissertation's substantial, theoretical, and methodical contributions. In the concluding chapter, I further elaborate on the implications of my findings and contributions in terms of suggestions for further research and the relevance to the community of practitioners and policymakers working with Russian foreign policy. I also reflect on the substantial, theoretical, and methodical decisions I have made as well as those I now realize I should have made now that I am approaching the end of my quest.

Substantially, the dissertation provides three central contributions. The first substantial contribution is an overall Sartrean reminder that existence precedes essence, and foreign policy is human all the way down. Based on my in-depth case studies, I conclude that the paths toward Russian military intervention in Kosovo and Ukraine were far from determined. Secondly, the in-depth case studies of the Russian military intervention in Kosovo and Ukraine offer concrete empirical evidence of how specific agents' senses of ontological insecurity provoked fundamental inner dialogues among a polyphony of Russian voices about the authenticity of the existing and visions for how to recon-

³⁴ Importantly, I am not dismissing that my knowledge claims potentially change how people think, act, and inquire about the world. Disseminating my research on Russia, I might influence how Russians and others interpret Russian military interventionism as well as the reconstruction and translation of the Russian Self in the future. However—and unlike reflexivists—I do not feel methodologically obliged to self-reflectively address what Patrick T. Jackson coins the “problem of the intellectuals”—by which he is referring to the problems caused when knowledge production and world change are inseparable—to warrant the scientific validity of my analyticist knowledge claims (2016, pp. 185-201).

struct a more authentic Russian Self. Unlike that which is claimed by a growing literature of geopolitical studies exploring Russian foreign policy, I find little evidence of exogenously material security concerns compared to the numerous instances of ideational and ontological concerns in the respective contexts of Kosovo and Ukraine. The third substantial contribution is based on my study of Kosovo, which shows that Russia's increasingly disruptive foreign policy is more contingent on the Russian dash to Slatina Airbase than Vladimir Putin becoming President of Russia. I conclude that the origin of Russia's disruptive foreign policy should be moved further back than Putin's infamous Munich Speech (2007) and when Putin officially becoming president (2000), this policy instead being traced back to the military intervention in Kosovo (1999).

Theoretically, the most significant contribution is the conceptual retranslation of ontological security in International Relations; a retranslation bringing the concept closer to its roots in existentialist philosophy, particularly the concept of authenticity. My retranslation entails an orientation away from a dialectical Self–Other toward a dialogical Self–Self relation. An orientation away from the essentialist premise of the existence of a “Russian Core Self” toward a relationist premise of a polyphony of Russian Selves in dialogue before, during, and after crisis. An orientation away from foreign policy action as determined by the presence of a threat against the “Core Self” toward foreign policy action/non-action as an outcome of an inner dialogue among several visions of the Russian Self. An orientation away from foreign policy crisis as a one-sided negative phenomenon toward a two-sided conception of crisis as a breakdown of the existing Russian Self, but simultaneously also a breakthrough for a new and potentially more authentic Russian Self. My retranslation addresses a fundamental criticism directed against ontological security as a concept anthropomorphizing the state; and, hence, treating an imagined human collective as one individual with and motivated by a more or less homogeneous Core Self. Drawing on William S. Sewell's re-narration of the agency–structure nexus (1992), I support my retranslation of ontological security with a social theoretical foundation emphasizing the creativity of agency in utilizing their knowledgeability and resources to transform structures, particularly in relation to contexts of crisis.

Methodically, the dissertation offers two key contributions. First, a rich and comprehensive body of Russian primary sources from which to generate and analyze data. The bulk of the body of primary sources consists of articles from daily issues of four central Russian newspapers. Second, a transparent, four-step hermeneutical process of undertaking historical interpretivist studies. The hermeneutical process constitutes four interpretivist moments of

gathering and reading the body of sources as well as *writing and presenting* the analytical narrative conveying my interpretations.

Dissertation Outline

The dissertation is structured in three parts. The first part consists of Chapters 1 and 2, outlining the retranslated ontological security perspective and historical interpretivist research design chosen, respectively. The most substantial part of the dissertation is the second one, which consists of the in-depth study of Kosovo and Ukraine in Chapters 3 and 4. The third and final part contrasts the senses of ontological security as well as the reconstruction of the Russian Self before, during, and after the military intervention in Kosovo and Ukraine in Chapter 5.

In Chapter 1, I elaborately outline and discuss the use of my core concepts: ontological security, foreign policy crisis, and national identity. The most significant function of this chapter is the retranslation of ontological security into International Relations. Chapter 2 is about the methodical decisions made when designing my historical interpretivist inquiry. The chapter's main aim is to present the body of sources and discuss how I generated and analyzed my data from an analyticist stance. In Chapters 3 and 4, respectively, I interpret how senses of ontological insecurity rendered military intervention meaningful in Kosovo and Ukraine, how the Russian Self was reconstructed before, during, and after intervention, and subsequently translated into the foreign policy of Official Russia. In Chapter 5, I perspectively contrast how the two meaning-making processes before, during, and after Russia's interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine with the aim of elucidating key similarities and particularities between the two ways of rendering military intervention meaningful and reconstructing the Russian Self. Finally, I conclude the dissertation by presenting my answers to the three key research questions and reflect on the implications of the theoretical, methodical, and substantial contributions in terms of future research and foreign political recommendations.

Part I: Inquiring about the “Russian Self”



In this initial part of the dissertation, I discuss a number of core theoretical and research design matters related to how I have decided to conduct my inquiry into the post-Soviet “Russian Self.” This part constitutes the theoretical and methodical underpinnings of the subsequent parts, which analyze and contrast the reconstruction and translation of the Russian Self in the context of the Russian military intervention in Kosovo and Ukraine.

Chapter 1: Theorizing “Russian Self”

To understand how the Russian military intervention in the Kosovo and Ukraine crises became meaningful to undertake as well as how these crises reconstructed the “Russian Self” that subsequently translated into “Official Russian” foreign policy, I argue that we must interpret from the perspective of the post-Soviet Russian quest for ontological security.

Ontological security concerns the security of the “National Self” or national identity.³⁵ Unlike the existing ontological security research program—based on a Giddensian understanding of securing sense of order and continuity within a “Core Self” from “Others”—I understand ontological security as an “inner dialogue” about the authenticity of National Self among multiple visions of National Self. A dialogue provoked by an encounter between “Official Self” and “Foreign Other,” where existing expectations to the Official Self were unfulfilled.

Existing understandings of ontological security focus on Self–Other relations between states, whereas I focus on Self–Self relations among members of an imagined community living within the territorial confines of a state.

By “Official Russia,” I refer to the official representation of the Russian Self via foreign policy saying and doings. When I write Russian Self in unitary, it denotes the ideal vision for Russian Self discussed by Russian custodians from the perspective of their ideal post-Soviet Russian Self. Drawing on Søren Kierkegaard’s understanding of “Self” in *The Sickness unto Death* as a

[...] relation relating to itself in this relation [...]; Self is not the relation, but the relation relating to itself (Kierkegaard, 2017).

I understand Russian Self as something imagined and reconstructed by a polyphony of Russian voices in ongoing inner dialogue about what constitutes a meaningful Russian Self.

It is the discrepancies between what representatives of Official Russia say and do and what individual and collective members expected them to do that causes a heightened sense of ontological insecurity leading to fundamental questions of the authenticity and meaningfulness of the existing Russian Self and how it translates into Official Russia.

³⁵ I use “National Self” and “national identity” interchangeably. Consequently, I use “Russian Self” interchangeably with “Russian national identity.”

The premise of this argument is existentialist. From the onset of their formation, the imagined communities creating the territorial confines of a state and ideational demarcations of a nation are ontologically insecure. Even the most homogenous states and nations are without a core identity (e.g., Østergaard, 2007). The Russian national identity (i.e., Russian Self) constitutes not merely one, but a disharmonic polyphony of different voices. Depending on the spatiotemporal context, some of these voices will overlap and create *rhetorical commonplaces* of meanings, while other voices will contest construction of such commonplaces.³⁶ Each voice represents narrative understandings of what it meant, means, and will mean to belong to the imagined community of Russians. Aligned with these narrative senses of national belonging are roles for Russia to play vis-à-vis Foreign Others. An ideal, ontologically secure version of Russian Self is one where the envisioned narrative and role aligns completely with experience.

However, complete alignment between the envisioned and experienced Russian Self remains the ideal. Thus, a complete sense of ontological security remains an ideal. Instead, like any other imagined community, Russia is on a perpetual quest of becoming “Itself.” Like any other imagined community, the polyphony of “Russian voices” is chasing a ghost.

In the absence of a completely ontologically secure existence, individual and collective agents of the imagined communities are left with the task of making sense of an essentially meaningless existence. The existence of a meaningful Russian Self precedes its essence. Facing this existential task, individual and collective agents of the imagined communities strive to realize what they find to be the most meaningful sense of “Being” under the uncertainty that such meaningfulness might never emerge. A fundamental sense of existential anxiety is—if anything—the closest one comes to a universal human experience. What differs is how—as individual, as member of an imagined community—one deals with this fundamental sense of ontological insecurity in the various spheres of human existence.

This dissertation focuses on the foreign political sphere. Foreign policy is par excellence *the* policy of belonging most directly devoted to the mutually

³⁶ In this dissertation, the use of commonplaces aligns with Patrick T. Jackson’s notion of rhetorical commonplaces in *Civilizing the Enemy* (2006). A rhetorical commonplace “explains how policymakers connect their arguments to their audience” (P. T. Jackson, 2006, p. 28). How these commonplaces concretely develop and influence targeted audiences as well as how commonplaces link to particular actions are empirical questions, which depend on case-specific configurations. Jackson defines a commonplace as something “weakly shared between individuals. [...] not a univocal, completely fixed bit of meaning that is *identically* possessed by multiple people” (2006, p. 28).

constitutive relation between Russian Self and Foreign Others (Campbell, 1998, p. 62). When Russia performs a role—aligned with a version of Russian Self—in world politics, both Foreign Others and Russian Selves respond more or less as expected regarding the official representation of Official Russia.³⁷ Drawing on David Campbell’s observation, foreign policy is a practice that

reproduce[s] the constitution of identity made possible by “foreign policy” and *contain[s]* challenges to the identity that results (Campbell, 1998, p. 69).

Former presidential advisor Sergey Stankevich summarized this performative aspect of foreign policy on the reconstruction of the Russian post-Soviet national identity:

Foreign policy with us does not proceed from the directions and priorities of a developed statehood. On the contrary, the practice of our foreign policy will help Russia become Russia (Sergey Stankevich in Donaldson & Noguee, 2009, p. 111).

In short, interactions between Foreign Others—in particular, the behavior of the most significant “Western Other”—and Russian Self influenced the Russian understanding of National Self, which subsequently translated into how to interact with Foreign Others in the future.

When Foreign Others and Russian Selves respond in unexpected ways to performing Official Russia—representing a vision of authentic Russian Self—a sense of ontological security emerges among the members of the imagined Russian community, who find the Russian Self it challenges meaningful. Consequently, members who contest the understanding of a vision for an authentic Russian Self guiding Official Russia might feel an increased sense of ontological security when observing or actively trying to undermine a contending vision of Russian Self.

The discrepancy between experienced and envisioned Self influences how the ontologically secure members of the imagined Russian community feel. In different ways, shapes, and forms, members of the imagined Russian community would ask if that which was experienced, said, and done by Official Russia authentically represents what they envisioned of a meaningful Russian Self.

In assessing authenticity, a central criterion is the autonomy associated with the intention preceding action. Did Russian officials represent the Russian Self as they did because they genuinely wanted to or because they were forced or manipulated to? Depending on the assessment of authenticity, the

³⁷ In Official Russia, I include the Russian President, members of the Russian government, Federation Council, State Duma, Russian Armed Forces, and senior associated administrative staff members and spokespersons.

individual and collective members of the imagined community will feel relatively more or less ontologically secure about the existence of the Russian Self as they envisioned it; in short, they feel their individual or collective understanding of Russian Self more or less aligned with the official representation of Russia in world politics.

Going from the existential premise to the more concrete object of analysis, I argue that with the desire to become a more authentic version of the Russian Self—and anxiety for losing the authentic Russian Self completely—the ontological insecurity voiced by members of the Russian imagined community externalized into concrete action when Official Russia intervened militarily in Kosovo and Ukraine. To understand why the Russian government decided to intervene despite significant threats to Russian material well-being and security as well as its status and role in world politics—it is necessary to supplement the existing material and ideational lenses with an ontological one.

The aim of this chapter is threefold. First, reviewing existing understandings of ontological security. Second, defining and situating the retranslation of ontological security guiding this inquiry. Third, embedding retranslated ontological security in a social theoretical foundation explaining (I) how military intervention became meaningful to undertake, (II) how reconstruction of the Russian Self proceeded before, during, and after the interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine, and (III) subsequently, how the reconstructed Russian Self translated into Russian foreign policy, as represented by Official Russia after crisis.

The chapter consists of two main parts. In the first part, I retranslate ontological security. In the second part, I situate retranslated ontological security in the social theoretical underpinnings of reconstruction and the translation of Russian Self informing the in-depth studies of the Kosovo and Ukraine crises.

Ontological Security in International Relations

I am not the first to call for considering the ontological dimension of security in the field of International Relations (IR). In 1998, Jeff Huysmans introduced ontological security to IR from sociology in an article entitled “Security! What Do You Mean? From Concept to Thick Signifier” (1998). Building on Anthony Giddens, Huysmans defines ontological security as a sense of ordered “social relations while simultaneously guaranteeing the very activity of ordering itself.” (Huysmans, 1998, p. 242).

The next year, Bill McSweeney convincingly argued for supplementing a conventional material understanding of security with an ontological dimension in *Security, Identity and Interests* (1999). Similar to Huysmans, McSweeney builds on a Giddensian redefinition of ontological security as sense of trust in:

social order as practically conceived is normal, consistent with one's expectations and skills to go on in it (McSweeney 1999, p. 156).

Such a sense of ontological security—as existential trust—is secured by routines and habits, which at a structural level of existence enable and limit the “creativity of the actor” to an extent where the individual remains in “cognitive control” of their sense of being (McSweeney, 1999, pp. 154–156).

A key similarity between Huysmans and McSweeney is the idea of ontological security as a sense of existential trust in social order bracketing out fundamental existential chaos, in addition to which is trust in social order as a central condition for a social actor's capacity to exercise agency and act.

In short, ontological security—as existential trust in the existing social order at the structural level—presupposes agency. Fundamental existential anxieties unleashed in the absence of ontological security petrify agents. This is the most central bedrock assumption in the existing scholarship on ontological security.

Since the publication of Huysman's and McSweeney's respective works, several significant studies have benefited from and contributed to the onward theoretical and analytical development of ontological security. Scholars have used the lens of ontological security to enhance understanding and advance explanations of numerous phenomena. Jennifer Mitzen (2006b, 2006a) uses ontological security to explain deviations from expected state behavior exclusively based on a conventional material conception of the security dilemma and anarchy. Catarina Kinnvall (e.g., 2004) uses ontological security to problematize “othering” as a strategy to make an increasingly intangible globalized world comprehensible. Stuart Croft (2012a, 2012b) employs an ontological security lens to investigate how a sense of Britishness increasingly entails a process of securitizing Islam and British Muslims. Brent Steele (2005, 2008) applies ontological security when explaining the outcome of concrete foreign policy decision-making, such as British neutrality in the American Civil War and NATO's Kosovo intervention. Ayşe Zarakol (2010) explains why Turkey and Japan keep denying historical war crimes committed using ontological security as a framework. Similarly, Karl Gustafsson (2014) uses ontological security to analyze how China and Japan instrumentally use the shame caused by the guilt surrounding war crimes to infuse ontological

insecurity. Stefano Guzzini (2013) uses ontological security to explain the revival of geopolitics in Europe due to states losing the roles and narratives that historically constituted their national identities. More closely related to this dissertation, Flemming S. Hansen (2009, 2016) uses ontological security to study post-Soviet Russian foreign policy.

In addition to the studies mentioned above, I could add a growing number of journal articles (e.g., Chernobrov, 2016; Combes, 2017; Ejodus, 2018; Greve, 2018; Kay, 2012; Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2018; McCourt, 2011; Rumelili & Çelik, 2017; Subotic, 2016; Vieira, 2018; Zarakol, 2017), a special issue (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2017), books (e.g., Kinnvall, 2006; Rumelili, 2015), and conference papers drawing on ontological security in IR.³⁸

One can only speculate about the reason for the recent surge in ontological security studies. When Giddens borrowed the concept from Ronald D. Laing, it was to elaborate on the existential anxieties that seemed increasingly dreadful to human beings going through late modernity. With the tangible frames provided by traditional ways of life and societal authorities absent, late modern man was even more responsible for creating and maintaining a meaningful sense of Self identity. In short, phasing out the traditional institutions bracketing out fundamental existential questions condemned—in Paul Sartre’s words—humankind to freedom.

Having witnessed increasing attention to discussions about global phenomena (e.g., globalization, terrorism, rise of the rest, and a liberal world order ending) it may seem less surprising why IR scholars increasingly seek answers to the puzzling behavior of states in the name of ontological security. Indeed, the question of “Who are *we*?”—and the political externalizations hereof—have become increasingly commonplace in the West.

To my knowledge, ontological security is the only theoretical IR perspective taking existentialist challenges tied to the human existence of self-conscious reflections about a *meaningful existence* seriously. In favor of materialist definitions of the political stressing “who gets what, when and how” (Lasswell, 1971) and “those interactions through which values are authoritatively located for a society” (Easton, 1967, p. 21), scholars neglect that the pro-

³⁸ Within sociology and media studies, inquiries about identity (re-)construction have frequently used ontological security to explain—in addition to material needs—why and how social agents construct individual and collective identities across a rich variety of settings and encounters (e.g., Brown, 2000; Cohen & Metzger, 1998; Hawkins & Maurer, 2011; Hiscock, Macintyre, Kearns, & Ellaway, 2002; Marlow, 2002; Noble, 2005; Silverstone, 1993; Skey, 2010; Vigilant, 2005).

cess of creating and maintaining a meaningful way of life constitutes an alternative way of defining the concept of the political (Schmitt, 2007).³⁹ Ontological security, I argue, departs from an alternative existentialist understanding of the political where *existence precedes essence*. As I see it, the existentialist premise and lens is the most significant contribution ontological security offers as a research program.

However, the growing use of ontological security to enhance our understanding and explanation of international relations has spurred academic counter reactions (e.g., Lebow, 2016; Martina, 2012; Pratt, 2017; Rossdale, 2015).

My main point of criticism is that the existing ontological security research program is coming close to essentializing the foreign policy of states like the neorealist theories used to motivate the contribution offered by ontological security. Ironically, sticking to an understanding of ontological security as a “basic need” for states to maintain an undivided “Core Self,” existing theories are coming dangerously close to short-circuiting the research program.

Whereas neorealists rely on the metaphysical logic—dictated by the anarchical international system and the relative distribution of military and economic capabilities—to explain state behavior in world politics, Mitzen evokes the metaphysical logic derived from states assumed basic need for ontological security to provide a

structural explanation for the apparent irrationality of conflicts among security-seekers that persist for long periods of time (Mitzen, 2006b, p. 343).

Understanding ontological security as a basic need might explain puzzling deviations unaccounted for by neorealist analysis—emphasizing physical security concerns—but replaces one essentialist understanding of state behavior with another. Indeed, as Richard N. Lebow suggests, the existing ontological security research program needs to demonstrate more “caution and self-restraint” to avoid essentializing state behavior (Lebow, 2016, p. 43).

Chris Rossdale (2015) and Lebow (2016) have voiced similar critiques of the theoretical and analytical limitations that Core Self manifests to ontological security. Whereas the thrust of Lebow’s critique consists of theoretical and analytical limits by the “one-sided” Giddensian assumption of a unitary Self, Rossdale’s critique focuses on the normative implications of ontological security as a research program, due to its origin in Laing’s Core Self assumption.

³⁹ Leo Strauss argued that Schmitt—similarly to Anthony Giddens and Zygmunt Bauman—was preoccupied with understanding how life was made meaningful after Modernity had led to the collapse of previous traditional ordering principles (Schmitt, 2007, p. xviii).

Departing from the premise of a Core Self (as Ideal Self), Rossdale (2015, p. 378) argues that ontological security fails to incorporate queer identities—hence, fails to denaturalize the assumption of stable and binary identities—and insights about identities intersectionality.

Instead of throwing the baby out with the bathwater, I propose a retranslation of ontological security into IR; a retranslation closer to Laing’s definition that—as argued by Lebow and Rossdale—idealizes the undivided secure Self but examines the *divided* and *insecure* Self. Laing’s seminal work does not depart from a philosophical or theoretical premise about *ontological security*, but rather about an *ontologically insecure* Self.

Retranslating ontological security departing from Laing instead of Giddens will enable me to deal with the valid points of criticism raised by Rossdale and Lebow. First, the Giddensian definition of ontological security takes its point of departure in the existence of Core Self. From an existentialist point of view, such a notion of Core Self is problematic since it ultimately assumes the existence of an essence preceding existence; hence, an authentic sense of Self to be gradually uncovered through a mix of bracketing out encounters with Others and heightened Self-reflexivity. The understanding of Core Self is problematic when applied to the micro-level of analysis but leads to stereotypical and unnuanced conclusions at the macro-level.

Replacing the Giddensian focus on maintaining the Core Self with Laing’s Divided Self, the theoretical lens of ontological security is replaced with one of ontological insecurity striving to make sense of the ontological insecurity. Moreover, the subject of analysis is moved from a societal state of ontological (in)security to who and how individual and collective members of imagined Russian community state and externalize ontological insecurity. Moving the subject of analysis in this manner accommodates the vast criticism of theories—including existing ontological security ones—anthropomorphizing states (e.g., Jervis, 1976, pp. 18–19; Lebow, 2016, pp. 35–41; Lomas, 2005). In short, my translation of ontological security insists on foreign policy action as the outcome of human meaning-making processes, not states or nations. Or as Valerie Hudson writes, it is “*human agents all the way down*” (Hudson, 2014, p. 12).⁴⁰

The value-added of ontological security—I argue—is its distinct focus on Self–Self relations—the discrepancy between experienced and expected Self—influence on foreign policy, which differs from theories focusing on the influence of self-other relations. Indeed, ontological security provides insights

⁴⁰ Russia is not saying or doing anything. If I indulge myself with shorthand like “Russia does” or “Russia says,” I ask the reader to forgive me for the lack of data or interpretation implicit in such shorthand.

about the meaningful dimension of politics (creating and defending a meaningful way of life) rather than reducing the perpetual search for coherent self to an instrumental act.

An adverse analytical implication of the Giddensian focus on a relatively ontologically secure Core Self to be defended is a narrow focus on those whose sense of ontological security is challenged. Instead, to integrate a dialogical sense of Self, I suggest moving the focus away from the threat and response of those whose ontological security is challenged to the inner dialogue about the meaning of the discrepancy between expected and experienced Russian Self among the polyphony of voices constituting Russian Self.

Second, the Giddensian focus on defining and maintaining an ontologically secure Core Self means that the theoretical development and empirical analysis of ontological *insecurity*—which I argue is the norm—remains underdeveloped. Indeed, the premise that state action—here, military intervention—presupposes ontological security is a misconception. As Laing’s study of ontological insecurity demonstrates, people suffering from existential anxieties are highly capable of acting, but out reasons puzzling to the individual undertaking them as well as spectators.

Drawing on Laing, I propose a retranslation of ontological security into IR; a retranslation with a coreless and inherently ontologically insecure Self as the theoretical point of departure. Focusing on ontological insecurity, it becomes key to reconstruct and interpret the inner dialogue among various Russian voices in the wake of Russo–Western encounters. To understand the sense of ontological insecurity rendering military intervention meaningful and reconstructing the Russian Self, in-depth case studies reconstructing and interpreting the inner dialogue about Official Russia towards the Western Other among Russian Selves are needed.

In the following two sections, I will trace Giddens’ translation of Laing’s original definition of ontological security into sociology, the translation of the Giddensian redefinition into IR, as well as the development of ontological security within IR from Huysmans to today.

Giddens translating Laing into Sociology

In *The Constitution of Society*, Anthony Giddens introduced ontological security to Sociology as:

Confidence or trust that the natural and social worlds are as they appear to be, including the basic existential parameters of self and social identity (Giddens, 2006, p. 375).

The Giddensian sense of ontological security stresses individual confidence and trust—rather than individual humans’ ability to—manage existential challenges against existing ontology. For Giddens, any experienced deviation from the envisioned manifests a threat to ontological security.

In *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1991), Giddens updates his retranslation of ontological security by specifying that “trust” and “confidence” is in relation to what an individual perceives as “continuity” and “order” of events in his or her existing ontology. Ontological security defines a sense of trust in the:

continuity and order in events, including those not directly within the perceptual environment of the individual (Giddens, 1991, p. 243).

According to Giddens, the idealized state of ontological security is complete stability; hence, no deviation from individual expectation. Challenges to the existing sense of order and continuity of the autobiography constituting individual Self manifests an ontological threat by undermining the validity of established answers to the “fundamental existential questions [about] time, space, continuity and identity” (Giddens, 1991, p. 37). A Giddensian understanding of the state of ontological security rests on the complete absence of the existential dread inherent to human existence. In short, an ontologically secure existence is one where most things are taken for granted, naturally given, common sense, or free of anxiety (Giddens, 1991, pp. 37 & 47).

For Giddens, stable everyday routines and habits are the means to maintain ontological security and to bracket out the existential anxiety persistently threatening to overwhelm the ontologically secure with fundamental questions challenging the “very roots of our coherent sense of ‘being in the world’” (Giddens, 1991, p. 37). In short, any deviation from everyday routines manifests a threat against ontological security.

In what Giddens defines as “critical situations”—that is, when an agent realizes that routinized life is replaced with uncertainty (Giddens, 2006, p. 61)—anxiety grows as confidence and trust in the autobiographical narrative of the Self proves inadequate to meaningfully connect the experienced and envisioned worlds. Once again, fundamental existential questions arise in need of fundamental answers.

Lacking the capacity to provide meaningful answers to the fundamental existential questions encountered, a sense of shame is caused by “feelings of inadequacy or humiliation” (Giddens, 1991, p. 65). Ultimately, the sense of shame can spin into an ontological crisis. In the case of crisis, a more fundamental reconstruction process of routines and habits is required to reestablish ontological security (Giddens, 1991, pp. 184–185).

The more self-reflexive an agent is, the easier it is to maintain an uninterrupted and coherent autobiographical narrative adequately bridging the discrepancies between expectations and experiences in critical situations; hence, avoiding ontological security crises (Giddens, 1991, pp. 53–55). In short, routines and self-reflexivity constitute the primary precautionary measures to bracket out the challenges imposed by existence on the ontological security of human beings' sense of Core Self.

Laing coined the term ontological security in *The Divided Self* (2010). Controversial at the time of its publication in 1960, the primary goal of *Divided Self* was to make “madness, and the process of going mad, comprehensible” (Laing, 2010, p. 9). In short, enhancing our ability to understand individual senses and externalizations of ontological insecurity.

Laing defined an idealized state of ontological security as an ability to make sense of existence:

in the world as a real, alive, whole, and, in a temporal sense, a continuous person. As such, he can live out into the world, and meet others: a world and others experienced as equally real, alive, whole, and continuous. Such a basically ontologically secure person will encounter all the hazards of life, social, ethical, spiritual, biological from a centrally firm sense of his own and other people's reality and identity (Laing, 2010, p. 39).

Unlike the ontologically secure person, the ontologically *insecure* person experiences existence in the world as:

more unreal than real; in a literal sense, more dead than alive; precariously differentiated from the rest of the world, so that his identity and autonomy are always in question. He may lack the experience of his own temporal continuity. He may not possess an over-riding sense of personal consistency or cohesiveness. He may feel more insubstantial than substantial, and unable to assume that the stuff he is made of is genuine, good, valuable. And he may feel his self as partially divorced from his body (Laing, 2010, p. 42).

To Laing, what separates the ontologically secure from the ontologically insecure is the ability to manage the existential challenges inevitably encountered across the span of a lifetime. The ability to bridge the encountered discrepancies between experienced and envisioned Self meaningfully without succumbing to engulfment, implosion, and petrification or depersonalization (Laing, 2010, pp. 43–53). I will return to these three different externalizations below when I retranslate ontological security into IR. For now, in my interpretation of Laing, it is sufficient to say that a central feature of his understanding of ontological security is the individual capacity to manage internal Self–Self re-

lations rather than bracketing out the external challenges manifested in encounters between Self and Others. Ontological security is the ability to Self-manage, not to bracket out the existential human condition.

Ontological security, understood as the capacity to manage the Self–Self relation, significantly differs from Giddens’s translation of ontological security into sociology. To Giddens, maintaining the existing sense of ontological security is key. Lacking the capacity to manage one’s relation between Selves, the ontologically insecure remains preoccupied with “preserving rather than gratifying himself” with the presence of an Other (Laing, 2010, p. 42). Unable to manage oneself, encountering an ontologically secure Other—regardless of how friendly Others may present themselves—manifests an existential threat from the perspective of the ontologically insecure.

The difference between Laing’s and Giddens’ respective understandings of ontological security can be summarized in terms of how they would treat a patient in a state of ontological insecurity. Giddens would prescribe a preassembled, autobiographical narrative with a complete set of everyday routines and means to increase Self-reflexivity. Laing’s treatment would initially demand of the practitioner to recall Jean-Paul Sartre’s central existentialist claim that “*existence* comes before *essence*” (2007, p. 27) and then start exploring the patient’s lifeworld to make the individually sensed ontological insecurity comprehensible. Through dialogue on the patient’s ontological terms, treatment should gradually make the patient able to manage inescapable challenges imposed on Self encountering Others highlighting discrepancies between multiple Selves.

Studying ontological insecurity from Laing, reconstructing and interpreting the inner dialogue among various Selves in context is key. Controversial at the time of its publication in 1960, the primary goal of *Divided Self* was to make “madness, and the process of going mad, comprehensible” (Laing, 2010, p. 9); in short, enhancing our ability to understand individual senses and externalizations of ontological insecurity.

Bringing matters to a head, Laing would recommend that practitioners prescribe one-to-one therapy at eye level and philosophy rather than a preassembled autobiographical narrative of Core Self—gradually enforced by a routinized everyday life—bracketing out instead of managing ontological insecurity. Indeed, existential anxiety is as an inherent part of human existence as the perpetual quest to bracket it out; whereas the first is a basic condition of being, the latter remains an illusory promise.

Translating Giddens into International Relations

As mentioned above, Huysmans introduced ontological security to IR from sociology in “Security! What Do You Mean?” In the pioneering article, Huysmans defines ontological security as a sense of ordered “social relations while simultaneously guaranteeing the very activity of ordering itself” (Huysmans, 1998, p. 242).

Adopting the Giddensian sense of ontological security as trust in “order” and “continuity” as his premise, Huysmans’ understanding of ontological security stressed the human need for forming groups in order to relieve the fundamental uncertainty caused by an awareness of “the power of other people to kill [and] the uncertainty about life” (Huysmans, 1998, p. 238).

Similar to Giddens, Huysmans defines ontological security as a state and strategy to secure existential relief. A concrete strategy to maintain a sense of existential order relieving people of the anxieties that would otherwise prohibit them from living their daily lives. As a strategy, ontological security sets the

limits of reflexivity—death as the undetermined—by fixing social relations into a symbolic and institutional order. It does not primarily refer to threat definition—in the sense of enemy construction—or threat management but concerns the general question of the political—how to order social relations while simultaneously guaranteeing the very activity of ordering itself (Huysmans, 1998, p. 242).

From Giddens, Huysmans borrows the understanding of ontological security as order and the distinction between fear and anxiety to distinguish between a context of “daily security” (characterized by concrete fears which are possible to order hierarchically) and one of “ontological security” dealing with threats “almost impossible to hierarchize [characterizing a society in] a permanent state of crisis and urgency” (Huysmans, 1998, p. 243).

The most important original contribution in Huysmans’ article is the tie between ontological security and “the political.” To Huysmans, effective ontological security strategies are central to maintaining political legitimacy in societies undergoing ever-rapidly increasing globalization undermining established orders via the “multiplication of threat experiences in everyday life” (Huysmans, 1998, p. 243).⁴¹

In societies undergoing globalization—rendering the human lifeworld increasingly defuse and incomprehensible—trust in the capacity of politicians to

⁴¹ According to Rollo May (1977, p. 11), the politics–anxiety relationship is central to Spinoza’s concept of state legitimacy as related to the capacity to successfully establish “freedom of fear.”

reestablish a sense of ontological security, understood as relief from existential dread, and to “keep threats at a distance” when daily security crumbles have become key to their legitimacy to remain in power (Huysmans, 1998, p. 243). In other words, Huysmans places both the instrumental utility of using (and the responsibility for maintaining a state of) ontological security among society’s political elites. Should these elites fail to maintain ontological security, their regime would be delegitimized due to their failure to facilitate the symbolic and institutional order needed to make daily life intelligible (Huysmans, 1998, p. 243).

On par with military and economic security, ontological security has become a fundamental need that political elites must address in the wake of the Cold War. During the Cold War era, it was easier to clearly identify and hierarchize threats due to the omnipresent threat of nuclear annihilation, which had relevance for ontological security and political legitimacy, Huysmans (1998, pp. 243–244) claims.

Consequently, Huysmans assumes that political elitists have a strong interest in maintaining a widely held sense of order regardless of the means used to establish such order. The increasing incomprehensiveness of the globalized world, however, makes it harder for the responsible political elites to make the world intelligible; and, hence, to maintain political legitimacy. Political elites have therefore started developing concrete strategies to keep their states ontologically secure by transforming intangible existential anxieties into concrete fears.

Transforming anxieties into fears demands concrete manifestations in terms of turning “strangers” into “enemies” of the existing social order. Human groups on the periphery or outside of what is recognized as the boundaries of the in-group are often assigned such concrete manifestations in the form of “strangers” creating a whole range of normative issues (Huysmans, 1998, pp. 242–244).

Huysmans claims that established IR theories have predominately been preoccupied with studying how states manage perceived national threats from enemies, but that—given the end of the Cold War and rise of more diffuse sources to insecurity—they ought to begin inquiring about how states manage the ontological threats imposed on them. However, the political practice of constructing images of enemies primarily related to “daily” (not “ontological”) security. Huysmans is primarily interested in the intangible and unspecific existential threats “strangers” manifest before they are turned into tangible enemies one can fear (Huysmans, 1998, pp. 242–244).

This is the point of departure for Catarina Kinnvall's (2004) initial use of ontological security. Following Huysmans, she uses ontological security to develop a critique of "Othering" as predominant ontological security strategy. Kinnvall notes that:

Increasing ontological security for one person or group by means of nationalist and religious myths and traumas is thus likely to decrease security for those not included in the nationalist and/or religious discourse (Kinnvall, 2004, p. 763).

Departing from the same premise about the destabilizing effects of globalization—particularly, altered "patterns of global mobility and migration"—on how individuals perceive their ontological security, Kinnvall argues that "world leaders and other paramount figures" increasingly use the strategy to rally people—increasingly haunted by existential anxieties—around "simple rather than complex causes," such as nationalism and religion (Kinnvall, 2004, p. 744).

Nationalist and religious discourses of exclusion are "portrayed as resting on solid ground, as being *true*, thus creating a sense that the world really is what it appears to be," which has historically made them effective strategies to foster a sense of ontological security (Kinnvall, 2004, p. 742).

Discourses of exclusion popularly constructed by Western political elites began altering definitions of Foreign Others, "both structurally (e.g., immigrants as 'bogus' asylum seekers) and psychologically (by turning the stranger into an enemy)" after the 9/11 terror attack to "securitize subjectivity in times of uncertainty" (Kinnvall, 2004, pp. 754–755).

In times of uncertainty, hatred manifests a strong link between the present, past, and future. On a structural and psychological level, hatred determines the selection of "chosen traumas" and "chosen glories," providing society with the "comforting stories" that reestablish ontological security (Kinnvall, 2004, p. 755). Chosen traumas—supplemented by dogmatic nationalist and religious truths—reboot the collectively and individually held identities recovering the "ideological lineage [providing] a guide for future actions;" hence, the sense of order and continuity essential to a Giddensian redefinition of ontological security (Kinnvall, 2004, p. 756).

While ontologically securing, these essentialist (i.e., exclusionary) nationalist and religious discourses redefine the Self–Other relationship in terms of "superior" and "inferior." The former are members of the religious or national "inside-group," who legitimately can and are obliged to bring back order and security; whereas the "outside-group" of Others who are not defined as members of the essentialist account are blamed for unleashing the existential chaos (Kinnvall, 2004, p. 763).

To avoid a “clash of civilizations,” scholars need to counter the manipulative use of exclusionist nationalist and religious discourse to boost ontological security at the expense of disadvantaged Others by disclosing why “feelings of fear, loathing and even hatred creep into ‘our’ perceptions of ‘them’” (Kinnvall, 2004, pp. 751, 764).

Writing in the context of a rapidly globalizing world and three years into the War on Terror—spurring increased hatred towards Islam and the othering of Muslims—Huysmans and Kinnvall both use the lens of ontological security to address important societal developments and accompanying emotional externalizations of increasingly insecure senses of Self.⁴²

However, the manner with which Huysmans and Kinnvall use ontological security to understand and explain problematic outcomes of encounters between Self and Others displaced the conceptual development of ontological security. Combined with the Giddensian translation of ontological security as order and the continuity of a Core Self—leaving ontological security open to the criticism of essentializing states’ foreign policy—developing ontological security in the direction of understanding Self–Other relations instead of Self–Self relations makes it increasingly difficult to identify the value added by ontological security.

This conceptual displacement has brought ontological security closer to existing ideational approaches within IR (which I introduced in the previous chapter) all dealing with different aspects of Self–Other relations stressing the importance of identity, norms, securitization, status, and emotions in the study of states’ foreign policy. Where some see the overlap between ontological security and ideational approaches as a virtue (e.g., Mitzen & Larson, 2017, pp. 14–17), I argue it hinders the conceptual development of ontological security as a research program about whose and how senses of ontological security are manifest and externalized in foreign policy as well as the reconstruction and translation of “National Self.”

Some ideational scholars have also called for studies about ontological security to justify human needs for identity—hence, why identity is important to study in IR—without going further into the theoretical developments of ontological security. Ted Hopf added ontological security to his understanding of the influence of identities on Soviet foreign policy in his contribution to *Measuring Identity* (2009, p. 280) and has kept it in his most recent book, which reconstructs the early phase of the Cold War from a Soviet perspective (2012,

⁴² Stuart Croft’s studies about the othering of British Muslims as a way to secure a sense of Britishness among the imagined British community also engages with the normative implications of reestablishing ontological security at the expense of Others (2012a, 2012b).

p. 9). Lebow embraced ontological security as a need satisfied through the construction of identities in *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (2008), but turned against the use of the concept in a full-chapter critique in *National Identity and International Relations* (2016).

Particularly, Kinnvall's conceptual blurring of the already delicate distinction between daily-psychological and ontological-existential security makes conceptual demarcation between ontological security and ideational approaches unclear. As Huysmans argues, the two dimensions are interrelated—hence, mutually constitutive—but hatred is an emotion directed against a concrete object or source of unhappiness. It is possible to hate specific individuals, groups, behaviors or even ideas, but not to hate something without an identifiable source or a diffuse object. Consequently, hatred can help objectify an abstract and diffuse sense of anxiety but cannot maintain ontological security. Hatred is definitely an effective psychological coping mechanism, but in the event that existential anxiety arises from something that “ancient hate” cannot meaningfully account for, it will not prove effective.

Hatred ought not to be directly linked with ontological security, which primarily deals with how humans make sense of the challenges and opportunities imposed on them by their mere existence. A primary analytical value added by ontological security is the enhancement of our limited understanding of how humans deal with the diffuse and intangible existential anxieties arising from the fundamental insight that humans are mortal and meaning-making beings.

Aspiring to demonstrate how “states pursue social actions to serve self-identity needs, even when these actions compromise their physical existence,” Brent J. Steele undertakes three case studies in which there is a need to maintain “*consistent self-concepts* [constituted by] a narrative which gives life to routinized foreign political actions” (Steele, 2008, pp. 2–3).

Central to Steele's understanding and work with ontological security are Giddens' concepts of “critical situations,” “shame,” and identity as autobiography of Self. A state of ontological insecurity occurs in critical situations, which defines an unpredictable situation compromising agents' “ability to reconcile *past (or prospective) actions* with the biographical narrative states use to justify their behavior” (Steele, 2008, p. 13). Such inadequacy to bridge contradicting the existing narratives, which are central to groups constituting the political elites in a given state causes a sense of shame among these inadequate elites.

Advocates of existing and competing narratives will use states of ashamedness to support or undermine, respectively, existing policies and the political legitimacy associated with the existing autobiographical narrative by a process of “Self-interrogative reflexivity” (Steele, 2008, pp. 150–157). Agents try to initiate such “Self-interrogative reflexivity” processes, employing numerous

means, such as “reflexive discourse” (explicitly pointing out discrepancies between what elites say and do), “unfavorable images” (the origins and validity of which elites cannot bring into disrepute), and “scholarly production of knowledge” (providing the frame of reference used by elites). The goal is to bring about desired changes to the existing autobiographical narrative and the prescribed policies (Steele, 2008, pp. 157–162).

The degree to which agents are successful depends on the available resources, authority, and credibility. Because of their deliberately emancipatory and revolutionizing framed agendas, terrorist organizations—for obvious reasons—as well as NGOs are considered political entrepreneurs that do not depict the world in a neutral and “objective” light (Steele, 2008, p. 156). Compared to most states, NGOs and terrorist organizations have limited resources and less authority and credibility, repeated actions can nevertheless spur self-reflection within the targeted national communities, whose foreign policy the NGOs and terrorist organizations want to alter. However, these actions can also aid the existing narrative, unintentionally triggering the opposite result: Reaffirmation or even reinforcement of a national community’s trust in the existing autobiographical narrative and the elites with which its content align (Steele, 2008, p. 157).

A key contribution of Steele’s work is bringing ontological security closer to what I call the inner dialogue provoked by encountering Foreign Others, but among agents envisioning different National Selves disclosing otherwise latent contestations and commonplaces in the everyday understanding of National Self. Demonstrating how individual and collective agents⁴³ use critical situations to challenge and support the legitimacy of ruling elites, Steele brings ontological security closer to the polyphony of voices—or autobiographical narratives—about what constitutes an authentic version of National Self otherwise lost when essentializing the foreign policy of states to the needs of a Core Self.

Mitzen’s pioneering reinterpretation of the security dilemma from the perspective of ontological security is among the most essential publications to the proliferation of the concept of ontological security. Her identification of the paradox—that what increases a state’s sense of ontological security may be the source of what decreases its material security (Mitzen, 2006b, p. 347)—was paramount to the increased interest in ontological security. That “conflict may benefit a state’s identity even as it threatens its body” is one of the most prev-

⁴³ For instance, social movements, international and national media outlets, international organizations, NGOs, and various transnational actors (Steele, 2008, pp. 152-157).

alent quotes across the research program (Mitzen, 2006b, p. 365). Indeed, ontological security can be maintained by dysfunctional routines and self-defeating foreign policy to the extent that states, due to their ontological (not material) needs, “prefer their ongoing, certain conflict to the unsettling condition of deep uncertainty as to the other’s and one’s own identity” (Mitzen, 2006b, pp. 341–342).

Paradoxically, I argue, early work with ontological security is also paramount to disseminating and maintaining two key built-in conceptual weaknesses echoed in the existing research program. First, anthropomorphizing states and turning them into rational entities with a uniform, personalized need for ontological security reproduces the analytical determinism ontological security studies claim to undermine by replacing one essentialist concept with another (Mitzen, 2006b, pp. 351–352). In short, replacing “opposing actors do what they do, because of their material interests” with “opposing actors do what they do because of a need to preserve their sense of “Core self” keeps ontological security stuck within the orbit of essentialism. The only thing that changes is that the essentialist conception of states foreign policy as motivated by a need for survival is replaced with another essentialist understanding of states foreign policy as motivated by an ontological need for a stable Core Self to bracket out an otherwise ontologically insecure existence.⁴⁴

Motivated by engaging “realist IR theory, which treats states as rational actors,” Mitzen developed an understanding of ontological security with “rational agency” as a bedrock assumption (Mitzen, 2006b, p. 345). Ironically, the result of Mitzen’s rationalist definition of ontological security is the essentialization of states’ foreign policy actions, reproducing the same analytical determinism she accuses “realist IR theory” of having; a less fortunate way to solve the problems regarding the levels of analysis.

Second, ontological security studies have mainly studied cases where state foreign policy deviated from what material theories would predict (e.g., Mitzen, 2006b; Steele, 2005). Consequently, ontological security concerns take precedence over material ones. Scholars who persistently attempt to reduce individual and collective human actions to materialism and those who attempt to refute the influence of materialism in favor of immaterial factors (ontologies, identities, norms, etc.) are both engaged in a futile task. Instead, I endorse recent suggestions (e.g., Lupovici, 2012; Mitzen & Larson, 2017, pp. 6–9; Subotic, 2016) for the ontological security research program to move beyond the material–immaterial divide and not solely pay attention to cases

⁴⁴ Similarly, Mark Laffey criticized David Campbell’s *Writing Security* (1998) for replacing one essentialist notion of the state with another, short-circuiting his research agenda of denaturalizing the role of the state in IR (Laffey, 2000).

where material and ontological security concerns are *irreconcilable*, but also where concerns are *reconcilable*.

Here, I adopt a supplementary approach, but focus on findings produced by my adoption of an ontological security lens. Neither the material nor the immaterial dimension of security can independently account for the process of becoming increasingly insecure as well as the reactions and outcomes hereof.

In sum, the existing studies within the ontological security research program entail a number of valuable contributions, unresolved tensions, and criticism. I have already outlined the contributions, built-in tensions, and criticism arising from the prevailing Giddensian retranslation of ontological security emphasizing the need for a stable sense of Core Self for individuals to exercise agency raised to an assumed identical need of states. Anthropomorphizing states and retaining the need for a stable Core Self vis-à-vis Foreign Others with the same fundamental need for ontological security has ironically replaced essentialism with alternative essentialism. Keeping the original motivation for starting the ontological security research program (as alternative to deterministic materialist understandings of security mentioned in the Introduction) in mind, sticking to a Giddensian translation of Laing's definition of ontological security (replacing one essentialist determinism with another) risks short-circuiting it. If we stick to understanding ontological security as a fundamental need or justification of the relevance of various ideational studies about foreign policy, ontological security may end up as an assumption rather than a theoretical tool for understanding how senses of ontological insecurity and the perpetual search for ontological security manifest and externalize concretely in context.

Retranslating Ontological Security into International Relations

Instead of abandoning ontological security in IR, I propose a retranslated version building on Laing's *The Divided Self*. Contrary to Giddens' focus on the need for ontological security to maintain an anxiety-free existence, I want to tap into the inner dialogue among the polyphony of Russian Selves to understand whose ontological security or insecurity in- or decreased in the encounter with a Foreign Other. Additionally, how the inner dialogue about what meaningfully constitutes the Russian Self proceeded throughout intervention, closure, and translation is summarizing the independent analytical value added by my retranslation of ontological security into IR.

The change of interest away from maintaining a Core Self to managing "Polyphonic Self" denotes my aim to bring the ontological security research

program closer to—paraphrasing Laing’s original aim behind writing *Divided Self* (2010, p. 9)—make the processes, manifestations, and externalizations of becoming increasingly ontologically insecure comprehensible.

My retranslation of ontological security follows in line with the conceptual pathway of Brent Steele, who—in contrast to Mitzen—ties ontological security close to existential anxiety and how humans manage this basic condition in context. Thus, my retranslation of ontological security adapted for studying how individual and collective agents manage a heightened sense of anxiety and unauthenticity answers a recent suggestion by Stuart Croft and Nick Vaughan-Williams to turn the conceptual development of ontological security in the direction of analyzing the:

Management of dread at the level of the “everyday”—and the related, but potentially distinct analytical move to study diverse “vernacular” narrations of it (Croft & Vaughan-Williams, 2017, p. 20).

I argue that Laing’s understanding of ontological security offers insights and a vocabulary to help us in this direction. Encountering a threatening Other, one can decide to engage or disengage to safeguard one’s Self. While some protect their subjectivity through isolation⁴⁵—like the protagonist in Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s *Notes from the Underground* (2008)—others persistently engage in conflicts. To be “hated as such is often less disturbing than be destroyed,” as Laing notes (2010, p. 44). In other words, some prefer being someone’s enemy to being nobody.

In the following section, I re-narrate a relationist concept of ontological security building on three core premises. First, the absence of a “Core Russian Self” in favor of multiple Russian Selves on a competitive quest for ontological security by realizing their respective ideal visions for authentic Russian Self. Second, a state of ontological insecurity as the norm rather than security. Whereas the task of defending an existing sense of ontological security against potentially undermining actions has been the core assumption of existing ontological security studies, I interpret military intervention as a response to a

⁴⁵ North Korea, East Germany, and the Soviet Union are three examples of states that historically attempted to isolate themselves to avoid unintended interactions between their citizens and the surrounding world. Despite serious efforts with tragic consequences, these states were unable to completely obstruct and control their citizens’ interaction with the surrounding world. Instead, alternative strategies were adopted to absorb their citizens’ demands for foreign consumer goods symbolizing a forbidden way of life (e.g., Western blue-jeans or music by *The Rolling Stones*) by establishing domestic productions to supply the demand and, hence, control as well as substituting the symbolic meaning of these unwanted foreign, capitalistic influences.

heightened sense of ontological insecurity in an already ontologically insecure context; military intervention as an externalization of increased ontological insecurity among certain individual and collective members of an imagined Russian community. Third, crisis represents both *breakdown* and *breakthrough*. The foreign policy crises following in the wake of the Russo–Western encounters over Kosovo and Ukraine provoked the partial breakdown of the existing configuration of Russian Selves, which caused a breakthrough for new contestations and commonplaces among Russian Selves. After the crisis, new configurations of Russian Selves were translated into Russian foreign policy to accommodate the accompanying reconstruction of envisioned Foreign Others.

The retranslated concept of ontological security builds on the insights of the important work reviewed in the previous section. From Huysmans and Steele, respectively, I adopt an elite-centered focus and emphasize the opportunities and challenges created by states of increased ontological insecurity, which existing and aspiring political elites will face and exploit, employing varying resources and status. From Mitzen, I take the paradoxical material–ontological security nexus while remembering Kinnvall’s objection of the normative implications of the othering following in the wake of the paradoxical quest for a complete sense of ontological security.

From dialectical to dialogical “Self”

A Giddensian retranslation of ontological security, where an ordered and continued sense of Core Self presupposes agency, is no fruitful way to study how imagined entities like states or nations characterized by an absence of such a Core act in world politics. In assuming that a state has a Core Self, we miss what I denote as the inner dialogue among the polyphony of voices of the Russian Selves uttering a multitude of ontologies and visions for Russian Self underneath the veneer of Official Russia; instead of silencing the dissonance within the imagined Russian community, *whose ontological security* becomes central to the inquiry I suggest.

In the cases involving Russian military intervention in Kosovo and Ukraine, it was the ontological insecurity sensed by some individual and collective Russian custodians, respectively, which was caused by action and a lack of action by Official Russia in the encounter with Western Others. After it intervened militarily, “Intervening Russian Self” and later “Closing Russian Self” became the main points of reference for the inner dialogue reconstructing the Russian Self.

In the following two sections, I first define Russian Self in terms of the literature on national identity and then theorize the reconstruction process of

Russian Self. Building on Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the "Dialogical Self," I theorize Russian Self as polyphonic and coreless in contrast to the predominant dialectical understanding of the "National Self."

Instrumental "Self"

The existing literature about national identity is vast and interdisciplinary, which has led to conceptual ambiguity. Ambiguity has been so frustrating for some scholars that they have argued to abandon or partially replace national identity with proxies like "national self-image" (e.g., Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). For others, ambiguous conceptual multi-facetedness is driving their fascination with national identity. Representing a fascinated scholar, Bo Petersson argues that scholars should reconcile themselves with the fact that we will never be able to "reveal the entire contents of that can" called national identity (Petersson, 2001, p. 43).

Given the growing importance that debates about senses and policies of national belonging preoccupy in political debates across the world, I argue that letting conceptual frustration hinder further scientific inquiry about an ambiguous yet important phenomenon is not a feasible way to proceed. In short, because a phenomenon like national identity is hard to comprehend and measure, it does not disqualify scholars from taking up the challenge of trying to understand something, which historically had and will remain very real manifestations and externalizations.

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to usher the reader through an exhaustive selection of the theoretical and empirical studies about national identity from Johann G. Herder's *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (1967) to the present. Instead, I exclusively engage with the early proponents of the modernist—also known as instrumentalist—tradition.

The reason for this exclusion is that the ontological security research program is based on a premise of national identity as a social construct. Consequently, primordialist—also known as essentialist—understandings of national identity as naturally given by essentialist criteria (e.g., race and geography) assuming humans form national communities based on affinity of birth and evolutionary reasons will not be investigated further here.⁴⁶

Before returning to the origin and influence of modernist understandings of national identity on the ontological security research program, it is worth

⁴⁶ For an exhaustive overview and discussion of primordial, modernist, and post-modernist definitions of national identity, see Anthony D. Smith's *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era* (2002) and *Nationalism and Modernism* (2003).

responding to Ashutosh Varshney's reservations concerning the use of "modernist" and "primordialist" as theoretical and analytical labels. Varshney notes that, as well as

pure essentialism could not survive empirical scrutiny, pure instrumentalism also could not, [...] pure essentialists or pure instrumentalists do not exist any longer. Nor is it likely that they will re-emerge given the force of empirical evidence (Varshney, 2007, pp. 285, 291).

In 1983, Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, and Eric Hobsbawm published what would become the most influential scholarly works about nationalism and national identity. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (2006), Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* (2006), and Eric Hobsbawm's *The Invention of Tradition* (2015) revolutionized the existing understandings of national identity and nationalism. All three authors worked with a non-essentialist take on national identity as socially constructed.

Gellner identifies the origins of national identity in the early phase of industrialization. Successfully industrializing a state demanded a mobile, skilled workforce. To accommodate this need, modern states established universal mass-education systems. To legitimize such state systems, national identities were constructed to ensure a homogenous population with a shared sense of belonging to a nation represented and administered by the state. In traditional societies, there had been no need for national identities due to the functional division of labor only demanding sparse interaction between ruling elites and food-producing masses. Thus, the changing division of labor during the course of industrialization called for national identity as an instrument to level out the increasing dependence of the ruling elite on the growing working class.

Anderson stresses the technological development of means enabling mass communication in his explanation of the origin of national identities. Concretely, Johann Guttenberg's printing press (invented ca. 1440) made it possible to construct a collective sense of belonging for an imagined national community. National communities were "imagined," as most of the community's members would never establish personal ties with each other but nevertheless feel connected with each other thanks to mass communication. Similar to Gellner, Anderson argues that nationalism spread because it accommodated psychological and economic needs arising in the wake of modernity. For Anderson, however, it is primarily the invention of the means for mass communication driving nationalism in itself and not the functional needs of elites.

Hobsbawm's explanation of the emergence of nationalism and national identities focuses on the invention of traditions as functional needs necessary to fill the widening gap left by the traditional societies gradually replaced with modern ones; hence, reestablishing continuity between a "suitable historic

past” and the present. Conversely, when an invented tradition is successfully established, it significantly influences “who” and “what” is perceived as legitimate in society (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2015, pp. 1, 4–5); in short, devising traditions to maintain, challenge, or support the legitimacy of certain individual and collective agents benefiting from such. Hobsbawm concludes that since nation-building involves the invention and development of traditions based on convenient interpretations of the past, the construction of national identities basically constitutes a process of systematically and intentionally getting history wrong. Historians are therefore “professionally obliged not to get it wrong” and disclose contemporary intentions underlying what are *believed to be* old traditions (Hobsbawm, 2012, p. 12).

Despite the differences in their arguments about the origins and function of nationalism and national identity, Anderson, Gellner, and Hobsbawm share two key assumptions. First, national identity is a modern phenomenon. Second, national identity is socially constructed by someone for someone. Following the second assumption, Anderson, Gellner, and Hobsbawm all argue that national identities serve certain functional needs of elites. National identity is primarily of instrumental utility for elites to gain control over the population and manage the societal challenges imposed by modernity sweeping across Europe and infusing skepticism regarding the traditional pillars of society among the populations.⁴⁷

Dialectical “Core Self”

The modernist understanding of national identity as an instrument constructed by someone for someone heralded—among other immaterial aspects of world politics—increasing interest in IR during the “constructivist turn” around the end of the Cold War (e.g., Finnemore, 1996; Goldstein & Keohane, 1995; Katzenstein, 1996; Kratochwil, 1991; Kratochwil & Ruggie, 1986; Onuf, 1989; Wendt, 1992).

Whereas the group of “critical” IR-scholars⁴⁸ conducted inquiries striving to disclose and denaturalize the power relations underlying the construction

⁴⁷ Unlike Gellner and Hobsbawm, Anderson does not perceive the instrumentality of nationalism and construction of national identities as the deliberate manipulation or deception by elites per se, but rather as inventions accommodating the social-psychological readjustments needed by rapid technological developments fundamentally changing the spatiotemporal context of human existence.

⁴⁸ For notable contributions to early critical IR scholarship, see: Tzvetan Todorov’s *The Conquest of America* (1999), James Der Derian’s *On Diplomacy* (1987), David Campbell’s *Writing Security* (1998), and Lene Hansen’s *Western Villains or Balkan Barbarism?* (1998).

of national identity—in line with Gellner and Hobsbawm’s emancipatory project—by identifying the groups benefitting and losing from sustaining certain identities, “mainstream” constructivists were preoccupied with convincing materialist IR-scholars that “ideas matter.” To convince skeptical colleagues, the mainstream formulated different variants of “if, when, and to what extent do ideas influence foreign policy,” research questions answered by ever more sophisticated and rigorous methods and subjected to the testing of hypotheses (e.g., Hopf, 1998).

Despite the difference between inquiry conducted by “critical” and mainstream researchers, both groups of IR scholars subscribed to a dialectical understanding of national identity. By dialectical, I mean the assumption that the relations between identities are conflictual, and one identity, *ceteris paribus*, is more predominate at a given point in time; hence, some identities are influencing state interests and behavior more than others. Such dialectical conceptions of identity—if not treated carefully and particularly combined with aspirations for isolating and measuring the relatively most influential identity—invite essentialism; essentialism, understood as reducing foreign policy (of states) to the claimed predominance of one identity bracketing out the multitude of ideational contestations and commonplaces within the state studied.

Along the mainstream quest for a convincing—and, hence, falsifiable—answer to skeptical colleagues, mainstream understandings of the interrelation between identity and foreign policy developed dialecticism into an increasingly essentialist direction; essentialism understood as certain identities determining—and, hence, predicting—certain foreign policy actions. Instead of examining how agents reconstruct and use identities to render certain foreign policy options meaningful in context, the foci of mainstream inquiry was uncovering the cognitive or discursive structures constituting identities to conclude which identity, *ceteris paribus*, had the most dominant influence on foreign policy in a given period.

The consequence of mainstream constructivist scholars searching for a recognition of identity as a meaningful analytical lens has gradually written agency and context out of inquiry in favor of assessing the explanatory power between structurally constituted identities on foreign policy. In short, a step in the direction of thinking foreign policy outcome as structurally determined by the predominance of a single core identity; hence, a Core Self.

As mentioned in the Introduction, this step towards essentialism is particularly evident in the path-breaking scholarship of Ted Hopf and Andrey Tsygankov on the influence of Soviet and Russian identities on foreign policy during and after the Cold War (e.g., Hopf, 2002, 2009, 2012; Tsygankov, 2008,

2013). Hopf and Tsygankov employ different variants of the following research strategy. First, inductively uncovering identities or schools of thought in the period of interest, then constructing hypotheses about the observable empirical manifestations of each identity/school of thought and then testing their hypotheses deductively by searching for observable empirical manifestations of hypotheses in Soviet or Russian foreign policy. Finally, Hopf and Tsygankov test the influence and assess the relative explanatory power of identified identities on foreign policy.

The mainstream understanding of the relation between national identity and foreign policy highlights Alexander Wendt's *Social Theory of International Relations* (1999) as a key reference; and with good reason. Wendt provides a compelling, book-length criticism of systemic IR theories based on Waltzian bedrock assumption of states reasoning and acting "like units" (Waltz, 1979, p. 93). *Social Theory* is thus a key contribution and stepping stone for endogenizing the foreign policy of states advanced since the late 1990s.

However, *Social Theory* is also a hallmark in theorizing the interrelation between foreign policy and identity in essentialist and dialectical terms. In short, Wendt's understanding of identity makes it difficult "to acknowledge the complexity of identity and ultimately restricts identity to a question of boundaries," as Maja Zehfuss argues (2001, p. 333).

Like humans, Wendt argues, states "are people too" (Wendt, 1999, p. 194). Anthropomorphizing the state, Wendt assumes that states operate in different "states of mind," mediating their perception of cooperation and conflict within the international system influencing interests and actions differently; hence, "*Anarchy is what states make of it*" (Wendt, 1992, p. 315). The foreign policy actions of states derive from the respective states of mind; neither anarchy nor the relative distribution of power per se. Wendt identifies three idealized states of mind or anarchical cultures: A Hobbesian, Lockean, and Kantian (1999, Chapter 6). Summarizing the foreign policy implications of Wendt's three idealized states of mind—Andreas Behnke notes—states either hate, respect, or "really, really like each other" (Behnke, 2006, p. 55).

The publication of *Social Theory* has had an impact on IR similar to Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* 20 years earlier. Despite the skepticism of Wendt's state-centrism, Patrick T. Jackson welcomed the "thinking space" created by *Social Theory* (2001). On a more skeptical note, Friedrich Kratochwil warned against the "orthodoxy" that Wendt's contribution could impose on the constructivist research program (2000). Since Kratochwil's warning, Wendt and his critics have frequently discussed aspects of Wendt's work, but more importantly the implications of its hallmark status among IR constructivists (e.g., Alker, 2000; Guzzini & Leander, 2006; P. T.

Jackson, 2001; Keohane, 2000; Krasner, 2000; Lomas, 2005; Lynn Doty, 2000; S. Smith, 2000; Wendt, 2006, 2015, 2000, 2004; Zehfuss, 2001).

Echoing Wendt and in line with mainstream constructivism, the ontologically security research program also—as argued above—predominately conceives security of Self in essentialist and dialectical terms. The state represents a Core Self, the ontological security of which is to be maintained and secured against discrepancies between experienced and envisioned worlds potentially threatening existing conceptions of order and continuity.

In the following section, I replace a dialectical and essentialist understanding of Core Self with a dialogical and relational conception of a “Coreless Self.” This step may seem radical, but I argue it is necessary to develop ontological security in the direction of endogenizing the relation between national identity and foreign policy further by focusing on the inner dialogue among National Selves, which I argue is fundamental to understanding foreign policy.

Dialogical “Coreless Self”

The dialogic sense of Self was developed by Russian literate and semiotician Mikhail Bakhtin in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (1984). As suggested by the title, Bakhtin developed his understanding of the Dialogical Self through close readings of Fyodor M. Dostoyevsky’s novels. An overall trait of Dostoyevsky’s authorship is its polyphonic style. According to Bakhtin, the polyphonic novel is defined by a

Plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices. [...] a plurality of consciousness, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 6).

Those familiar with Dostoyevsky’s phenomenal authorship possess an intuitive understanding of what this polyphonic style denotes. The inner struggles between multiple voices going in various and conflicting directions, threatening to tear the unreliable and anti-hero protagonists apart, is a key hallmark of Dostoyevsky’s style of writing. In *The Double* (2009 [1846]), Yakov P. Golyadkin is tormented by a series of encounters with his doppelgänger, who attempts to take over his life by being the better version of himself. In *Notes from Underground* (Dostoyevsky, 2008 [1864]), we meet the isolated, self-recriminated, and bitter Underground Man, who is incapable of looking his colleagues in the eye but at the same time frustrated over the lack of recognition deserved by others. A final example is Rodion Raskolnikov, who is gradually descending into madness and terrorized by voices of guilt and self-righteousness after having killed an unsympathetic pawnbroker in *Crime and Punishment* (Dostoyevsky, 2003 [1867]).

A central premise of dialogism is that the Self is coreless and polyphonic. The Self constitutes an ongoing inner dialogue among not merely two contesting (Self–Other), but a whole symphony of contesting and compatible voices from the past, present, and future (Selves–Others). In short, a dialogical way of thinking identity demarcates itself from a dialectical in terms of the multiplicity of voices and the outcome of encounters between voices.

Translated into ontological security, a synthetic state of complete ontological security will never emerge. Paraphrasing Bakhtin’s summarization of existing dialectical and monotone interpretations of Dostoevsky’s authorship (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 43), a principled critique of the existing understandings of ontological security lies in their insistence on comprehending ontological security departing from a monologic understanding of the Core Self.

Like a symphony, more than merely two instruments constitute identity. Instead, multiple Selves in dialogue will come across more or less loud and clear, depending on the given part of the piece performed (Sennett, 2012, pp. 14–18). In short, the polyphony of voices representing a multitude of National Selves will come across more or less loudly and meaningfully, depending on the specific spatiotemporal context.

Dialogism insists on meaning-making as relationist process constituted by specific configurations of agents in settings of interest. Without being firmly grounded in a specific spatiotemporal context, utterances about the National Self are meaningless. Consequently, Russian custodians must ceaselessly reconstruct their respective voices uttering the narrative and role envisioned for Russian Self in the specific spatiotemporal context constantly undergoing transformations.

Custodians must do so to accommodate the inevitable discrepancies between the envisioned and experienced Self; hence, to remain politically legitimate and be meaningful. Bridging these discrepancies is not an arbitrary process, as it implies deliberately selecting certain interpretations of past, present, and future Selves.

Consequently, dialogism understands identity as a perpetual “process of becoming” without ever becoming oneself. Instead of predicting the outcome of the dialectical rivalry between Self and Other, dialogism focuses on observing and interpreting the development of contestations and commonplaces about what meaningfully constitutes the Russian Self. In short, dialogism is interested in the complex process of becoming. A paradoxical process, because such a search for becoming an authentic version of Self is unachievable.

Rather than focusing on identifying the characteristics of the Core Self—the predominate Self—a dialogical understanding focuses on the polyphony of

Russian voices uttering their respective visions for what constitutes an authentic Russian Self with reference to the existing version of Russian Self represented by the performance of Official Russia in foreign policy.

Adopting a dialogical understanding of the National Self as polyphonic and coreless promises three fundamental benefits to ontological security. First, a focus on who and how ontological security and insecurity manifests and externalizes; that is, turning away ontological security as an assumption for mainstream constructivists studying the interrelation between identity and foreign policy towards a phenomenon subjectable to empirical scrutiny. Second, the relationist context-sensitivity of a dialogical understanding focuses the analytical lens on when and how different proponents for certain Russian voices of interest become more and less loud and clear—and, hence, influential—as the inner dialogue among Russian custodians proceeds over the course from Russo–Western encounter to the translation of post-crisis Russian Self into Official Russia. In short, dialogism focuses the analytical attention on two central analytical questions: “Whose ontological security?” and “Who, when, and how certain visions of Russian Self influence the reconstruction process?” Third, like any other policy area, foreign policy is not solely defined by what is said and done by responsible decision-makers. A dialogical understanding of foreign policy insists that foreign policy is subject to and the outcome of a polyphony of voices. Besides decision-makers conveying the voice from pro- and opponents in the imagined Russian community, my case studies show an entire range of agents participating in the inner dialogue before, during, and after the Russian military interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine.

Despite the analytical virtues of a dialogical understanding of identity, dialecticism is not prevalent in IR and the social sciences more generally (Guillaume, 2011, pp. 1–3). A notable exception is Iver Neumann, who is among the first IR scholars explicitly adopting a dialogical understanding (e.g., 1999, pp. 11–15, 2003). Another exception worth mentioning is Xavier Guillaume’s work (e.g., 2002, 2011), which is currently among the most advanced dialogical IR studies in terms of theorization and application.

Less explicitly, studies have adopted a dialogical way of reasoning about identity. A concrete example of dialogism is found in Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy’s *Mr. Putin* (2015). Even though the scholars do not explicitly theorize what defines identity—as phenomenon or concept—the main argument is indeed dialogical. Hill and Gaddy argue that to understand Putin, one has to think of him as composed of not one but at least six overlapping identities. Depending on the given spatiotemporal context, Putin will come across as the “Statist,” “History Man,” “Survivalist,” “Outsider,” “Free Marketeer,” or “Case Officer.” This does not mean that the voices of the History Man or the Free

Marketeer are mute, but merely that they are less loud and influential in that context.

As illustrated by my following two in-depth studies of Kosovo and Ukraine, neither Yeltsin nor Putin—nor any less prominent member of the Russian custodianship—consistently utter the same coherent vision of what constitutes the authentic Russian Self. One of the most illustrative examples is the speech Putin delivered to Russian deputies on March 18, 2014. In this speech, Putin uttered several visions for the authentic Russian Self drawing on multiple voices from the past, present, and future.

In sum, a dialogical understanding of identity emphasizes the importance of the spatiotemporal context and identity as a polyphonic process of becoming. From a dialogic point of view, there is no teleological assumption of an end of history in which one true national identity emerges. A specific understanding of the Russian Self remains merely temporally meaningful—and, hence, successful in terms of managing existential anxieties—to certain agents in specific settings. A commonplace about what constitutes the Russian Self will never emerge, as there will always be contesting voices. Indeed, as Johannes Angermüller notes, it is impossible to proliferate the vision of a single voice without

gaps and fissures, no text which doesn't contain traces of other voices, no discourse which stages power without its critique (Angermüller 2012, p. 118).

In short, even the most deliberate attempt at crowding out the polyphony of human meaning-making by investing immense resources in proliferating a concise and monotone voice of what constitutes a meaningful Russian Self will leave traces of contesting voices in the form of references to the past, present, and future voices.

So why has dialogism not become more widespread, with its focus on the process of proliferating meaning in context? Particularly, why has dialogism not become more popular among interpretivist scholars, who praise contextualization in favor of generalizability? After all, dialogism narrows, whereas dialogism remains open to the multitude of various ways that meaning-making proceeds among agents in context.

One answer is the unresolved debate about whether interpretivists should embrace or refuse the concept of causality. Whereas Lene Hansen argues for adopting a “non-causal epistemology [focusing on the] constitutive significance of representation of identity for formulating and debating foreign policies” (L. Hansen, 2006, p. 5), Lee Ann Fujii argues for embracing a “processual

sense” of causality and seeking answers to “how’ questions” in context (2008, p. 572).⁴⁹

Given the emphasis on understanding a complex process of meaning-making in context, dialogism is not compatible with generalizable cause-and-effect causality. Rather, dialogism conceives of the social world as an *amorphous blob*—or relationalist soup—where configurations specific to the settings studied end up rendering certain sayings and doings more meaningful than contesting ones to the agents in the specific setting of interest. To a scholar conducting dialogical inquiry, the transition from meaning to action is both complex and quite idiosyncratic. Scholars claiming to have proven the existence of causal relationships between cause and general effects or even case-specific outcomes would find dialogism to overcomplicate and even undermine their preexisting conception of what constitutes science.

From ontologically secure to insecure

“We live in an age of anxiety.” So people have said at various points throughout the 20th century; including when Giddens and Laing wrote their book-length manuscripts about the challenges imposed on human existence by the discrepancies between expectations and experience. Indeed, anxiety is a fundamental aspect of human existence. That which may have changed is the shift from predominately “covert” to “overt” anxiety (May, 1977, p. 3). Drawing on Paul Tillich’s definition of anxiety as “nonbeing,” Rollo May concludes the omnipresence of

anxiety arises from the fact that [...] anxiety is our human awareness of the fact that each of us is a being confronted with nonbeing (May 1977, p. 343).

Unlike Giddens, anxiety is neither something we can nor should strive to bracket out. Complete relief from anxiety entails the complete loss of an autonomous and creative sense of Self; and, hence, the capacity to make an otherwise meaningless existence meaningful. That a meaningful life is a life characterized by a “*total absence of anxiety, [...] becomes delusive and even dangerous*” (May, 1977, p. 355).

Consequently—I argue—when applying the lens of ontological security, scholars should depart from the premise that members of imagined communities are ontologically insecure from the outset. What renders military intervention meaningful to counter a threat towards the Russian Self is partially the state of ontological insecurity preceding the Russo–Western encounter

⁴⁹ One example of such a how-question is “how did ordinary people come to be involved in mass violence and how did different actions (violent and non-violent alike) become possible in different contexts?” (Fujii, 2008, p. 572).

and partially the anxiety arising from a possible setback to a less authentic version of the Self associated with the traumatic past than a state of ontological security. In short, Russia was not ontologically secure before or after military intervention.

Though Laing cherished the “undivided” and ontologically secure as ideal in *Divided Self*, the existentialist foundation of Laing’s definition of ontological security also suggests that some degree of anxiety and ontological insecurity is present throughout most of human existence. Thus, failing to realize this and sticking to a belief in one’s capacity to bracket out anxiety or simply giving up managing anxiety altogether spurs the neurotic behavior Laing devoted *Divided Self* to understand.

Basically, Laing (2010, pp. 43–52) argues, ontological security is manifested in three idealized senses of anxiety: engulfment, implosion, and petrification. Engulfment denotes an anxiety for being overwhelmed by “practically any relationship” with others and ultimately the loss of one’s own autonomous identity. Isolation is a common way of dealing with anxiety for engulfment. It is “lonely and painful to be always misunderstood, but there is at least from this point of view a measure of safety in isolation” (Laing, 2010, pp. 43–45). Implosion is an anxiety for complete emptiness—a vacuum that can be filled with the slightest contact with others, which would completely annihilate the Self in terms of being absorbed by an Other (Laing, 2010, pp. 45–46). Petrification is a type of anxiety relating to a fear of losing one’s subjectivity by being turned into a dead thing without personal autonomy if action—by being turned from an agent into an it. Anxious about being turned into a thing, an object of an ontologically secure agent who is confident about their subjectivity, the ontologically insecure individual will begin to depersonalize others (Laing, 2010, pp. 46–48). The more an ontologically insecure individual attempts to “nullif[y] the specific human individuality” of others, the more it feels “necessary to continue to do so” to the point where the low threshold of ontological security makes the individual nullifying the other feel more dead than alive; more a thing than a person (Laing, 2010, p. 52).

Instead of bracketing out anxiety—as suggested by Giddens—humans can learn to manage existential anxieties. Managing anxiety requires going through experiences of being anxious. Enduring moments of heightened anxiety is not without risk of losing oneself. While it takes *Courage to Be*, as Paul Tillich entitled his seminal work (2014), at the same time, humans have to stand up for themselves and counter the challenges to their sense of Self. In *The Concept of Anxiety*, Kierkegaard (2013) notes that embarking upon a venture causes anxiety, but not to venture is to lose oneself. Despite the fact that going through phases of heightened anxiety is not without risk, the reward is

significant. Indeed—as Kierkegaard promises—whoever has learned “to be anxious in the right way has learned the ultimate” (Kierkegaard, 2013, p. 454).

In sum, by recognizing that individual and collective human beings are inherently ontologically insecure, most of their existence is the first step towards successfully learning to manage anxiety. By going through stages of heightened anxiety—where expectations are not met by experience—one can not only reduce the sense of anxiety in future anxiety-provoking encounters, but turn the increased Self-awareness and innovativeness accompanying anxiety into one’s benefit and doing things that would otherwise not have been possible. In short, if learning to managing crises, crisis gradually transforms from being a one-sidedly destructive into a two-sided phenomenon entailing both destruction and construction. This is the purpose of the third and final retranslation in my retranslation of ontological security.

From crisis as a one-sided to a two-sided phenomenon

The third and final pillar of the retranslated version of ontological security is preoccupied with the role of crisis manifested by anxiety-provoking challenges imposed on the Self. In the following, I challenge the predominately one-sided interpretation of crisis as threatening and destructive to the Self.

Such one-sided interpretation is central to the Giddensian retranslation of ontological security, where crisis should ideally be avoided by routinizing everyday life and increasing self-reflexivity to the point where even the most severe discrepancies between envisioned and experienced Self caused by sudden “critical situations” can be adequately bridged.

Instead, I argue, crisis contains both destructive and constructive capacity. On the one hand, crisis manifests a point where

people’s unfulfilled expectations [...] stir up the society in a manner that people no longer can expect what they had otherwise walked around and expected.⁵⁰

On the other hand, realizing that what one expected remains unfulfilled provokes both a heightened Self-awareness and creativity to channelize into creating a more authentic sense of Self. In short, critical periods characterized by a heightened sense of ontological security can provoke changes that potentially open up for a more widespread sense of ontological security.

At the initial state of crisis, human beings face a fundamental choice: To give up or start creatively reconstructing a meaningful existence. The choice

⁵⁰ Poul F. Kjær in “Er Weimar-øjeblikket kommet? [Has the Weimar moment appeared?],” *Weekendavisen*, Vibe Termansen, July 8, 2016.

imposed on humans by crisis is central to existentialist philosophy;⁵¹ central, because crisis manifests the point in time where humans either succumb to the meaninglessness of existence or decide to empower themselves and take responsibility for the freedom humans are condemned to live with;⁵² a freedom to define what constitutes a meaningful existence to the individual Self. The French existentialist Albert Camus brings matters to a head in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (2005), where he begins his essay by concluding: “There is only one really serious philosophical question, and that is suicide.” In short, by provoking the most fundamental existential question of giving up or engaging, crisis manifests both a risk of losing and empowering the Self sufficiently to make existence meaningful.

Drawing on micro and macro historical testimonies as well as existentialist insight, I argue that crisis is a paradoxical, two-sided phenomenon manifesting a risk of breakdown as well as the chance for breakthrough. In short, crisis is simultaneously both de- and constructive. The constructive aspects of crisis—following the previous section—depend on the capacity to manage anxiety and turn the increased Self-awareness and creativity accompanying anxiety into a breakthrough.

I cannot claim the two-faced feature of crisis to be novel. The Chinese word for crisis consists of two characters (危机/危機) meaning, respectively, “danger” and “opportunity.” Whether the meaning of the Chinese words can be translated directly into “danger” and “opportunity” is an ongoing subject of heated debate among Chinese linguists. Disregarding this linguistic debate, politicians frequently use the trope to describe the two-faced feature of crisis. Through history, Western political leaders have frequently used the analogy to the Chinese word for crisis rhetorically. The most infamous example is probably how John F. Kennedy used it in several speeches, including a speech Kennedy gave at a fundraiser for the United Negro College Fund in 1959: “[...]”

⁵¹ As Friedrich W. Nietzsche declared in *Twilight of the Idols* (2013), that “which does not kill us, makes us stronger.” The statement is central to existentialist thought, as it underscores crisis as essential to rise to a more authentic state of Self. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1969), Nietzsche denoted this process of empowering oneself as “Self-overcoming” [Selbstüberwindung] on the way to become a “Beyond-Man” [Übermensch].

⁵² In *Existentialism and Humanism*, Jean-Paul Sartre declares that “man is condemned to be free. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet is nevertheless at liberty, and from the moment that he is thrown into this world he is responsible for everything he does” (Sartre, 2007, p. 38).

in the Chinese language, the word ‘crisis’ is composed of two characters, one representing danger and the other, opportunity.”⁵³

Laing views crisis as an unavoidable part of human existence. What differentiates individuals is not their ability to bracket out, but to manage anxiety. However, Laing offers little guidance in terms of how to manage crisis. Instead, Laing devoted his scholarship to understanding the lifeworlds and actions of the human beings torn apart by their inadequate capacity to secure their ontological outlook (e.g., Laing, 1969, 2010; Laing & Esterson, 2016).

Along the same existentialist pathway as Laing, Rollo May’s work focuses on the meaning and management of anxiety. Anxiety has and will always be part of the human condition. Confronting instead of avoiding anxiety is what “inspired primitive man to seize a coal from his spent fire,” inspired man to write world literature, and provoked scientific breakthroughs (May, 1977, p. 345). In short, the anxiety produced by crisis is a vital source of creativity and transforms human existence.

Anxiety-provoking experiences are important to provoke the degree of Self-awareness and creativity to transform status quo—for better or for worse. Exposing oneself to anxiety trains the ability to bridge discrepancies between what one experiences and what one envisioned, which is “characteristic of all creative endeavor,” as May notes (1977, p. 369).

If managed successfully, anxiety will become a “teacher,” aiding us onwards and towards seminal breakthroughs. The idealization of continuity and order entailed by the Giddensian sense of ontological security comes at the price of a loss of opportunities for “discovering new truth, the exclusion of new learning, and [...] to adapt to new situations;” hence, circumventing anxiety comes at the “price of loss of creativity” and autonomy (May, 1977, p. 350).

Going from existentialism and existentialist psychology to political theory, Carl Schmitt also ascribes crisis a central role to the concept of the political. Crisis offers the necessary momentum essential to the most fundamental political task: reconstructing a meaningful way of life. According to Schmitt, the meaning of human life is contingent of its severity. Consequently, a major foreign policy crisis—which can ultimately result in war, the ultimate “existential negation of the enemy” (Schmitt, 2007, p. 33)—represents the risk of a complete *breakdown* of the existing meaningful way of life and simultaneously the *breakthrough* for realizing what is “‘rational’ for ‘us’ to do” or realizing—in other words—what defines a meaningful National Self (Schmitt, 2007, p. xxi).

⁵³ “Speech at United Negro College Fund fundraiser,” *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum*, April 12, 1959: <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/life-of-john-f-kennedy/john-f-kennedy-quotations#C> (accessed November 19, 2018).

Echoing existentialism, when a breakdown of the existing sense of meaningful Self seems near, there is a “willingness to take responsibility for *our own* lives arise” (Schmitt, 2007, pp. xv–xvi).⁵⁴ Testimonies of this paradoxical two-sidedness of crisis are identifiable in numerous accounts at the macro and micro levels, which testifies to the two-sided way of reasoning about the role of crisis.

At the macro level, a brief glance over the course of European history in the 19th and 20th centuries supports the idea of crisis as breakdown and breakthrough. The unification of the German Empire (1871) was preceded by three so-called “unification wars.”⁵⁵ Similarly, the unification of Italy (ca. 1871) followed numerous wars between Italian kingdoms and city-states, as well as three “wars of independence” against Austria (1848–49, 1859, and 1866). Turning our attention to Russia, both the Bolshevik regime’s victory in the Civil War (1917–22) and the victory over Nazi Germany in the Great Fatherland War (1941–1945) manifested essential historical hallmarks denoting the potential for complete defeat as well as the breakthrough for legitimizing the reconstruction of distinctly Soviet and Stalinist Selves.

Similarly, the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962) manifested both the chance of complete breakdown of human life as the consequence of nuclear war as well as an unprecedented breakthrough in Soviet–Western relations. The Cuban Missile Crisis cleared the way for the “Washington–Moscow Direct Communications Link” in 1963. In short, the Cuban Missile Crisis represents one of the greatest threats to humanity in the 20th century and simultaneously one of the greatest Soviet–American achievements during the Cold War. The crisis stimulated creativity and cleared the way for a special personal understanding between President Kennedy and General Secretary Nikita S. Khrushchev.⁵⁶

More generally, Vera Tolz argues that the “constant attempts to compare and contrast Russia and the West provided a powerful creative stimulus for Russian cultural figures” despite the dysfunctional implications for Russian

⁵⁴ One should not confuse Carl Schmitt’s notion of crisis as breakdown and breakthrough with a Hegelian-dialectic notion of evolution towards an ontologically secure Core Self. As Tracy B. Strong notes, it is only Schmitt’s form of the friend–enemy distinction that is Hegelian. What is “rational for a group to do to preserve itself as a group—is not only not universal but hard to know” to outsiders (Schmitt, 2007, pp. xx–xxi).

⁵⁵ In German, these three wars are referred to as *Die Deutschen Einigungskriege* [The German Unification Wars].

⁵⁶ For detailed studies of the American and Soviet sides of the Cuban Missile Crisis, see *The Crisis Years* (Beschloss, 1991), *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War* (Zubok & Pleshakov, 1996, Chapter 8), and *The Essence of Decision* (G. Allison & Zelikow, 1999).

development (2001, p. 1). In short, despite the devastating consequences of the conflict and antagonism following in the wake of various crises, crises seems to have propelled state- and nation-building.

At the micro-level, former Chair of the House Democratic Caucus, Rahm Emanuel, has expressed awareness of the paradoxical two-faced character of crisis in the wake of the 2008 Financial Crisis. He noted that:

You never want a serious crisis to go to waste [...]. Things that we had postponed for too long, that were long-term, are now immediate and must be dealt with. This crisis provides the opportunity for us to do things that you could not do before.⁵⁷

As regards the awareness of the political momentum and vitality offered by crisis, Margaret Thatcher famously remarked that

it is exciting to have a real crisis on your hands, when you have spent half your political life dealing with humdrum issues like the environment (Thatcher as quoted in Young, 2013).

Finally, Vladimir Putin expressed a similar sense of awareness of the breakthroughs in the context of crisis. In a speech recommending the Russian annexation of Crimea on March 18, Putin concludes the Ukraine crisis is one of those

historic turning points [where] a nation demonstrates its maturity and strength of spirit. The Russian people showed this maturity and strength through their united support for their compatriots [...]. Now, we need to continue and maintain this kind of consolidation so as to resolve the tasks our country faces on its road ahead.⁵⁸

Thus far, the two-sidedness of crisis remains neglected or underdeveloped in the existing ontological research program and IR more generally. A few notable exceptions in the social sciences are William H. Sewell and Margaret R. Somers' studies of the concrete role of political and economic crises (Sewell, 1996; Somers & Block, 2005). Both the Sewell and Somers' studies conclude that crises are essential to transform society, as they—depending on their severity—dislocate existing structures sufficiently to grant agency the necessary autonomy to transform entire societies by relocating a reconstructed version of the ideational structures underlying everyday life.

⁵⁷ Rahm I. Emanuel in "In Crisis, Opportunity for Obama," *The Wall Street Journal*, Gerald B. Seib, November 21, 2008: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB12272127-8056345271> (accessed November 15, 2018).

⁵⁸ "Address by President of the Russian Federation," *The Kremlin*, March 18, 2014: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603> (accessed November 15, 2018).

In his study about the relation between ontological security and foreign policy in post-Soviet Russia, Flemming Splidsboel Hansen notes the seemingly paradoxical two-faced role of foreign policy crises. Despite the adverse impact of foreign policy crises in the West, Hansen concludes these crises have

given the Russian population a more well-defined identity—or stronger sense of being or, to use the key term of this study, greater ontological security. Much more so now than in earlier phases of the post-Soviet development may the Russians now provide relatively clear answers to the questions asked earlier: “Who are we?”, “where are we going?” and “in what kind of society do we want to live?” (2016, p. 369).

My in-depth studies support Hansen’s observation. When focusing on the inner dialogues provoked by Russo–Western encounters, however, significant contestations elucidate around the question whether the revival of “Russian Greatness” lays within or beyond existing Russian borders below the expanding custodian and popular commonplace around the vision of an authentic vision of Russian Self as something in spite of or in contrast to the Western Other. In short, significant contestations about what constitutes the Russian Self prevails among Russia’s inward- and outward-looking nationalists, even though Russo–Western foreign policy crises have somewhat expanded the commonplace about what meaningfully constitutes the Russian Self among Russian custodianship and more broadly the Russian population. I return and elaborate on these findings in the chapters below.

Let me conclude this section on a speculative note. Modern existentialist psychologists have noted how some individuals intentionally seek out crises, provoking anxiety to stimulate their innovative capacity and Self-awareness in undertaking what Kierkegaard denoted a “qualitative leap” to a higher state of independence and realizing a more authentic version of Self (May, 1977, pp. 367–368, 370–372). Similarly, individuals and collectives within imagined communities may actively seek encounters provoking crisis, stimulating the creativity and heightened Self-reflection to overcome a neurotic state of ontological insecurity. Interestingly, Splidsboel-Hansen hints at a similar point when comparing what Putin has done to post-Soviet Russia to the psychotherapist–patient relationship; throughout his presidency, Putin has gradually developed the Russian Self and provided psychotherapeutic relief to the Russian people (F.S. Hansen, 2009, p. 68). Both the speculative note and Splidsboel-Hansen’s comparison touch on a key, implicit assumption in the existing ontological security research program. Following its point of departure in a dialectical understanding of the ontological security of a Core Self, there is a teleological argument about Self gradually developing into a more ontologically secure Self. In short, do states also become increasingly ontologically secure

when undergoing crises? In the Epilogue, I address whether a more ontological secure sense of post-Soviet Self has developed among Russian custodians.

Ontological security retranslated

The retranslated understanding of ontological security can be broken down into three key changes (see Figure 2, below). First, I replaced a dialectical with a dialogical sense of Self. Second, I replaced ontological security with ontological insecurity as the norm. Third, I replaced a one-sided understanding of crisis with a two-sided one emphasizing both breakdown and breakthrough.

Figure 2: Three key changes in the retranslation of ontological security into IR

| Existing ontological security | | Retranslated ontological security |
|--|--------|---|
| Dialectical Self | —————▶ | Dialogical Self |
| (1) Monologic Core Self | —————▶ | (1) Polyphonic Coreless Self |
| (2) Self as outcome of dialectical process | —————▶ | (2) Self as dialogic process of becoming |
| (3) Self manifests and externalizes alike across contexts | —————▶ | (3) Self manifests and externalizes differently across contexts |
| Ontologically secure | —————▶ | Ontologically insecure |
| (1) Ontologically secure Core Self | —————▶ | (1) Ontologically insecure Coreless Self |
| (2) Bracket out ontological insecurity via routines and Self-reflexivity | —————▶ | (2) Manage ontological insecurity, relief is illusory |
| (3) Outcome: Ontologically insecure or secure | —————▶ | (3) Outcome: Ontologically insecure and secure |
| Crisis as one-sided | —————▶ | Crisis as two-sided |
| (1) Crisis as breakdown | —————▶ | (1) Crisis as breakdown and breakthrough |

When bringing these changes together, an alternative way of theorizing and adopting an ontological security lens emerges. The most essential difference between the existing and retranslated version of ontological security is the focus on the inner dialogue among Selves with varying senses of ontological insecurity.⁵⁹ In short, the retranslated version interprets foreign policy as well as the reconstruction and translation of national identity into foreign policy as the outcome of a dialogical Self–Self rather than dialectical self–other relation.

The focus on Self–Self is not to suggest that Self–Other relations and material concerns are unimportant when attempting to understand and explain

⁵⁹ Similarly, Ole Wæver argues for supplementing self–other styled theorization and analysis of identity in IR with an increased focus on Self–Self relations. Wæver defines identity as the “difference between what one is and what one wants to be;” hence, identity is a relation unfolding between the existing and envisioned Self (1996, p. 115).

foreign policy outcomes. Indeed, how we represent and reaffirmed by others influence our Self-understanding. However, I argue, the Self–Other relation is influencing—not determining—the Self–Self relation, which is at a fundamentally existential rather than representational-ideational level of being. In short, the Self–Other relation is secondary to the Self–Self relation.

The retranslated version of ontological security deals with understanding the foreign political and ideational changes by focusing on the polyphonic inner dialogue; a dialogue among various National Selves, which representations of Foreign Others and material concerns are part of but not primary to. The dialogue among Russian Selves is first and foremost about what constitutes meaningful Russian Self and how to authentically represent such through Official Russia. In short, ideational and material influence and concerns are secondary to ontological concerns about what constitutes meaningful Russian Self and authentic representation of such via Official Russia.

In sum, retranslated ontological security demarcates itself from existing ontological, ideational, and material theories by focusing on the Self–Self relations within an imagined community encountering another. Furthermore, the retranslated concept of ontological security deviates from the existing research program by taking a state of ontological insecurity as the theoretical point of departure for analysis besides a two-sided understanding of crisis. Both alterations bring my retranslation closer to the original existentialist aim of making sense of the lifeworlds and behavior of divided coreless beings brought into a world where existence precedes essence.

It is not anxieties arising from the breakdown of routines and self-reflexivity—as argued by Giddens—making individual or collective beings ontologically insecure, but rather the sudden lack of capacity to manage a heightened state of ontological insecurity compared to the normal sense of insecurity. Sticking to the assumption that a collective sense of order and continuity can be attained, maintained, and defended by an imagined community—which is central to the Giddensian ontological security—obstructs further theorization and analysis of by whom and how changes of ontological insecurity manifest and externalize differently within an imagined community. Focusing on the inner dialogue provoked by the heightened sense of ontological insecurity among some agents advances our understanding of how such senses of ontological (in)security influence the reconstruction of National Self and render certain foreign policy options more meaningful than others.

Reconstructing and Translating the “Russian Self”

Having retranslated ontological security into IR, the aim of this section is to supplement the retranslation of ontological security with an explicit social theoretical foundation, leaving more room for the role of agency to reconstruct the Russian Self and translate it into the Official Self.

Briefly looking back to the existing ontological security research program, this section can be seen as a continuation of Brent Steele’s theorization of ontological security. Steele outlined some preliminary social theoretical thoughts on how material and immaterial resources influence agents’ discursive strategies and their capacity to influence the reconstruction of the National Self (Steele, 2008, pp. 68–75).

Based on Sewell’s re-narration of Giddens’ and Pierre Bourdieu’s understandings of the agency–structure nexus, I outline the ideal typical reconstruction process that the Russian Self undergoes as the inner dialogue proceeds before, during, and after the Russian military interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine. Additionally, I outline the ideal-typical process of how reconstructed Russian Self—national sense of belonging—translates into the foreign policy of belonging represented by Official Russia.

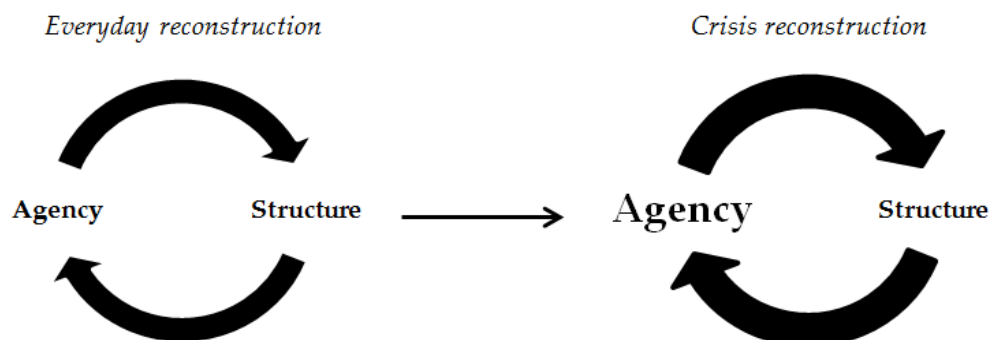
Agency and structure

The reconstruction processes that the Russian Self underwent during the Kosovo and Ukraine crises are comparable to a bicycle losing its chain; an active act preceded the chain falling off, and an active act is necessary to put the chain back in place. When the chain is back on, the bicycle can again work. Maybe relocated in a different configuration than before, depending on the agent putting the chain back.

The bicycle example stresses two important aspects. First, both dis- and relocating the chain involve agency. Second, reconstruction during crisis is something different from everyday reconstruction; the latter is primarily routinized and commonsense, whereas the former allows more autonomous agency; and, hence, more room for agents to reconstruct new commonplaces and contestations.

Translating the bicycle example into terms of the mutually constitutive relation between agent and structure, the start of a foreign policy crisis marks the transformation of the ongoing mode of reconstruction from “everyday” to “crisis” reconstruction (e.g., Archer, 2003; Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 2006).

Figure 3: Everyday and crisis reconstruction of “Russian Self”



While I admire Bourdieu’s sense of habitus and Giddens’ structuration, I depart from Sewell’s dualistic theory of structure and agency. Unlike Giddens and Bourdieu, Sewell re-narrates a theory of the mutually constitutive relation between agency and structure, where agency is ascribed an equal part (Sewell, 1992). This is particularly helpful when theorizing crisis reconstruction as defined by the breakdown of existing structural confines.

Sewell’s point of departure is that social agents are knowledgeable about the rules and resources reproducing the current structure. Consequently, agents are also aware of how to create structural transformation. Sewell’s re-narration thus addresses head-on the criticism of the seemingly “agent-proofness” and awkwardness regarding structural transformation found in both Giddens’ and Bourdieu’s social theories.⁶⁰

Re-narrating Giddens and Bourdieu, Sewell tries to overcome three cardinal pitfalls in their theorizations of the agency–structure nexus. Sewell’s re-narration entails a less structurally determined sense of agency, highlights social sources of structural change, and bridges the semiotic and materialist notions of structure (Sewell, 1992, pp. 3–4).

To Sewell, any society constitutes a multiplicity of structures. Structures exist at different levels of society, operating in different modalities, and based on varying types and quantities of resources. Structures vary both within and across different institutional spheres. In short, social actors are capable of applying different and incompatible schemas and accessing heterogeneous arrays of resources and, as such, more versatile than Giddens and Bourdieu as-

⁶⁰ Besides Sewell’s re-narration, Margaret S. Archer has notably criticized Giddensian structuration theory. Archer’s main criticism is Giddens fails to clearly demarcate between where structure and agency, respectively, starts and ends (e.g., Archer, 1995, 2003, 2012). Consequently, Archer argues, the analytical utility of Giddensian structuration is limited to theoretical abstraction.

sume (Sewell, 1992, p. 16). Another key feature of structures is the intersections of schemas and resources entailed. Societal structures constitute bundles of schemas and resources empowering agents to transform or reproduce them through their actions. Structural reproduction is neither automatic nor determined, but rather driven by empowered social actors (Sewell, 1992, p. 19).

Instead of theorizing agents as following structurally determined rules, agents act according to different schemas. In pursuing different schematic goals, agents mobilize unevenly distributed “human” (immaterial) and “non-human” (material) resources to reproduce or transform structures. Resources are polysemic, allowing a variety of interpretations of potential usefulness in context. In short, the same resources can be reinterpreted and remobilized in an infinite number of alternative ways (Sewell, 1992, pp. 18–19).

Besides the mobilization of resources, the individual knowledgeable of schemas and resources is critical to the capacity of agents to change or maintain an existing structure. Knowledgeability is among the most compelling feature of Sewell’s re-narration, as it clearly acknowledges individual will and the capacity to exercise agency differently. Thus, the capacity of social agents to reproduce or transform structures depends on the individual knowledgeable of relevant schemas and how to use a mix of material and immaterial resources in a specific social context (Sewell, 1992, pp. 8–10).

Following the focus on knowledgeable and resources, an identical distribution and kind of resources empowers social actors differently and allows use in numerous ways, depending on the knowledgeable of relevant schemas. The enactment of schemas is—given their transposability—not assumed to be entirely predictable, and their influence on the resources of the social actor never completely certain or determined (Sewell, 1992, p. 18).

According to Sewell’s re-narration, an agent can transform a structure the supports of which are more powerful in terms of the relative distribution of resources but inferior in terms of their knowledgeable of relevant schemas and the use of resources to reproduce or transform structures. Theoretically, a highly knowledgeable agent can outsmart resourcefully superior proponents of the existing structural setup. In short, outcomes of resource accumulation are per se unpredictable, as is the accumulation of schematic knowledgeable.

Structural transformation gradually takes place as the transpositions of schemas and mobilization of material and immaterial resources render “new structures recognizable as transformations of the old” (Sewell, 1992, p. 27). The virtue of Sewell’s dynamic understanding of the structure–agency duality is its recognition of human resourcefulness and creativity in theorizing the reproduction and transformation of existing structures. The capacity of agents to transpose a schema depends on his knowledge of this specific schema and

his ability to apply it creatively in unfamiliar cases (Sewell, 1992, p. 17). In short, Sewell's re-narration acknowledges that some agents are more resourceful and knowledgeable of how existing schemas function and how to get their vision for the Russian Self across.

Even the most deliberate attempts to strategically streamline a certain statement or interpretation of a given event in order to control the possible range of meanings hereof cannot completely bypass the polyphonic character of human utterance. The process of proliferating and fixing a specific interpretation of events also involves a simultaneous process of voicing the oppositional interpretation(s) (Angermüller, 2012, p. 127). Concretely, the inclusion of such oppositional or contesting voices is observable in connection with the enunciative markers (e.g., "not" and "but") normally deemed semantically insignificant (Angermüller, 2012, p. 120).

In his study of the polyphony of voices on the Beslan school siege (2004), Johannes Angermüller finds the process of proliferating and fixing meaning to be characterized by a division of labor between those "who speak by conjuring up a multitude of voices with or without names" and those who aid or contest the fixation of meaning by "filling in its gaps, and by revealing the anonymous sources" (2012, p. 131). In short, an agent alone cannot independently undermine or fix new meanings.

In the process of reconstructing the post-Soviet Russian Self, publishers, media outlets, the education system, and intellectual forums have played a vital role in contesting and supporting the fixation of visions of the Russian Self. *Piter*, a Saint Petersburg-based publishing house, has published numerous books in Russian and English supporting the annexation of Crimea and the rehabilitation of Stalin (e.g., Belyaev & Starikov, 2015; Starikov, 2015). On the Russian TV media outlets, the independent Russian television station *Dozhd* has undergone multiple official investigations and lawsuits since its sympathetic coverage of the popular protests that broke out in the larger Russian cities in 2011. In connection with the Ukraine crisis, several of Russia's largest TV-providers terminated their contracts with *Dozhd*, and the company owning the building in which they were located refused to extend their lease in 2014. Currently, *Dozhd* broadcasts online from a Moscow apartment. One of Russia's oldest privately owned TV-stations, *Tomsk TV-2*, underwent a similar course of events and was forced off air in 2014 by federal Russian agencies.⁶¹

⁶¹ I experienced contemporary Russian censorship firsthand during a summer school at the Pushkin State Language Institute (July–August, 2015). I tried to gain access to *Ezhednevnyj Zhurnal's* website (www.ej.ru) in order to arrange an interview with Russian journalist Alekandr Golts. When I attempted to access the webpage, I was informed that it had been blocked "by the decision of public authorities."

Besides media outlets, individual journalists play an increasingly important role in proliferating, contesting, and fixing meanings. After the Ukraine crisis, several Russian journalists were awarded prestigious medals for covering the course of events in Ukraine. Also, the importance of individual journalists and oppositional figures is reflected by the increasing number of journalists killed or who disappear each year in Russia. Most prominently, Russian critical journalist Anna Politkovskaya and Russian oppositional politician Boris Nemtsov were killed in 2006 and 2015.

Russian intellectuals are also increasingly being used in the reconstruction of the Russian Self. In the wake of the Ukraine crisis, Russian historian Aleksey Miller noted how both Ukrainian and Russian “official structures” used historians in the ongoing war in Ukraine to legitimize their respective interpretations of the past (Miller, 2015, p. 148). On each side of the dialogue about the Russian military intervention in Ukraine, Russian scholars Aleksandr Dugin and Andrey Zubov were dismissed from their respective positions at the Moscow State University and Moscow State Institute of International Relations following statements about Russia’s military involvement.

At the structural level, the Russian education system has faced increasing pressure from the Kremlin to adopt an official history of Russia in the 20th century free of “guilt” and “muddled interpretations.” In 2007, President Putin revealed the Kremlin fabricated *A Modern History of Russia: 1945–2006: A Manual for History Teachers* at a conference for Russian history teachers. The manual’s main aim was to hinder

anyone to impose a sense of guilt on us [...]. Russian history did contain some problematic pages, [but] so did other states' histories. We have fewer of them than other countries. And they were less terrible than in some other countries.⁶²

Additionally, the manual concluded it was the “failure of the course started by Peter the Great and pathetically continued by pro-Western democrats after 1988” that was undermining the traditional Russian way of life. The manual suggested that in order to counter this looming tragedy, Russians needed to concentrate resources and consolidate power in the hands of a strong leader who could develop an independent Russian economy under the rule of Sovereign Democracy; a recommendation remarkably close to the Kremlin’s official narrative.

⁶² Vladimir Putin as quoted in “The rewriting of history,” *The Economist*, November 8, 2007: <https://www.economist.com/europe/2007/11/08/the-rewriting-of-history> (accessed November 19, 2018).

In 2013, Putin ordered the Russian Academy of Science to draft an authoritative Russian history textbook free of “internal contradictions and ambiguities,” particularly, contradictions regarding the diverging interpretations of the Stalinist era (especially the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of 1939), swift collapse of the Soviet Union, anti-Putin demonstrations in 2011–2012, and trials and the imprisonment of various Russian oligarchs during the first decade of the 2000s.⁶³

Putin’s order was accompanied by a directive with new federal guidelines for schoolbooks. Despite several Russian publishers meeting the deadline for resubmitting the new expert opinions and formal documents, numerous skilled and well-reputed publishers had their textbooks rejected. A little group of Kremlin-affiliated publishers, however, met the new guidelines for most of their publications.⁶⁴

The debate surrounding the introduction of an authoritative Russian history textbook is just one of an increasing number of direct interventions by the Kremlin in the research and dissemination of the history of Russia, which has polarized Russian historians (Miller, 2015). Throughout the 2000s, state funding for revisionist historical research and museums has been cut, while state efforts to counter so-called “falsifications of history” have been indefatigable at home and abroad. The 2009 establishment of a presidential commission to counter the falsification of history and entry of passages about the need to combat the “revision” of Russian history—especially interpretations related to World War II—in Russia’s Foreign Policy Concept (2008) and National Security Strategy (2010) are just a few of several examples of attempts to proliferate and fix a commonplace about Russia’s past; fixing the past in order to align it with visions for a meaningful Russian Self in the present and future.

Knowledge of the existence and workings of this “division of labor” can be used strategically to address multiple public audiences (Angermüller, 2012, p. 118). By formulating one sufficiently vague, contradictory, and ambiguous narrative, one provides others the chance to fill in the. However, if an excessively vague, ambiguous, and contradictory narrative is constructed, the sender risks the narrative failing to get across—at least as intended—to the

⁶³ “Is Vladimir Putin rewriting Russia’s history books?,” *NBC News*, Albina Kovalyova, November 28, 2013: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/vladimir-putin-rewriting-russias-history-books-flna2D11669160> (accessed November 26, 2018).

⁶⁴ “Putin’s Friend Profits in Purge of Schoolbooks,” *The New York Times*, Jo Becker & Steven L. Myers, November 1, 2014: <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/02/world/europe/putins-friend-profits-in-purge-of-schoolbooks.html> (accessed November 26, 2018).

audience or simply being dismissed on the grounds of being too obviously strategic or simply meaningless.

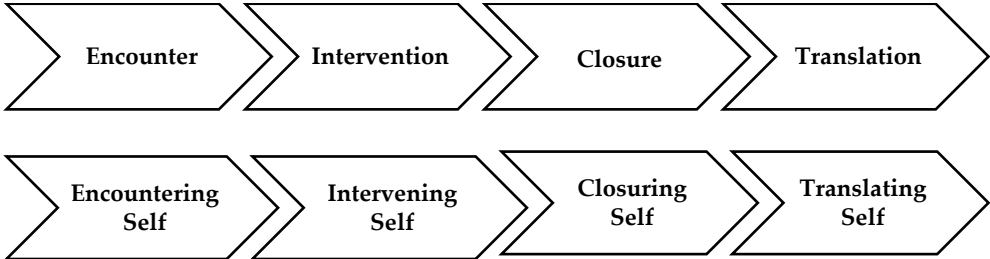
The implication of Sewell’s re-narration is a call for interpretivism. Interpretivism focuses on how agents use their knowledgeability and resources to make sense of themselves and—specific to my in-depth studies—contexts of foreign policy crises, where schemas and resources maintaining the reproduction of existing structures of national identity are challenged by “bursts of collective cultural creativity” (Sewell, 1996, p. 845). Without making any explicit references to ontological security, Sewell argues that the source of these human “outbursts of creativity” was a “generalized state of insecurity” preceding the events of July 12, 1789 (Sewell, 1996, p. 845).⁶⁵

Four phases of reconstruction and translation

In this section, I construct an idealized model depicting the reconstruction of the Russian Self before, during, and after the military intervention in the Kosovo and Ukraine crises and the subsequent translation of the Russian Self into Official Russia.

In this idealized depiction, I distinguish between four interrelated phases regarding the *course of events* (encounter, intervention, closure, and translation) and the *simultaneous reconstruction and translation* of the Russian Self (see Figure 4, below). In the following, I theorize each of the four interrelated phases of the course of events and the accompanying reconstruction or translation of the Russian Self.

Figure 4: Four idealized phases of Russo–Western foreign policy crisis



⁶⁵ Sewell undertakes such interpretivist analysis in “Historical events as transformations of structures” (1996), providing an illustrative example of how meanings embedded in existing schemas were transformed over the course of twelve days in 1789 in revolutionary France. Sewell demonstrates how the sequence of events leading to the storming of the Bastille transformed French history, but more fundamentally how the concept of “revolution” later came to be understood (Sewell, 1996, p. 845).

First comes the encounter. The first phase of the Kosovo and Ukraine crises commences with an encounter between different Russian Selves in light of a foreign policy encounter between Official Russia and Western Other. The two encounters elucidate a discrepancy between expectations and experience among Russian Selves in light of the discrepancy between Russian Self and Western Other. It is the disclosed discrepancies that enhance the sense of ontological insecurity among individual and collective members of the imagined Russian community. The heightened sense of ontological insecurity is what sparks the inner dialogue about whether Official Russia authentically represented the envisioned Russian Self. Indeed, a key defining feature of any encounter is its meaning-transforming capacity.

Jean-Paul Sartre used the example of the exchange of looks between two strangers encountering each other on a street in *Being and Nothingness* (2003, pp. 276-326) to illustrate what is at stake. As soon as two independent subjects encounter each other and get eye contact a power relation commence. The one who looks away first defects from defending one's subjectivity from the threatening objectification by the encountering other. Objectifying as well as avoid objectification, transforms the individual's existing understanding of one's will and capacity to defend one's authentic being.⁶⁶

In Kosovo, the encounter was between Viktor Chernomyrdin and Leonid Ivashov, as manifested in the public showdown on June 3, 1999, about the Bonn Agreement concluded the day before. In Ukraine, the encounter began with the ousting of Viktor Yanukovych on February 21, 2014. The ousting of Yanukovych and the congress for deputies from southeastern Ukraine the following day initiated an inner dialogue among Russian elites about if and how Official Russia should intervene in Ukraine in order to authentically represent the Russian Self. In short, is the authentic Russian Self implying the use of military force or is it seeking collective agreements?

Military intervention initiates the second phase of crisis and reconstruction. On June 12, 1999 and February 27, 2014, Russia intervened in Kosovo and Ukraine, respectively. Because of this intervention, the inner dialogue among various more or less ontologically insecure Russian Selves narrowed down from one of *if* and *how* Official Russia authentically represented the Russian Self to whether the "Intervening Russian Self" was an authentic representation.

⁶⁶ Central to Erving Goffman's research is the encounter between humans (e.g., Goffman, 1959, 1961, 1967, 1970). Goffman's micro-sociological studies of everyday encounters is foundational to the growing research program about encounters between state and citizens (e.g., Dubois, 2017; Lipsky, 2010; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; Soss, 1999; Soss, Fording, & Schram, 2011; Yanow, 2003).

In this intervention phase, the reaction of the Western Other plays a significantly more important role than the initial phase of the crisis. Supporters of the “Intervening Self” refer to harsh Western reactions as evidence for why Russia needed to stand up to expected Western aggressions. However, a harsh reaction also provides ammunition for those who contest Russian intervention by pointing out the adverse impact of such unauthentic representation; both for the Russian understanding of the National Self and the implications of the illusory political ambitions of some elites for the economic and physical well-being of Russia as well as its status in world politics.

Closure introduces the third phase of crisis. The reaffirmation of what one acknowledges as an authentic representation of the Russian Self is central to this phase. In terms of the actual course of events, the June 18 agreement between the USA and Russia manifests start of closure in Kosovo. With regard to Ukraine, a clear answer is more ambiguous. Despite the war in Ukraine remaining unresolved, I argue that March 18 represents a resolution to the initial crisis in which a larger unresolved international conflict about Ukraine followed. I argue the Ukraine crisis ended when the Russian annexation of Crimea became a reality on March 18, 2014. After March 18, the Ukraine crisis gradually developed into a new and more violent state of conflict with the escalation of separatist fighting in Donbass and the shooting down of MH-17. Uncertainty is a key feature of any crisis. By annexing parts of a neighboring country in the 21st century, Russia provided an answer for the most pressing question within and beyond Russia. Certainty replaced uncertainty on March 18.

Fourth and finally is translation. After the Kosovo and Ukraine crises followed a less specified translation process. In this post-crisis phase, the experiences gained from crisis translate into the foreign policy of Official Russia. Translation denotes multiple processes about how Russian custodians translated reconstructed the Russian Self into an Official Russia after the foreign policy crisis. Translation marks the shift from an inner dialogue about a Russian “senses of belonging” to “politics of belonging.” The distinction between senses of belonging and politics of belonging was developed by Nira Yuval-Davis, who defines politics of belonging as:

specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging to particular collectivity/ies which are themselves being constructed in these projects in very specific ways and in very specific boundaries (Yuval-Davis 2011, p. 10).

Translating the reconstructed Russian Self into an official, Russian “foreign policy of belonging” is predominately a covert process among members of the Russian strategic community. Unlike the reconstruction of the Russian Self, a number of less publicly known individual and collective agents participate in

the formal and informal discussions about Russian foreign policy after crisis (Checkel, 1997, pp. 106–119). For instance, representatives from The Security Council of the Russian Federation, The Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, and The Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation participate in varying degrees and stages of the translation and implementation of Russian foreign policy. The translation into and implementation of Russian foreign policy is crammed with “tacit voices” of numerous unknown individual and collective agents, who are beyond the scope of this inquiry. These individual and collective agents are members of an exclusive community of Russia’s foreign political decision-makers, whose worldviews are mediated by Russia’s strategic culture.

Jack L. Snyder coined “strategic culture” in *The Soviet Strategic Culture* (1977), where he defines it as:

the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses and patterns of habitual behavior that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other (Snyder, 1977, p. 8).

Keeping this mediating role of strategic culture in the back of one’s mind is important when examine the Russian case, because a significant number of relevant agents figure prominently among the Russian elites and the so-called *siloviki* constituted by members of Russia’s security and military services.⁶⁷ The overlap between prominent members of Russian elites stresses the mutually constitutive relation between national identity and foreign policy, which exists in any state but is particularly prominent in the Russian case (Lo, 2006, 2015).

It is, however, beyond the scope of my dissertation to undertake a thorough analysis of how strategic culture mediates the translation of Russian Self into foreign policy. Instead, I draw on relevant insights from existing studies of Russia’s strategic culture to interpret discrepancies between the Russian Self and Official Russian foreign policy (e.g., Eitelhuber, 2009; Glenn, 2004; Jones, 1990; Skak, 2011, 2016).

This covert process crystalizes publicly in the shape of foreign policy doctrines and statements as well as actual foreign policy actions. After the Kosovo and Ukraine crises, revised military, foreign political, and national security doctrines replaced pre-crisis ones. In the context of Kosovo, preparations for

⁶⁷ Being part of the Russian elite situated at the core of the imagined Russian community is merely one of several memberships that individual and collective agents have. Consequently, Étienne Wenger understands individual identity as the “*nexus of multimembership* [defining] who we are by the ways we reconcile our various forms of membership into one identity” (1998, pp. 149, 158-161).

drafting the revised National Security Concept already began while Vladimir Putin was in the Security Council of the Russian Federation during the crisis (Donaldson & Noguee, 2009, p. 117). After the Ukraine crisis, a revised *Military Doctrine* and *Russian National Security Strategy* were adopted on December 25, 2014 and December 31, 2015.

I argue that the publication of these revised doctrines testifies to the mutually constitutive relation between foreign policy and national identity. The policy guiding Official Russia's relations to Foreign Others transformed to accommodate reconstructed visions of the Russian Self and expectations to the Foreign Other during the inner dialogue before, during, and after military intervention.

It is important to stress that I do not assume that certain foreign policy statements or actions are manifestations and externalizations of certain "core" identities. As an interpretivist, I am not trying to erase or ignore the ambiguity between reconstructed National Self and how it translates into the foreign policy of Official Russia; rather, I want to understand the various sources of this ambiguity. Instead of identifying, testing, and determining the relative influence of certain identities on foreign policy, the analytical task here is to examine whose sense of ontological security changed, how the inner dialogue among various visions for authentic Russian Self proceeded, and finally how these different visions of belonging translated into a foreign policy of belonging.

Conclusion

The primary aim of this chapter is a retranslation of Ronald D. Laing's original concept of ontological security into IR. In short, bringing ontological security back to its existentialist roots emphasizing anxiety and authenticity; and, hence, concerns inherent to the human condition.

Based on a review of significant hallmarks in the existing ontological security research program within IR, I identify three points of retranslation. First, I suggest retranslating the notion of Self from dialecticism to dialogism. The theoretical and analytical implications constitute a shift away from focusing on Self-Other to Self-Self relations. A change away from a Core Self in contrast to a "Core Other" to an inner dialogue among a polyphony of Selves—a coreless sense of Self. Studying ontological security entails a focus on visions of National Self with reference to Self in an encounter with an Other, rather than articulation of National Self with reference to a Foreign Other.

Second, I suggest a fundamental shift away from understanding existence as existentially secure to existentially insecure from the outset. Consequently,

my retranslated concept of ontological security is not so much about explaining how a state maintains ontological security—a task I assume to be futile—but rather how specific agents manage their existential insecurities. The theoretical and empirical implications of this change are that some agents experience an encounter with a Foreign Other as a source of heightened sense of insecurity about the realization or sustainability of their envisioned ontology of National Self, whereas the encounter would cause a sense of existential security to the realization of other agents' visions of the National Self. In short, the outcome of the inner dialogue provoked by an encounter with a Foreign Other is neither complete ontological security nor insecurity.

Third, the two changes in the direction of a dialogical coreless Self and ontologically insecure existence clear the path toward a two-sided understanding of crisis. Drawing on existentialist thinking, I theorize foreign policy crisis two-sidedly as manifesting both a breakdown of the existing and a potential breakthrough for the envisioned. Instead of theorizing foreign policy crises one-sidedly as breakdown, major crises historically contained both the chance of complete breakdown as well as provoking major innovations. The underlying logic is that the heightened sense of Self-awareness accompanying crisis prepares the ground for visions and policies that were unthinkable before the crisis.

The secondary aim of this chapter is to align my retranslated concept of ontological security with a social theoretical foundation, which takes seriously the knowledgeability and resources of agents to reconstruct senses and politics of national belonging during foreign a policy crisis. Departing from Sewell's re-narration of Bourdieu and Giddens' theorization of the agent–structure nexus, I situate my retranslation of ontological security in a social theoretical conception of agency as capable of maintaining as well as transforming structures. In short, resources and the knowledgeability of agents drive the reconstruction of the National Self and translation of the National Self into Official Self.

The motivation for taking ontological security away from Giddens' structural to Laing's agent-based understanding mirrors my motivation to advance IR theory further along the way of rendering inherently difficult—yet important—questions concerning existential meaningfulness and authenticity comprehensible.⁶⁸ As mentioned earlier, anxiety is becoming increasingly

⁶⁸ Besides the existing research program on ontological security, Karl P.R. Niebuhr's *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (1945) and a newly published anthology *Politics of Anxiety* (2017) are among the few exceptions in the social sciences and IR examining

overt at the micro and macro levels of societies around the world. This is not a phenomenon isolated to post-Soviet Russia. Anxieties caused by belonging to a version of an imagined community significantly different from what one envisioned as meaningful and—consequently—experiencing unauthentic representations by the Official Self in encounters with Foreign Others are channeled into politics of belonging through elections in which voters cast their ballots for politicians promising to “make X great again;” in short, making things meaningful and authentic again, just like back in the “good ole days.”⁶⁹

Running on the slogan to “Make America Great Again,” Americans elected Donald Trump President of the United States in November 2016. Trump’s election was just one of many manifestations throughout the Western world where various populist parties have gradually increased their vote share on promises to “make things great again” or restore some form of former glory.⁷⁰ The common denominator for this political development is more or less widespread senses of ontological insecurity caused by discrepancy between experienced and envisioned existence.

The contemporary social sciences—including political science and IR—are poorly equipped with theories for rendering the political consequences of ontological insecurity intelligible. In the concluding chapter, I return to potential fruitful paths for the development of ontological security in order to enhance our understanding of the existentialist dimension of the political in the future.

the interrelations between politics and existential anxiety. With the exception of Niebuhr, the exceptions primarily depart from an understanding of anxiety as something to bracket out instead of to be managed.

⁶⁹ For popular manifestations of an existentialist urge of a more authentic sense of National Self, visit YouTube and review some of the uploaded videos depicting the “good ole days” in different countries. In Denmark—my own country of origin—uploaded videos depict anti-fascist protestors, Muslim immigrants, Danish politicians, and refugees as threats. In contrast, the Viking Age, Denmark in the 1930s, and members of the Nazi-German volunteer corps Free Corps Denmark are associated with the “good ole days”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P7Kosetr> Sc, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HtNCkbdjg5g> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Zze8RRKCqU> (accessed August 6, 2018).

⁷⁰ For instance, Front National, Alternative for Germany, Golden Dawn, Law and Justice, Five Star Movement and Fidesz etc.

Chapter 2: Designing Research about the “Russian Self”

This chapter sums up my thoughts on the historical interpretive research design of the dissertation. Fundamentally, devoting time and space explicitly to discussing the numerous methodical choices made is about ensuring the transparency and trustworthiness of the knowledge claims; hence, ensuring the scientific validity. The primary goal is to extend an invitation to critically assess how I generated and analyzed the data to answer my research questions.

The “historical interpretive” label denotes two key features of this research design. The design is historical in the sense that its orientation and methods are tailored to represent the past, particularly how contemporary humans conceive of the past as being meaningful. Thinking of the “past as a landscape, then history is the way we represent it,” as John L. Gaddis writes (2004, p. 5). Importantly, history does not speak for itself; the researcher decides which and when certain artefacts from the past enter and leave the analytical narrative. As E.H. Carr notes, the “historian is necessarily selective. [...] status as a historical fact will turn on a question of interpretation” taking place in an endless dialogue between past and present (Carr, 2001, p. 7). In short, the historical orientation constitutes a human urge to disclose the past conditions for our contemporaries. As discipline, questions of how we ended where we did are inherent to history. History denotes a self-reflective process of making sense of how others’ meaning-making got us here.

As already mentioned in the Introduction, representing the meaning-making of the past stresses the dissertation’s methodological commitment to interpretivism. The core of interpretivist inquiry is understanding and explaining how agents construct meaning in context. In short, to understand how and why others understood the world as they did. Mediating the experience-near concepts used by the researched agents in context (e.g., anxiety, pride, patriotism) and the experience-distant concepts (e.g., ontological security, National Self, principle of sovereignty) employed by the researcher, significant configurations of contestations and commonplaces in the meaning-making process elucidate (Schaffer, 2016, pp. 2–10).⁷¹

⁷¹ Experience-near and -distant concepts used by researched and researchers in social science are overlapping. For instance, “democracy” frequently appears in both everyday and specialized language. However, what democracy means to researchers

Intellectually, Interpretivism belongs to the realms of hermeneutics and phenomenology (Bevir & Rhodes, 2016; Schwartz-Shea, 2015; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2014, Chapter 1). Situating my inquiry within interpretivism, a prime design concern is ensuring adequate access and exposure to the human meaning-making of interest; hence, how collective and individual agents make sense of their lifeworld as they experienced—or recall experiencing—it (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2012, Chapter 4). Interpretivist research seeks to understand what

a thing “is” by learning what it does, how particular people use it, in particular contexts. That is, interpretive research focuses on context-specific meanings, rather than seeking generalized meaning abstracted from particular contexts. [...] understanding how a word or an object, a ritual, or ceremony or other act is used, in context, potentially reveals (or raises questions about) assumed, unspoken or taken-for-granted ideas (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2012, p. 23).

To an interpretivist, *contextuality* is what *generalizability* is to a scholar whose methodological commitments are devoted to identification of falsifiable law-like statements. Interpretivism is all about understanding and explaining human sayings and doings in terms of context-specific configurations of meaning.

Consequently, interpretivists do not understand data as something to be collected or analyzed as objectively true. As Dvora Yanow notes, data in interpretive research is

not the people themselves, or the events and conversations and settings and acts, or even the documents, but rather the researcher’s views of these, as encapsulated in her notes [...] human science data are never really “raw” and “unprocessed” (2014, p. xxi).

The researcher is the primary methodical instrument for both generating and analyzing data from a relevant selection of sources encountered in the interpretive research process. As an interpretivist, the trustworthiness of my knowledge claims primarily rely on my will and ability to critically reflect on the sufficiency of exposure to specific meaning-making by agents in the settings I claim to tap into (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2012, p. 85).

The double hermeneutic process of inquiring about how other humans understand their world—and how research in turn influences how they will understand their world afterwards—calls for critical Self-reflections about how

studying democracy and to researched agents can differ significantly (Schaffer, 2014).

my previous and present encounters with researched agents and settings influence my interpretations (Giddens, 1987; P. T. Jackson, 2014a). Not because my knowledge claims are supposed to be—nor pretend to be—derived from a “point-of-nowhere.” The self-reflections about encounters between researcher and researched are not driven by “Cartesian anxiety” originating from an imagined gap between researcher and researched, but rather by fundamental “problems of the intellectual” (P. T. Jackson, 2016, pp. 185–201).

However, this chapter is not solely written to foster recognition of my dissertation’s scientific validity. Designing trustworthy research is not only about thoroughly discussing critical reflections about the methodological and methodical opportunities and challenges facing social scientists when undertaking scientific inquiry, but also about satisfying the fundamental social needs of scholars, like acceptance and recognition from fellow researchers (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2012, pp. 2, 19, 76–77). Here, I strive for acknowledgement of my dissertation as a relevant contribution to the growing community of interpretivist research.

The chapter consists of two main parts. First, I discuss the implications of favoring contextuality over generalizability. Second, I outline how I generated and analyzed data from the selected body of sources. The process of generating and analyzing data constitutes an interrelated, four-phased hermeneutical process whereby I distinguish between gathering, reading, writing, and presenting.

Contextuality over Generalizability

I have not designed my inquiry to produce generalizable nomothetic knowledge claims about the relationship between foreign policy and National Self during foreign policy crises in general.⁷² However, should others find it

⁷² The most deliberate attempt to put scientific inquiry in political science on a neopositivist formulae is Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba’s *Designing Social Inquiry* (1994). In the preface to the book, the authors state that “IN THIS BOOK we develop a unified approach to valid descriptive and causal inference in qualitative research [...]. We argue that the logic of good quantitative and good qualitative research designs do not fundamentally differ [...]. Our goal in writing this book is to encourage qualitative researchers to take scientific inference seriously” (1994, p. ix). In contrast to “KKV,” Gary Goertz and James Mahoney’s *A Tale of Two Cultures* (2012) depicts a qualitative and quantitative logic of scientific inquiry as deriving from not one but two distinct cultures. However, the quantitative–qualitative divide is merely a methodical skin discussion covering up for the more fundamental methodological discussion originating in the different philosophical ontological commitments dividing scholars (P. T. Jackson, 2016, pp. 36–37).

interesting to generalize my theoretical findings to other foreign policy crises, they should feel free to do so. Indeed, the illustrative historical examples provided in the previous chapter suggest that National Selves historically underwent substantial reconstructions during foreign policy crises.

Instead, I have designed my inquiry to produce ideographic knowledge about how a context characterized by senses of ontological insecurity provoked by Russo–Western encounters in Kosovo and Ukraine rendered military intervention and the reconstruction of the Russian Self meaningful. The historical outcomes emerging out of such contexts are preliminary ends of highly contingent processes evolving multiple individual and collective human beings operating within different temporalities. Given this temporal heterogeneity, historical contextualization is necessary when interpreting the sequences of human actions and utterances to understand what they meant—and explain the consequences hereof—to agents in Kosovo and Ukraine. Utterances and actions have no intrinsic meaning or consequence, as they depend on the context in which they take place (Sewell, 2005, p. 10).

Where randomization, homogeneity/heterogeneity, and interdependence/dependence between cases are central considerations in variance-based case selection, interpretivists select cases based on whether the meaning-making among agents in settings of interest are expected to be present and accessible. In short, whereas variance-based research seeks to validate their nomothetic knowledge claims, testing them in negative cases in which phenomenon of interest are not expected to be present, interpretivists deliberately select the cases featuring the manifestations and expressions of meaning-making among agents in a specific setting of interest to the researcher.

Well-intended suggestions to introduce variation by including negative cases to increase the generalizability of the findings are not helpful to an interpretivist. Putting it bluntly, it would be outright counterintuitive to introduce variation in a dissertation about Russian senses of ontological security, the reconstruction of the Russian Self, and Russian military interventions in two specific foreign policy crises. There is little—if any—relevant knowledge gained from examining my case-specific research questions in other settings featuring other agents.⁷³

The evaluation of my knowledge claims does not depend on the validity, reliability, and/or replicability of the measures and methods used to produce the claims, trusting instead that interpretivist claims have been sufficiently contextualized. The capacity to construct contextualized knowledge depends

⁷³ For a more elaborated discussion of positive- and negative case-selection logics, see *Causal Case Study Methods* (Beach & Pedersen, 2016, pp. 57-64).

on the ability of the researcher to map and critically expose oneself to the setting and agents of interest in order to truthfully elucidate the intertextual meaning-making (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2012, Chapter 6).

The more I gathered, read, and wrote about researched settings and agents, the more I knew, and the more trustworthily I—drawing on Clifford Geertz’s notion of “thick description” (Geertz, 1973)—was able to “thickly” reconstruct and contextualize the contestations and commonplaces in the meaning-making in Kosovo and Ukraine. Thus, the more trustworthily I can comprehend, understand, and explain *what*, *why*, and *how* something came about as it did in the past on its own contextual terms.

Generating and Analyzing Data

Analyzing how Russian senses of ontological insecurity reconstructed the Russian Self, rendered military intervention meaningful, and translated into the Official Self after foreign policy crises is no easy task. As Bo Petersson notes, the study of identities alone does not “count among tangibles. [Identities] cannot be squeezed into narrow boxes and compartments” (2001, pp. 20–21).

However, if to study such elusive—yet important—phenomenon at all, social scientists must experiment with ways to approach them. Drawing on Shaul R. Shenhav’s work with narrative analysis, I argue that a good start to make the intangible comprehensible is for the researcher to learn to be a good listener (Shenhav, 2015, p. 1). The more carefully the researcher listens to what agents say, the better they understand what it meaningfully meant, means, and ought to mean to be belong to the imagined Russian community.

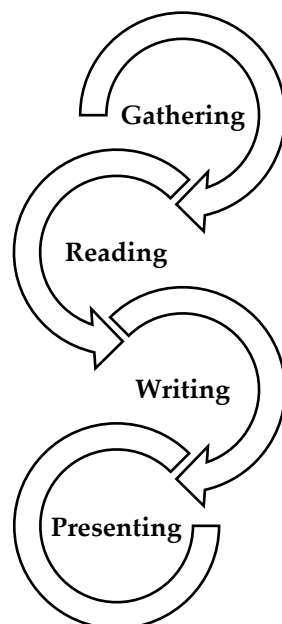
This is not a straightforward task. On the one side, it is uncomfortable for most social scientists to let down their guard and carefully listen and try to understand what, how, and who communicates these stories. This stands in stark contrast to both the logic and conduct of inquiry within, for instance, the literature about the influence of political communication on voting behavior (e.g., Chong & Druckman, 2007; Entman, 1993; Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997). Here, scholars are persistently questioning how women and men of power try to convey their desired representations and interpretations of social life—via manipulation—to safeguard their narrow self- or group-interests. Conversely, scholars interested in political communication agree that content as well as the means, ways, and even contexts in which a story is conveyed are important to understand and explain the intentions behind and the effect of human utterances (e.g., Druckman, 2001; Druckman, Peterson, & Slothuus, 2013).

In this dissertation, careful listening constitutes a four-step hermeneutical process of gathering, reading, writing, and presenting (see Figure 5, below).

Based on Dvora Yanow’s reflections about how to interpret (2014, pp. 19–21), each of these four hermeneutical steps constituted *interpretive moments* in which I played different roles as a researcher (delineator, listener, author, and presenter) and drew on different parts of my existing and acquired knowledge about the relevant settings and agents to contextualize meaning-making processes.

This hermeneutical process toward trustworthily contextualizing meaning-making processes of the past on its own terms is in principle infinite. You can gather, read, write, and present about all of the accessible material from the past, but the horizons between researcher and researched will never fuse completely.

Figure 5: The four-step hermeneutical process of generating and analyzing data



However, repetitively gathering, reading, writing, and presenting about the researched past, the researcher gradually brings the researched past closer through a dialogical encounter between their a priori and new understandings of the past (Gadamer, 2013). The encounter with the researched past informs the next round of the researcher’s gathering, reading, writing, and presenting about the past.

Besides informing and updating the researcher’s existing knowledge of the past, repetition and iteration attend to a fundamental phenomenological aspiration to understand and explain the world—including the past one—on its own terms. Through the four-way process of gathering, reading, writing, and presenting, the researched past gradually reveals itself to the researcher on its own terms. The closer the horizons of the researcher and researched are to one

another, the more authentically meanings of the past will reveal themselves to the researcher.

Despite the obvious lack of textual source material, the hermeneutical process is comparable to the ethnographic way of producing knowledge through encounters with agents in settings of interest. Though I do not have the luxury of an ethnographer to live with the people whose meaning-making I want to examine, I can expose myself to reconstructed “meanings of the words, metaphors, and rhetorical conventions” as well as the behavior Russian custodians used to talk, think, and act in their lifeworld (Sewell, 1980, pp. 10–11).

Though newspaper archives, radio, and television can never substitute the experience of being in Russia in 1999 and 2014, cultural historian Robert Darnton convincingly argues that one should not imagine that the ethnographer has “an easy time with his native informant,” as he also experiences “opacity and silence” and needs to interpret the native’s interpretations based on a reconstruction (Darnton, 1985, p. 4).

What I undertake here resembles that which Patrick T. Jackson coined “textual ethnography.” Through the in-depth interpretation of the textual source material, I elucidated meaning-making processes among the agents of the past via a reconstruction of “a cultural world primarily through a close reading of its emblematic texts” (P. T. Jackson, 2014b, p. 6). Like ethnographers, I accessed and embedded myself into the reconstructed past researched setting in order to obtain the necessary contextual sensitivity needed to comprehend, understand, and explain who, why, and how human agents acted like they did and how these actions in turn influenced their way of reasoning about the world.

In the following four sections, I independently outline each interpretive moment in this four-step hermeneutical process. However, the actual iterative and repetitive processes of gathering and reading sources as well as writing and presenting an analytical narrative are more time-demanding and messy than as indicated in the outline. Understanding how and why certain actions emerged as meaningful out of an amorphous blob of fluxing contestations and commonplaces between individual and collective agents in context demands a lot of the researcher, who constantly feels the past to be surpassing his understanding.

Gathering

The first phase of the hermeneutical process is identifying the “settings, actors, events, archives, and materials” providing me access to interpret the meaning-making relevant to my research questions (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2012, p.

56). Without access, I cannot gather a trustworthy body of relevant primary and secondary sources.

Critical to this phase is the cultivation of the researcher's "particular competencies and skills to maneuver effectively [and] adapt to the field setting," which depend on the skills and competencies gradually learned and internalized from encounters with primary and secondary sources (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2012, p. 74). A primary competency is becoming sufficiently conversant to undertake external and internal source criticism. Before selecting a source for the generation and analysis of data, the total sum of available relevant sources has already undergone a natural process whereby some sources have been destroyed, classified, or fabricated. External and internal source criticisms are therefore essential to, respectively, assess the authenticity and credibility of selected sources (Sager & Rosser, 2016, pp. 203, 205).

External source criticism questions the relative falseness of a source in order to determine whether we can trust it to be what it pretends to be. External criticism depends on the "researcher's ability to discern anachronisms [like] erroneous classification of events, ideas, or objects in time" (Sager & Rosser, 2016, p. 205). Internal criticism deals with the trustworthiness of the data generated from the sources. Consider Boris Yeltsin's *Midnight Diaries* (2000); first, is that which Boris Yeltsin said he and other actors felt and meant when he dictated his memoirs that which he and others *actually* felt and meant during the Kosovo crisis or more a product of what Yeltsin in hindsight wanted them to have meant and felt? Second, is the researcher capable of understanding the stated feelings and meanings from 1999 when undertaking inquiry in 2018? In other words, good internal criticism depends on the will and ability of the author to state the thoughts and intentions trustworthily and the researcher's will and ability to contextualize the interpretations of words and meanings from the past trustworthily (Sager & Rosser, 2016, pp. 206–207).

As the researcher becomes more conversant with the setting being researched, the researcher should gradually diversify and balance the selection of primary sources as well as the secondary sources used as guides to understand the context of the primary sources. Importantly, the purpose of diversifying and balancing the body of sources is not leveling out the "noise" steaming from these more or less significant differences between individually and collectively expressed predispositions in selected sources; rather, the purpose is to ensure that the researcher is sufficiently exposed to the complex web of meanings expressed by a rich polyphony of Russian voices.

Body of sources

Earlier, I wrote that trustworthily generating and analyzing data involves a hermeneutical process of gathering, reading, and writing as many testimonies by agents in the setting one is interested in examining. Iver B. Neumann makes a similar observation in his own research about Russian foreign policy and national identity. The number of relevant texts is “for practical purposes endless.” However—Neumann adds—there “is such a thing as reading enough” (1996, pp. 2–3). I have devoted this section about the body of sources to how I have distinguished between essential and non-essential source material.

The essentialness of a source depends, first, on how helpful it is in answering the research question and, second, its availability (Sager & Rosser, 2016, p. 201). The diversity of evidence “is thus almost inexhaustible; at the same time, the identification of a body of sources is limited by its availability” (Sager & Rosser, 2016, p. 203).

Looking to the *Stand der Forschung* on Russian national identity and foreign policy, essentialness depends on contemporary novelty and representativity. According to Neumann, essential sources are novel and their content conveyed in terms of preexisting frames of reference, because some novel ideas can simply be

too new and [...] literally so “far out” of the ongoing debate that they are not even noticed, or are mistaken for something else, or taken to be so incomprehensible as to be worthless (Neumann, 1996, p. 3).

To Ted Hopf, representativity is the key consideration for assessing the essentiality of sources. In *Measuring Identity*, Hopf urges researchers to develop

a list of texts sufficiently numerous and diverse so as to approximate a representative sample of the discourse of identity in any society, a collection of texts that are most read by the mass public. This cannot be done absent basic knowledge of research about the society in question [...]. Relevant sources about daily information consumption habits of one’s population should be read (Hopf, 2009, p. 285).

Representativity is critical to Hopf because of his cognitive-structural notion of societal identities and their influence on foreign policy (2009, p. 286). Particularly, the quantitative aspect of representativity is important to Hopf’s understanding of what delineates essential from non-essential source material. It is from the circulation and distribution of sources that Hopf deduces which identities relatively influenced contemporary Soviet and Russian foreign policy the most (e.g., Hopf, 2002, p. 24). Hopf concludes that a

discourse predominates to the extent that, numerically speaking with regard to competing discourses; it dwarfs its competitors in appearances in texts. [...] this numerical preponderance [must] be consistent across the range of genres of texts as well (Hopf, 2009, p. 291).

Consequently, for Hopf, variance regarding the authors and genres of sampled texts is another key source-selection criterion (e.g., 2002, pp. 33–37, 2009, pp. 314–315, 2012, pp. 23–27).

Despite Hopf's ambition to combine an interpretive research design with a fundamentally—albeit not self-acknowledged—neo-positivist notion of the relation between identity and foreign policy behavior, the emphasis on representativity is more aligned with Hopf's attempt to construct a falsifiable constructivist theory capable of explaining—ideally, predicting—states' foreign political behavior than interpretivism (e.g., Hopf, 2002, pp. 29–33). Representativity—understood in terms of variance and circulation numbers—is important to generalize knowledge claims but not to contextualize or understand human meaning-making.

Unlike Neumann's focus on novelty (and Hopf's on representativity), I distinguish between essential and non-essential sources according to whether and how well the source conveys the polyphony of contemporary Russian voices uttering their ontological security concerns, discusses the Russian Self, and how such Russian Self should translate into the foreign policy of Official Russia. Besides polyphony, an essential source also reveals who, what, when, and how individual and collective agents use their voice. In contrast to Neumann and Hopf's overly structural analyses of the longitudinal reconstruction of Russian identities and their influence on foreign policy (and vice versa), I focus on what specific agents—or that which Neumann refers to as the “vessels” of debate (1996, p. 3)—say and do in relation to the sayings and doings of other agents rather than the debate itself.

In the following two sections, I provide an overview of the different types of primary and secondary sources constituting the body of sources. Throughout the dissertation, I continuously reference relevant primary sources in footnotes. I continuously place references to relevant secondary sources in the text using brackets. All secondary sources are included in the alphabetically ordered bibliography.

Primary Sources

To identify which agents and trace how their individually and collectively held senses of heightened ontological insecurity and the inner dialogue about Russian Self proceeded during foreign policy crises, I primarily generate and analyze that which Jutta Weldes refers to as “high data.” High data constitutes

“official or semiofficial sources circulating among elites and from elites to various publics” (2014, p. 233).

Central Russian newspapers

I primarily generate high data in the case study of Kosovo and Ukraine through a systematic reading of the complete issues of four central Russian newspapers (see Table 2 below) about a week before Russian intervention and a week after the end of the foreign policy crisis. From the Kosovo crisis in 1999, I systematically gathered and read 48 issues from June 2 to June 25. From the Ukraine crisis in 2014, I read 88 issues from February 20 to March 25. Each issue of the central newspapers contains on average of about 30 texts in different genres and lengths. Thus, I systematically generated data from a pool of 1440 and 2640 texts, respectively, in the context of Kosovo and Ukraine.

Table 2: Selection of central Russian newspapers

| Central Russian Newspaper | Kosovo (1999) | Ukraine (2014) |
|--|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Коммерсант (Коммерсантъ) | N° 95-109 (16 issues) | N° 29-49 (22 issues) |
| Независимая Газета (Независимая газета) | N° 100-113 (14 issues) | N° 34-60 (28 issues) |
| Известия (Известия) | N° 100-114 (15 issues) | N° 31-53 (23 issues) |
| Novaya Gazeta (Новая Газета) | N° 20-22 (3 issues) | N° 19-32 (15 issues) |

There are two main strengths associated with generating data from Russian newspapers. As media, a newspaper must communicate a broad array of diverse substance on a very limited amount of space. Editors and journalists must select and condense numerous voices and the multitude of perspectives and interpretations about current events into a rather compact format. This condensation discards—depending on the editorial quality and autonomy—non-essential voices in the public debate.

The condensing process is highly selective, so the researcher should exercise plenty of critical judgement of the sources used; in particular, the renowned *problématique* about how to tap into “silent” or “marginalized voices,” which are not represented in the prevalent media image but still potentially influential (L. Hansen, 2006, pp. 63–64). Given the elitist understanding of post-Soviet custodianship adopted here, omitting marginalized voices—insofar as they do not make it to central Russian newspapers of secondary primary sources—reflects a deliberate choice. If a voice—for whatever reason—is not heard, it also means that it had no say in discussing ontological security concerns, the reconstruction of the Russian Self, or foreign policy, which means it falls short of the scope of my dissertation’s elitist perspective. This is not to say that marginalized voices in Russia are not relevant; simply that they are neither the scope nor aim of this dissertation.

Another key advantage of using central newspapers is their high degree of intertextuality (L. Hansen, 2006, pp. 55–64). Consequently, the condensation process secures a multitude of meanings that are conveyed and situated in relation to other relevant meanings and interpretations within the imagined Russian community by journalists and other contributors writing in the newspapers. Newspapers provide a condensed glimpse into important contemporary voices and important contextual knowledge to situate this knowledge.

In sum, the condensation process preceding the publication of central Russian newspapers offers me a shortcut to cover the polyphony of contemporary Russian voices expressed by multiple individual and collective agents. Thus, central newspapers are ideal for a dialogical account of the reconstruction of the Russian Self among a polyphony of Russian voices. For the same reason, Fyodor Dostoevsky—inventor of the polyphonic novel—loved newspapers. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, Dostoyevsky’s love for newspapers originated in the “contradictions of contemporary society in the cross-section of a single day” inherent to the genre (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 30).

Translation and digest services

Besides the selection of central Russian newspapers, I have used various translation and digest services (*The Current Digest of the Russian Press*, *Johnson's Russia List*, and *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*) to ensure exposure to Russian voices in radio, TV, and less central national and regional newspapers and magazines. An obvious pitfall tied to using the available translation and digest services is the dependency on the respective editorial boards’ selection criteria. I will address the potential pitfalls of relying on others’ selection criteria in detail below.

Official sources

In addition to central newspapers as well as translation and digest services, my body of primary sources also contains official speeches, statements, and policy documents.

Official speeches are excellent sources for tapping into the worldviews of official Russian voices together with their interpretations of the past, present, and future. In addition to being deliberately formulated with the purpose of conveying an authoritative vision of what constitutes a meaningful Russian Self and official representation, official speeches and statements provide an idea of which alternative—or undermining—voices the representatives of the existing regime see as threatening. First, a speech does not merely convey one narrative and speak in one consistent voice. Over the course of a speech, multiple narratives and voices uttered. Presenting the audience with a meaningful

vision of the Russian Self also requires that the author simultaneously delimits his vision from alternative ones (Angermüller, 2012, p. 118).

Interpreting how the Russian Self translated into a representative Official Russia after foreign policy crises, I gathered previous and revised editions of Russian foreign policy concepts, national security concepts, and military doctrines (see Table 3 below).

Table 3: Selection of central Russian foreign policy documents

| | Adopted before Kosovo | Adopted after Kosovo | Adopted between Kosovo and Ukraine | Adopted after Ukraine |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| Foreign Policy Concept | April 1993 | June 2000 | July 2008 February 2013 | November 2016 |
| Military Doctrine | November 1993 | April 2000 | February 2010 | December 2014 |
| National Security Concept | December 1997 | January 2000 | May 2009 | December 2015 |

The revisions to Russian policy documents offer unique glimpses into the puzzling engine room driving Russian foreign policy. Although researchers must obviously be cautious to avoid overstating the credibility of official documents, the official documents still offer contemporary testimonies of the intentions and broader “principles behind policy [and] define the mental universe within which policy decisions are made” (Mankoff, 2012, p. 16). As George F. Kennan cautions in his “Long Telegram” (1946), like any other state’s foreign policy, Russian foreign policy is undertaken at both official and unofficial levels, which can be guided by more or less separate guidelines and intentions. Paying special attention to the discrepancies between Russia’s official and actual foreign policy is essential to assess the trustworthiness of the policy documents as guides to actual foreign policy.

Secondary sources

Secondary sources are essential to provide the researcher with valuable contextual knowledge critical to accessing and interpreting why, how, and when custodians said and acted as they did in context. Metaphorically, secondary sources are comparable to guides in a foreign country. Like guides, secondary sources are not only helpful in translating the language and actions of Foreign Others—to which the researcher is an outsider—but also enhancing the understanding of what is actually said and done by contextualizing the words and deeds in terms familiar to the outsider. In short, secondary sources are valuable aids in making sense of agents’ meaning-making in settings otherwise restricted to insiders.

However, using guides—regardless of whether the guide is aiding one’s scientific inquiry or a trip to the Red Square—also means becoming increasingly dependent on others. Others who are outsiders to the analytical goals of my dissertation and make their judgements and interpretations based on their own personal priors and value commitments. In short, one increasingly becomes dependent on using or reinterpreting others’ data. This is far from unproblematic (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2014, p. xxi); particularly in interpretivist inquiry, where data is generated and analyzed by researchers actively utilizing their positionality and contextual knowledge.

The differences between the personal, ideological, social, and national pre-suppositions of researchers can cause significant differences in how data is generated and analyzed. From an interpretivist stance, these differences are not a matter of objectively “false or true” knowledge claims, but rather a matter of knowledge claims originating from different predispositions.

Before proceeding to the different secondary sources used, I will briefly add a few reflections on the invaluable help I had from my research assistants. Besides using other scholars’ work, I received help from four native Russian-speaking research assistants who screened most of the central Russian newspaper articles used. I assigned each research assistant to one of the central Russian newspapers mentioned above. Their primary task was to carefully read their way through each issue of their assigned Russian newspaper and highlight relevant articles with relevance to ongoing events in Kosovo, Ukraine, government officials and politicians, articulations of the Russian Self, and Western Other.

I decided to use native-speaking research assistants with two considerations in mind: practicality and intertextuality. On practicality, even with fluent Russian language proficiency, the task of reading the complete series of issues from four central Russian newspapers would have been disproportionately time consuming. Besides saving time, the native command of Russian meant my research assistants detected and deciphered meanings and intertextual references that would have been beyond me. In short, the decision to include research assistants—despite the aforementioned challenges using guides in interpretivist research—was justified by the analytical depth and width gained. Without the support of my research assistants, my case studies would have featured fewer Russian voices.

To enhance my understanding of the context of the Kosovo and Ukraine crises, I benefited from insightful descriptions and interpretations of a variety of topics related to the crises in the memoirs of various Russian and Western politicians, officials, journalists, and scholars. Mike Jackson’s *Soldier* (2008) and Wesley Clark’s *Waging Modern War* (2002) offer unique first-hand experience with the Kosovo crisis from the perspective of the Commander of

KFOR and Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, respectively. Former Deputy Secretary of State and key negotiator during the Kosovo crisis, Strobe Talbott, has written *The Russian Hand* (2002), which offers a personal account of the bilateral Russo–American negotiations during the crisis. From the Russian side of the table, Boris Yeltsin’s *Midnight Diaries* (2000), Vladimir Putin’s *First Person* (2000), Yevgeny Primakov’s *Russian Crossroads* (2004), and Igor Ivanov’s *The New Russia Diplomacy* (2002) offer their respective retrospective assessments and interpretations of the Kosovo crisis and its implications for Russo–Western relations and Russian foreign policy.

To provide me with a Russian perspective on the Ukraine crisis, I primarily relied on the Russian television documentary *Crimea: Way Back Home* aired on state-owned *Rossiya 1* on March 15, 2015.⁷⁴ Besides President Vladimir Putin, Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov offer their personal testimonies about the unfolding crisis. In addition to the documentary about Crimea, I have benefited from reading German journalist Hubert Seipel’s TV interview with Putin (2014), the 2016 *BILD*-interview with Putin,⁷⁵ and Oliver Stone’s documentary, *The Putin Interviews*, aired during my research stay at American University’s School of International Service—Washington, D.C.—in spring 2017.

Shortly after I started my doctoral research, my supervisor Derek Beach told me that George F. Kennan recommended that anyone who wants to understand the soul of a country should at least read five of the most important literary classics in the original language. While attending a Russian summer language course at The Pushkin State Russian Language Institute in 2015, I read John Lewis Gaddis award-winning biography *George F. Kennan* (2011) to expand my knowledgeability of the infamous Russian Soul and not least how to study it from the most seminal Russianist in the 20th century.

I never read five Russian literary classics in the original language, but I found reading translations of Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* (2009), Mikhail Bulgakov’s *The Master and the Margarita* (2018), and several of Fyodor M. Dostoevsky’s novels—*The Double* (2009) being my favorite—a delightful way to learn about different aspects of Russian culture. Particularly, Dostoevsky’s polyphonic novels inspired me to adopt a dialogical understanding of the re-

⁷⁴ The full documentary can be accessed via <https://sputniknews.com/russia/201503311020271172/> (accessed October 28, 2016).

⁷⁵ "BILD-Interview with Russian President Vladimir Putin," *BILD*, Nikolaus Blome et al., January 11, 2016: <https://www.bild.de/politik/ausland/wladimir-putin/russian-president-vladimir-putin-the-interview-44092656.bild.html#fromWall> (accessed November 26, 2018).

construction of the Russian Self. Aforementioned—and more contemporarily—Svetlana Alexievich’s Nobel Prize-winning authorship about “the last of the Soviets” inspired me to think about Russian foreign policy from the perspective of ontological security. I believe there is no better source to understanding the heightened state of ontological insecurity haunting Russians since the dissolution of the Soviet Union as *Secondhand-Time* (2016). Three Western scholars have also contributed to broadening my understanding of what it means to belong to an imagined Russian community in a perpetual search for itself. Oliver Figes’ *Natasha’s Dance* (2003) provides an exhaustive and worthwhile outline of Russian cultural history. Similar to Alexievich, James H. Billington’s *Russia* (2004) enhanced my understanding of the Russian nation’s ongoing search for itself and how this search has influenced its political decisions historically. Finally—returning to the start—John F. Kennan’s famous “Long Telegram” (1946) as well as “America and the Russian Future” (1951) opened my eyes to hallmarks of Russian foreign policy thinking and what to keep in the back of my mind while reading Russian primary sources.

The *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Yearbooks* offer opportunity to monitor changes in the development of Russian military spending and the composition of its armaments and military acquisitions after crises. Here, it is important to remember that meaning-making is not limited to textual and oral testimonies alone (e.g., Yanow, 1995). Russia’s military budgets and the composition of their acquisitions also tell a story about the Russian “sense of belonging” by manifesting the resources deemed necessary to support the associated “foreign policy of belonging.” Similarly, Aaron Wildavsky notes that a budget is not merely a declaration of costs and revenues, but an excellent source to “what the government does or what it intends to do” (1964, p. 128). In short, what and how much Russia spent on its military provide important insights into its intentions and what is deemed a meaningful representation of Official Russia.

Reading

The reading phase constitutes a close chronological reading of the gathered sources on a day-by-day basis to expose oneself to the events and meanings as they unfolded chronologically.

The close day-by-day reading is a way to avoid the common pitfall of reading history backwards—or the “now for then” fallacy—in studies tracing and

comparing developments over time.⁷⁶ The “now for then” fallacy arises when studies—in light of the known historical outcome of an event or trend—divert analytical attention toward the successful developments while neglecting the unsuccessful ones and the chronology of events (e.g., Capoccia, 2015; Capoccia & Ziblatt, 2010; Fischer, 1979; Pierson, 2000).⁷⁷ In my dissertation, this translates into exclusively focusing on those visions of the Russian Self and foreign political representations hereof successfully manifesting themselves while neglecting those disappearing during the Kosovo and Ukraine crises. As already discussed, the implication of this pitfall is making the relation between national identity and foreign policy more consistent and responsive than is the case when focusing on such relations before, during, and after foreign policy crises.

The primary aim of this phase is to reconstruct the setting of interest and map when, what, and how ideas and actions proliferated in Kosovo and Ukraine. Reconstruction and mapping the historical setting wherein relevant agents’ contestations and commonplaces develop are two essential tasks presupposing the interpretation of the meaning-making processes and rendering certain senses of Russian Self and foreign policy actions more meaningful.

The reading phase entails two core activities: Observing and reflecting on encounters with the past. First, writing down what the researcher descriptively observes in the historical setting as it reveals itself via close readings of the gathered source material. This part of the process is comparable to when ethnographers do fieldwork. When the ethnographer has entered the field and started descriptively observing, analytical observations follow as interpretations of agents’ meaning-making processes unfold, drawing on his prior knowledge, personal dispositions, in-field experience, and theoretical lenses. Second, textual ethnographic fieldwork is not only about observing and interpreting the past; it is also about reflecting on encounters between researcher and researched setting. Embedding oneself in the past reconstructs how the researcher thinks of and interprets the past; hence, encountering the past challenges and supports existing predispositions hereof. Recalling that the interpretivist researcher is the primary tool of inquiry—there is no assumed gap between the worlds of the researcher and researched—reflecting on how and why encounters with the past influence researcher’s interpretations hereof is

⁷⁶ Similarly, Patrick T. Jackson suggests a turn to genealogy to trace the delicate and unintended mutations and shifts in discourse and articulations, which studies reading history backwards neglect (2006, pp. 73-74).

⁷⁷ For an exhaustive survey of the methodical pitfalls associated with the fallacy of reading history backwards—and the virtues of reading it forwards—see Jørgen Møller’s working paper “Reading History Forwards” (2018).

critical to writing a trustworthy analytical narrative about phenomena belonging to the past.

Writing

Having gathered sources to reconstruct the field as well as descriptively observing, analyzing, and reflecting on my encounters with the past in the field, we now turn to the third phase of writing the analytical narrative. The core aim of this phase is to become aware of what one knows and, more importantly, what one still needs to know. It is by the time you begin writing the analytical narrative that you “begin to clearly and logically perceive what it is that you really want to say,” to paraphrase Mark Twain. In short, you only know what you have to say once you have written it.

After having carried out the initial writing-down of significant events and reactions from notable agents—based on initial hunches and thin interpretations in the gathering and reading phase—in chronological order, the “thick” analytical narrative can gradually begin to emerge out of the multiple revisions of the final text. The writing phase is the strongest manifestation of the hermeneutical and phenomenological logics in the process. The revisions disclose which sources need to be gathered and how to be interpreted. The basic idea of (re-)writing the analytical narrative is the

more I write, the more I know what I am looking for, the better I understand the significance and relevance of what I find (Carr, 2001, p. 23).

Out of the repeated revisions, the amorphous blob of Russian voices gradually turns into a coherent analytical narrative wherein configurations of the key contestations and commonplaces in the reconstruction of the Russian Self and the official representation stands out.

How many repetitions of iterative gathering, reading, and writing does it take before the researcher can be said to be completely exposed and embedded to the reconstructed past and interpret it trustworthily on its own terms? In principle, never. The researcher can repeat the iterative process indefinitely without reaching the complete fusion of horizons between himself and the researched past. In other words, it is impossible to relive the past; “The historian is of his own age, and is bound to it by the conditions of human existence,” as E.H. Carr notes (2001, p. 19).

However, the analytical narrative will eventually become sufficiently “thick” and contextualized to the degree where the researcher—with reservations for missing the source material and acquired competency to internally and externally criticize the sources—can make trustworthy knowledge claims

about how, when, and why certain actions seemed more meaningful to undertake than others to the agents in question.

At this final stage of writing—where trustworthy knowledge claims have emerged—it is important to critically reread and rewrite the manuscript, exercising a sense of what American historian Samuel Eliot Morison denoted *measure*. During Morison’s presidential address at the 1951 dinner of the American Historical Association, he argued that besides intellectual honesty, measure was the single most important academic virtue for any historian. Measure denotes a will and ability not to confine an analytical narrative (e.g., about to whom, why, and how Russian military intervention became a meaningful way to respond to Russo–Western encounter) but to situate such narrative in the wider political, social, and cultural context (Morison, 1951, p. 269). In other words, a call to remain humble to the idiosyncrasy or fatefulness surrounding human meaning- and decision-making and remember to situate knowledge claims in the wider historical context—evoking a healthy sense of historical proportion.

Presenting

The fourth step of the hermeneutical research process is presenting research. The point of presenting is at least threefold. First, disseminating the conclusions as well as the methodological and methodical underpinnings of the production of knowledge claims is in itself a key point of presenting. Humans do research for various and more or less intrinsic reasons. However, not presenting one’s research findings about worldly facts of interest renders the whole practice of doing research meaningless. In short, we do research to present our research in different ways and forms.

Second, disseminating research orally and/or textually enables public criticism. Recalling what demarcated science from non-science in the Introduction, subjecting knowledge claims to criticism is something any piece of research must do in order to claim scientific validity (P. T. Jackson, 2016, p. 209). Criticism highlights the lack of transparency, sharpens the accuracy of our arguments, and the internal validity of the knowledge claims—if given on appropriate methodological grounds. Ultimately—and in line with what David McCourt notes in *Britain and World Power since 1945*—my interpretations of the decision to militarily intervene in Kosovo and Ukraine as well as the reconstruction and translation of the Russian Self are not “correct in any absolute sense,” as they remain open to alternative interpretations (McCourt, 2014, p. 56).

The third point of presenting is member checking to increase the trustworthiness of my knowledge claims (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2012, pp. 106–107).

The common denominator for interpretivists is a fundamental interest in human meaning-making. However, it is not possible to observe this process of meaning-making directly. Interpretivists infer these meanings from their interpretations of researched agents' manifestations or expressions of meaning in a specific, spatiotemporal setting (Yanow, 2014, p. 19).

Consequently, interpretivists face a double-hermeneutical challenge to make sense of other humans' sense-making (e.g., Giddens, 2006, pp. 284-285 & 374; P. T. Jackson, 2014a, pp. 269-272). Further challenging here, I am a researcher positioned as an outsider in relation to the settings and agents' meaning-making processes.

I am neither Russian nor native to the area of the former Soviet Union where Russian language and culture are prevalent. I was turning 11 the year Russia dashed to the Slatina Airbase and experienced its military intervention in the Ukraine crisis from the perspective of the Western Other, more precisely Denmark. Furthermore, Denmark is a member of NATO and the EU as well as a loyal supporter of the US-led military interventions in the Middle East.

To remedy these general and specific challenges arising from double hermeneutics and my positionality, I drew on a large body of secondary literature covering a vast number of issues related to Russian foreign policy and national identity as well as a joyful journey through key Russian literary classics. I also secured aid from Russian native-speaking research assistants in the process of generating and reading the body of Russian primary sources offering important access to contextual inside knowledge to write my analytical narrative as trustworthily as possible.

While member checking is a conventional way to remedy challenges imposed by double hermeneutics and positionality, it is in the nature of things (given the subject matter of my dissertation) that having the researched Russian custodians to read and comment on the trustworthiness of my inquiry by reading parts of my manuscript or interviewing them about the military interventions is not an option. Even if relevant custodians agreed to assess my interpretations, assessment would be marred by subsequent rationalization and not trustworthily depict the senses of ontological insecurity as well as visions for Russian Self and the foreign policy of Official Russia experienced back in 1999 and 2014.

Employing conventional member checking would not elucidate whether I "got it right," but rather how certain Russian custodians felt about how they recall the researched setting rather than what they felt and meant in the past. Instead of conventional member checking, I have used research presentations at national and international workshops and conferences as opportunities to

discuss the trustworthiness of my interpretations with scholars and practitioners, native as well as non-native to Russia.⁷⁸ Two concrete marks where the dissertation has benefitted from the encounters: First, an aspiration to de-essentialize Russia and its foreign political behavior. Russia is far from a homogenous nation-state, resembling more a patchwork of members belonging to various different ethnic, religious, political, and economic groups. Second, sustained encouragement to draw on Russian literature classics to read, write, and present my interpretations to convey the meaning-making processes in an authentic manner.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the historical interpretivist research strategy guiding the inquiry. At this point, it should be clear that meaning-making is central to my inquiry into Russian foreign policy. Russian custodian said, decided, and acted as they did in Kosovo and Ukraine in a manner that was meaningful to them in that specific spatiotemporal setting. Elucidating those meaning-making processes is the primary aim of this inquiry.

Unlike a researcher methodologically committed to a dualist conception of the knowledge–knower relationship, I have designed this inquiry from a monist one. Thus, I reject the existence of a divide between researcher and researched to be overcome in order to produce scientific knowledge-claims. Contrarily, I argue that the creation of trustworthy knowledge claims requires the researcher’s exposure to the agents situated in settings of interest. The findings are neither universally “true” nor generalizable to other contexts. The interpretations mirror the encounters between the researcher—with personal, social, economic values, and predispositions—and researched past.

To access these meaning-making processes, the bulk of the body of sources consists of Russian primary sources gathered from day-to-day readings of central Russian newspapers. Besides central newspapers, I gathered transcripts and digests of Russian radio, TV, and less central newspapers to ensure sufficient exposure to the polyphony of Russian voices in the inner dialogues initiated by Russo–Western encounters.

⁷⁸ Thanks for the many insightful comments made by participants at the *European International Studies Association’s Annual Conference* in Barcelona (2017), *International Studies Associations Annual Conference* in San Francisco (2018), and *Narrating Russian and Eurasian Security* workshop sponsored by British International Studies Association (2018). Particular thanks to participants and colleagues in workshops and presentations hosted by the *Aarhus Seminars in Russian Studies* at Aarhus University.

With the theoretical lens adjusted and the research strategy tailored to the examination of Russian meaning-making, I move on to the empirical part of the dissertation. In the following Chapter 3, I start with an in-depth study of Russia's military intervention in Kosovo before moving on to the in-depth study of Russian intervention in Ukraine in the subsequent Chapter 4.

Part II: Reconstructing and Translating the “Russian Self”



Having constructed the theoretical and methodical underpinnings of my inquiry into the post-Soviet “Russian Self,” I now proceed to this second part of the dissertation. This part consists of two in-depth studies of the reconstruction and translation of the Russian Self before, during, and after “Official Russia” intervened militarily in Kosovo and Ukraine.

Chapter 3: The Kosovo Crisis

There are two paths: either to stop it [the Kosovo crisis] using political methods or to fight—put your greatcoat on and forward you march. There is a choice, but I don't think that we, Russians, need to choose that path.
—Viktor Chernomyrdin, June 4, 1999⁷⁹

We were now in the post-Chernomyrdin phase of Russian engagement in Kosovo, and the real defenders of Russia's national interest were now back in charge.
—Aleksandr A. Avdeyev, June 9, 1999⁸⁰

The two quotes above from President Boris Yeltsin's Special Envoy to the Balkans, Viktor Chernomyrdin, and Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr A. Avdeyev, respectively, highlight two central features of the Russian military intervention in Kosovo. First, the Kosovo crisis placed the "Russian Self" at a crossroads by imposing a fundamental dilemma on its custodianship. Either Russia could decide to engage the "Western Other" diplomatically—thereby complying to the Western Other, the critics argued—or use military force and risking escalating a serious crisis into a devastating war—but finally daring to authentically standing up to the Western Other.

The Avdeyev quote offers testimony regarding the tipping point in the Kosovo intervention. The decision to militarily intervene represents one of the most crucial tipping points in the post-Soviet reconstruction of the Russian Self, the translation of Russian Self into Official Russian foreign policy, and more fundamentally its quest for ontological security. In this chapter, I argue that the intervention in Kosovo manifests a rite of passage for the Russian Self, a passage from reconstructing the Russian Self along the vision for revival of post-Soviet greatness *because of* the Western Other to a vision for revival *in spite of* the Western Other. Whereas Chernomyrdin personified a vision for

⁷⁹ "Russian Balkans envoy indignant over Duma deputies' criticism of peace plan," *NTV*, June 4, 1999.

⁸⁰ US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott recalling Avdeyev's admonition from a meeting with Prime Minister Sergey V. Stepashin on June 9, 1999 in Moscow (Talbott, 2002, p. 334).

the revival of Russian greatness *because of*, Aleksandr Avdeyev (alongside General Leonid G. Ivashov) personified a *post-Chernomyrdin* vision for revival of post-Soviet Russian Self *in spite* of the Western Other.

This chapter has three aims. First, identifying whose and how senses of ontological insecurity rendered military intervention meaningful in Kosovo. Second, whose and how visions of the Russian Self were reconstructed before, during, and after the military intervention. Here, I pay special analytical attention to how contestations and commonplaces develop in the inner Russian dialogue about what defines an authentic sense of Russian Self. Third, how reconstructed visions of the Russian Self translated into the foreign policy of Official Russia.

Setting the Scene

At around 2AM, *CNN* live-broadcasted columns of Russian armored vehicles rushing toward Kosovo on June 12, 1999.⁸¹ Militarily intervening, Russia violated the agreement with NATO to simultaneously occupy Kosovo at 05:00 hours same day (M. Jackson, 2008, p. 316). At dawn, *CNN* journalist Jim Clancy reported from the provincial capital of Kosovo, Pristina, that the “situation is sheer madness, [this] has awakened the entire city.”⁸² The painted NATO-acronym KFOR (Kosovo FORce) was still visibly fresh on the armored Russian vehicles rushing through cheering crowds of Serbs, who were greeting the troops as liberators.

A few hours earlier, US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott’s delegation had just taken off from Moscow. The delegation was in a good mood, having concluded several tough rounds of negotiations with their Russian counterparts about the joint occupation of Kosovo. However, the mood changed dramatically half an hour into the flight. US National Security Advisor Sandy Berger notified Talbott that the Russian part of SFOR (Stabilization FORce) in Bosnia was presumably dashing toward Kosovo. Talbott ordered the plane to turn around to resume negotiations with his Russian counterparts (Talbott, 2002, p. 337). To the great amusement of the Russian press and custodians, Talbott had made a U-turn back to Moscow just like former Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny M. Primakov had done on March 23 the same year, after US

⁸¹ The Russian troop contingent consisted of approximately 250 soldiers in 16 armored vehicles and 16 trucks (W. K. Clark, 2002, p. 378; M. Jackson, 2008, p. 317).

⁸² “NATO peacekeepers pour into Kosovo,” *CNN*, June 12, 1999: <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/europe/9906/12/kosovo.03/> (accessed November 20, 2018).

Vice President Al Gore told him that NATO would initiate Operation Allied Freedom and commence an air campaign against Serbia.⁸³

The freshly painted KFOR and Talbott's confidence in the agreement reached were two of the many indications that the Russian decision to intervene militarily was rather impulsive. Consequently, speculation about whether the Russian military had acted independently quickly spread throughout the Russian and international media. To this date, the exact Russian decision-making process preceding the intervention remains unclear, also with respect to who gave the explicit order.⁸⁴

Especially after Russian Foreign Minister Igor S. Ivanov called the military intervention an "unfortunate mistake" in a live *CNN* interview shortly after

⁸³ An example of a contemporary Russian source describing Strobe Talbott's U-turn, see "Paratroopers occupy Pristina airport, to NATO's consternation," *Sevodnya*, Natalya Kalashnikova & Andrey Smirnov, June 14, 1999. For a recent testimony of the symbolic importance of Primakov's U-turn during the Kosovo crisis, see *Rossiya 1*-interview with Sergey Lavrov ("Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview for the Rossiya 1 television network documentary entitled 'My mind is set: Yevgeny Primakov'," *International Affairs*, November 7, 2016: <http://en.interaffairs.ru/lavrov/637-foreign-minister-sergey-lavrovs-interview-for-the-rossiya-1-television-network-documentary-entitled-my-mind-is-set-yevgeny-primakov-moscow-october-31-2016.html> (accessed November 15, 2018).

⁸⁴ According to interviews between Head of Ingushetia Yunus-bek Yevkurov and, respectively, *Kommersant* and *Vesti.ru*, Yevkurov was awarded Russia's highest honorary title, "Hero of the Russian Federation," for taking control of the Slatina Air Base together with a group of Russian GRU-specialists in late May 1999 (<http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=265963>, accessed October 19, 2018). According to Yevkurov, the operation had been planned a month in advance. According to a contemporary article in *Kommersant*—dated July 1, 1999—the motive for seizing the airbase was to prevent NATO from gaining access to sophisticated technology and underground layers (<https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/221250>, accessed October 19, 2018). This is backed by another *Kommersant*-article (dated June 9, 1999) claiming the plan came together in collaboration with Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic May 28, 1999. According to General Ivashov, the decision to dash to Slatina was taken "after the disruption of negotiations with the Americans who were trying to impose on Russia discriminating terms of participation in the peacekeeping operation in the Balkans" ("General Ivashov: Decision to deploy Russian airborne battalion in Kosovo was correct," *Pravda.Ru*, June 11, 2003). The "operation was sanctioned by the then Russian President Boris Yeltsin." The decision was based on reports made by the Defense and Foreign Ministries, who "envisaged the deployment of a Russian peacekeeping contingent simultaneously with NATO troops if NATO refused to recognize Russia as an equal partner in the Kosovo settlement," Ivashov stressed.

the Russian incursion into Kosovo, reassuring that Russian peacemakers had already been “ordered to leave Kosovo immediately and to await further orders.”⁸⁵ Despite Ivanov’s reassurance, the Russian troops did not withdraw and occupied Slatina Airbase outside of Pristina later that morning.

Clancy’s description of the situation in Kosovo as “sheer madness” was symptomatic for how officials in the Russian and Western capitals experienced June 12, 1999. What followed in the early morning hours of June 12—when NATO forces made contact with the Russian troops—represents the closest Russia and the West had been to direct military confrontation since the Cold War. Former Soviet officer, politician, and scholar Aleksey G. Arbatov notes that:

For the first time since the mid-1980s, within operational departments of the General Staff and Armed Forces, the Security Council, and Foreign Ministry crisis management groups, and in closed sessions of the *Duma*, serious discussions took place concerning military conflict with NATO (Arbatov, 2000, p. 9).

About the seriousness of the situation, now famous pop singer James Blunt recalls—then commander of a column of British paratroopers encountering the occupying Russians firsthand—from Slatina Airbase:

We had 200 Russians lined up pointing their weapons at us aggressively [...] and you know we’d been told to reach the airfield and take a hold of it. [...] there was a political reason to take hold of this. And the practical consequences of that political reason would then be aggression against the Russians.⁸⁶

Russian President Boris N. Yeltsin later recalled the incident in his memoir. To Yeltsin, the escalation of the Kosovo crisis represents the “most serious crisis in relations between Russia and the West in nearly twenty years” and compared the standoff with the Cuban Missile Crisis (2000, p. 346). On June 22, 1999, President Yeltsin’s Press Secretary Dmitry Yakushkin said in a radio interview to *Ekho Moskvy* that Russia and the West “reached the point of new, virtually military contact for the first time, contact between military contingents.”⁸⁷

⁸⁵ “Russian troops enter Kosovo: Moscow orders them to leave,” *CNN*, Jim Clancy, John King & Jill Dougherty, June 11, 1999: <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/europe/9906/11/kosovo.08/> (accessed October 18, 2018).

⁸⁶ “Singer James Blunt prevented World War III,” *BBC*, November 14, 2010: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-11753050> (accessed October 18, 2018).

⁸⁷ Dmitry Yakushkin in ‘Yeltsin’s press secretary says G8 relieved that “trouble” averted over Kosovo’, *Ekho Moskvy*, June 22, 1999.

From Supreme Allied Commander Wesley Clark and British KFOR Commander Mike Jackson's memoirs, we know that a military solution to breaking the Russian occupation was on the table. General Clark ordered Jackson to seize the airport using military force if necessary. Jackson refused the order on the grounds that he would not be responsible for starting "World War Three." Instead, working together with local Russian commander Colonel General Viktor M. Zavarzin, Jackson managed to de-escalate the local tensions at the airbase (M. Jackson, 2008, pp. 333-334). While Clark's order may seem drastic retrospectively, one needs to recall how the Russian dash took the USA and NATO by surprise.⁸⁸ Puzzled by why and who would order Russian troops to move on Kosovo—ahead of planned joint entry the same day—Western decision-makers were perplexed by the intervention.⁸⁹

Just two days before the intervention, Russia and the USA had finally agreed on adopting Resolution 1244 in the UN Security Council on June 10. The resolution mandated the occupation of Kosovo by international peacekeepers under NATO command from June 12, 05:00 hours. However, the peacekeeping operation had to be within the realm of the United Nations (UN), as Russia had insisted from the onset of crisis. From an outside perspective, the Russian actions seemed both risky and counterintuitive. Why adopt an UN-sanctioned resolution just to violate it before the ink was dry two days later?

On June 18, the crisis was effectively resolved with the Helsinki Agreement, concluded between the USA and Russia. Russia did not get its own sector, but "zones of responsibility" within the German, American, and French sectors in Kosovo.⁹⁰ The Russian troop contingent would be responsible for the management of Slatina Airbase and not under direct NATO command.

Despite the lack of significant Western concessions, the Russian Defense Minister, General Staff, Foreign Minister, and President were all very pleased with the agreement and downplayed the necessity of a separate Russian sector:

⁸⁸ For a detailed inside account of how key Western decision-makers reacted to the news about the Russian dash to Pristina, see Wesley Clark's *Waging Modern War* (2002: Chapter 15, particularly p. 389–403).

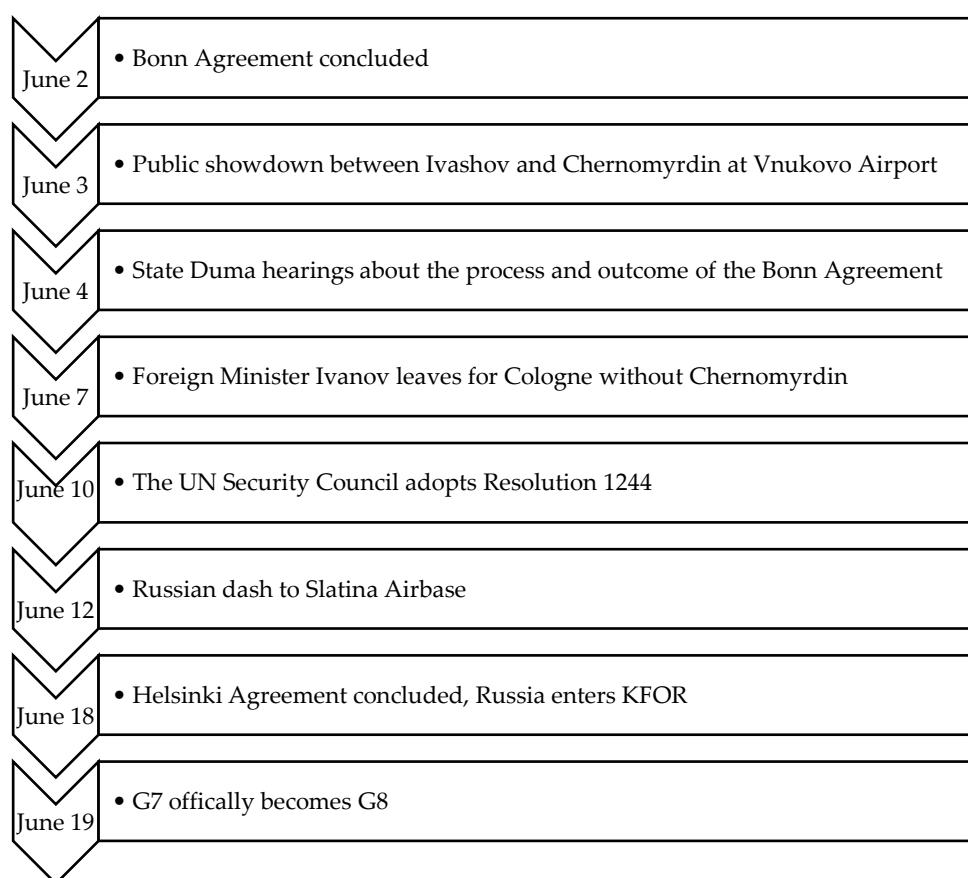
⁸⁹ Mike Jackson writes US president Bill Clinton should allegedly have been "stunned by the development" in Kosovo (2008, p. 329).

⁹⁰ "Agreed Points on Russian Participation in KFOR," *NATO*, June 18, 1999: <https://www.nato.int/kosovo/docu/a990618a.htm> (accessed November 20, 2018).

We should not make [providing a separate] sector a panacea necessary for Russia to be fully satisfied [...]. I think it is hard to imagine a better outline to jointly perform the tasks and to be in key positions in Kosovo.⁹¹

The outcome of the Helsinki Agreement only makes the Russian intervention more puzzling. Russia did not gain any significant US or NATO concessions after its “dash to Pristina” compared to what it had already achieved with the Bonn Agreement (concluded June 2). The most significant difference between the Bonn and Helsinki agreements was that Russia would have to self-finance a considerably larger share of its military presence in KFOR compared to the Russian troops within SFOR, sponsored by UN and NATO.

Figure 6: Timeline for the Kosovo crisis



While the obvious material gains from Official Russia’s dash to Slatina are hard to identify, the obvious adverse economic and military impacts of the Russian military intervention are significant. After the intervention, the Russian government had to allocate considerable funding to the Russian Armed Forces at a time when the Russian economy was on the brink of total collapse,

⁹¹ “Russian defence minister satisfied with arrangements for Kosovo force,” *NTV*, June 22, 1999.

heavily dependent on the renewal of loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). As regards military security, at the time of the intervention, Russia was participating in the international peacekeeping mission SFOR in Bosnia and Herzegovina together with NATO. Prior to its intervention, Russia was increasingly perceived as a status-quo oriented state in contrast to the chronic revisionism ascribed to the Soviet era.⁹² After intervention, Russia once again attracted negative attention and scrutiny from hawks in Washington and NATO, who were left asking themselves whether the Russian bear had finally awoken. Interestingly, Russia had created rather than diffused a potential military threat as a consequence of its intervention. In short, from a conventional material security perspective, the Russian actions seemed both risky and counterproductive—if not outright *irrational*.

However—turning to the Russian insider perspective—contemporary Russian source material indicates that the Russian custodians and decision-makers saw intervention as more than a meaningful act to counter the ontological threat manifested by the Western other. As *BBC* Moscow Correspondent Rob Parsons understood the security problem from Moscow, a significant consequence of the NATO air campaign against Serbia was that:

Now Russia feels insecure again—aware of its weakness and nervous of NATO’s growing strength [...]. The Cold War is over, but Russia may never have been more dangerous. A nuclear giant, its pride had been badly hurt.⁹³

While intervention manifests a response to an ontological threat against the Russian Self, intervention simultaneously provoked a reconstruction of the Russian Self toward an alternative and more authentic vision.

From an ideational perspective, the most significant gain was that, in General Jackson’s own words, by standing up for itself Russia’s dash was a “reminder that the Russians were still players on the world stage, that they still needed to be treated with respect” (2008, p. 332). On June 25, Russian Defense Minister Igor D. Sergeyev similarly argued that intervention had “checked our understanding of Russia’s role and place in Europe at the global

⁹² Examples of studies based on Russian foreign policy as inherently revisionist: Nathan Leites’ *The Operational Code* (1951) and *A Study of Bolshevism* (1953), Jack L. Snyder’s “The Soviet Strategic Culture” (1977), Henrikki Heikka’s *Beyond the Cult of the Offensive* (2000), Mette Skak’s “Russia’s New ‘Monroe Doctrine’” (2011) and “Russian Strategic Culture” (2016) as well as Elias Götz’s *Russia’s Quest for Regional Hegemony* (2013).

⁹³ “NATO is new Russian Enemy,” *BBC*, Rob Parsons, July 6, 1999: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/386725.stm> (accessed November 20, 2018).

political level [and] our views considered here.”⁹⁴ Once again, General Ivashov concludes, intervention was decisive for “the fate of Russia and its future position in the world and Europe.”⁹⁵ Chernomyrdin—who had originally been strongly against intervention—stated that intervention had secured Russia’s presence in the Balkans and demonstrated that “no problems must be solved without it.”⁹⁶ According to Chernomyrdin, a significant positive outcome of the Russian actions was that “a dignified future in the family of European nations” was secured.⁹⁷

According to one Russian journalist, the unpredictability Russia had demonstrated to NATO was that it was “too early to consider the Russian army helpless.” Additionally, the NATO airstrikes and neglect of Russian interests “made a sobering impact” on those parts of the elites who had earlier fraternized “with America [...] and underestimated their obvious bid to become an international gendarme.”⁹⁸

Russian decision-makers did not seem to fear any NATO threat to Russia’s material security or that intervention had any military significance. Retrospectively elaborating on the intentions behind the order to intervene, Yeltsin said intervention was a

crowning gesture, even if it had no military significance. Russia had not permitted itself to be defeated in the moral sense [...]. The last gesture was a sign of our moral victory in the face of the enormous NATO military, all of Europe, and the whole world (Yeltsin, 2000, p. 266).

The intervention was important to the Russian sense of National Self, as it was the first time since the end of the Cold War that Russia dared to put its proverbial foot down against the Western Other. By doing so, Russia had more clearly than before demarcated its Russian Self from Western Other—hence, signaling that Russia was something distinctively different from what the USA and NATO thought it was. Russia’s intervention established a demarcation between the Russian Self and Western Other, which was porous before intervention. The Kosovo crisis brought existentialist questions forward regarding the

⁹⁴ “Russian defence minister happy with decision on peacekeepers for Kosovo,” *ITAR-TASS*, June 25, 1999.

⁹⁵ “Senior general expects Russian zone in Kosovo to expand,” *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, June 25, 1999.

⁹⁶ “Yeltsin’s envoy on Yugoslavia says Russia must be present in the Balkans,” *ITAR-TASS*, June 25, 1999.

⁹⁷ “Russia will never be ‘closed country’ again—envoy,” *ITAR-TASS*, June 23, 1999.

⁹⁸ “Russian TV links current military exercise to worsening relations with NATO,” *TV Centre*, June 22, 1999.

contestations and commonplaces between the multiple visions for post-Soviet Russian Self.

Nezavisimaya Gazeta most clearly addressed this question of a lack of national unity the very day before the Russian dash to Slatina, which was ironically undertaken on post-Soviet Russia's Independence Day.⁹⁹ In the article, Russian scholars explain why Independence Day never became the unifying holiday parts of the Russian political elite had hoped. According to Sergey A. Karaganov, who had actively participated in debates about Russian national identity since the early 1990s, the day was not something to commemorate, but marked the day "another state, which was then Russia" collapsed. Post-Soviet Russia was still going through a search for its post-Soviet national identity; hence, it remained contested what to celebrate. More than being a day of national unification, Independence Day was an annual cause of frustration over the lack of a clear sense of national belonging or a day to grieve the banished former Soviet Self.

Andranik Migranyan, vice president of the International Fund for Economic and Social Reforms, similarly noted that June 12 symbolized a great tragedy more than a holiday. Independence Day represented "a radical break with the past in Russia" on one side and a "chaotic and unclear and very disturbing future" on the other.¹⁰⁰ From "whom, from what?" had Russia become independent, General Director of the Center for Political Technologies Igor M. Bunin critically asked.¹⁰¹

That which the interpretations of the meaning of Independence Day presented above share in common is that instead of looking toward a brighter future, they argue that Russians nostalgically look back at a seemingly golden Soviet past. In June 1999, Russians found themselves in a meaningless limbo left with "absolutely neutral colors and concepts that just do not cause either love or hate" and torn between Soviet nostalgia and an uncertain future lacking appealing visions for the Russian Self.

Observations made by French scholar Dominique Moïsi during a visit to Moscow in the spring of 1999 support this interpretation. During his visit, Moïsi participated in various meetings with members of the Russian State Duma, government, and Federation Council. Based on these firsthand encounters with Russian custodians and elites, Moïsi concluded that the Kosovo crisis played a central role in a more fundamental Russian

⁹⁹ "День независимости в России не прижился [Independence Day never found its place in Russia]," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, June 11, 1999.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

identity quest, a search for status and clout. It reflects the difficult period of transition it [post-Soviet Russia] is undergoing, from a feared and central superpower to a chaotic and marginalised, decaying empire, desperately searching to become a more “normal” country.¹⁰²

I argue and demonstrate below that the Bonn Agreement represents a concrete crossroads in this otherwise diffuse quest for a more authentic—hence, ontologically secure—Russian Self.¹⁰³ Russian custodians could either develop the Russian Self along the path toward further integration into a Western way of life and embedding itself further into assigned roles and rules of the game in an existing world order. Alternatively, custodians could reconstruct the Russian Self in the direction of a more independent Russian role, which aligned with their vision for an authentic Russian Self.

The existing sense of ontological insecurity felt among those members of the Russian custodianship who envisioned a sense of Self not aligning with the Western Other heightened significantly with the conclusion of the Bonn Agreement. To them, Bonn manifest a deceive step along the path of realizing a vision for the Russian Self becoming increasingly irrelevant and, even more than before, a mere shadow of its former Soviet Self. Consequently, General Ivashov publicly denounced the agreement brokered by Chernomyrdin, thereby reigniting the latent sense of ontological insecurity felt among other members of the Russian custodianship. Particularly among those in the Russian political opposition, the Russian media, and even among senior public servants within the Russian state apparatus itself.

From intervention onwards, the Russian Self embarked on a quest toward realizing a future vision increasingly distinct from the Western Other. However—and this is important—not freezing relations with the Western Other, but renegotiating roles and rules embedded in the existing Russo–Western relations. Intervening, the Russian Self and the Official Russia representing it changed dramatically.¹⁰⁴ On such changes to the Russian Self and Official Russia, Jeffrey Mankoff notes that Russian

¹⁰² “Russia’s search for identity,” *Financial Times*, Dominique Moïsi, May 31, 1999: <http://www.russialist.org/archives/3321.html##9> (accessed November 26, 2018).

¹⁰³ The term “crossroads” appeared in a contemporary article titled “Мир на перепутье [The World at a Crossroads]” in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (June 11, 1999).

¹⁰⁴ Here, I partially disagree with Robert H. Donaldson and Joseph L. Noguee’s analysis of the Kosovo crisis. I agree that it “revealed the fault lines between Russia and the West,” but disagree with the conclusion that the crisis “revealed Yeltsin’s determination to keep Russia as a partner rather than as an adversary to the United States and Europe” (Donaldson and Noguee, 2009, p. 266).

elite opinion about the scope and content of Russia's national interest has changed substantially since the early 1990s. Calls for full-scale integration with the West [...] have become rarer (Mankoff, 2012, p. 62).

The Kosovo crisis represents a unique window of opportunity for fundamentally reconstructing what some members of the Russian custodianship envisioned as an authentic sense of Russian Self. The crisis facilitated a tangible frame to discuss issues of national identity, the Russian sense of belonging, which otherwise stood in the background in everyday Russian life.

In the coming in-depth study of intervention in Kosovo, I argue that intervention tilted this development in the direction of the Western-skeptical factions in the Russian custodianship. Those who had long argued the West was merely treating Russia as a second-rank great power—nothing more than a “mail man” for narrow Western interests—found themselves with a unique opportunity to undermine what they perceived as an authentic vision for the Russian Self. The factions wanting Russia to leave the Western orbit thus found themselves with a louder and more credible voice than at any time since the end of the Cold War (e.g., Trenin, 2006). Supporting this interpretation, Yegor T. Gaidar testifies to Strobe Talbott during the crisis:

Oh Strobe, if only you knew what a disaster this war is for those of us in Russia who want for our country what you want (Gaidar in Talbott, 2002, p. 307).

Bomb by bomb, NATO's Operation Allied Freedom had undermined the legitimacy of the narrative representations constructed and proliferated by the parts of the Russian custodianship who wanted to draw Russia closer to the center of the Western orbit in world politics.¹⁰⁵ Those in the Russian elite who had preached for closer Russo–Western collaboration found it increasingly challenging to proliferate a narrative of Russia and the West being equally independent and operating under same rules.

Yabloko Faction Leader Grigory A. Yavlinsky's explanation to Strobe Talbott testifies to the increased hardship of gaining support for a vision of the Russian Self in alignment with the Western Other. Yavlinsky explains how:

Your bombs may land on the Serbs, but there will be a fatal dose of fallout on those in Russian politics who most want Russia to be part of the West. Think about that irony! (Yavlinsky in Talbott, 2002, p. 301).

¹⁰⁵ Similarly, Jack Snyder observes firm Western stances toward the Soviet Union in contexts where “defensively motivated moves [cannot be distinguished] from offensive ones,” the efforts of Soviet doves trying to reduce the influence of hardliners on Soviet foreign policy were effectively undermined (Snyder, 1991, p. 254).

Similarly, Talbott concludes that Kosovo became a “substation of all the Russians’ reasons for fearing NATO and opposing its expansion.” Expectedly, Russian communists and nationalists “shook their fists,” but even “relative sanguine” liberals started to “wring their hands” in the wake of NATO’s air campaign (2002, p. 301). In short, the intervention became a turning point away from Russia as a liberal great power¹⁰⁶ and closer toward a Gromykin vision¹⁰⁷ of “no problems must be solved without Russia.”¹⁰⁸

The intervention in Kosovo dealt a devastating blow to Russia’s liberal-minded custodians from “the Soviet past [showing that] old mental stereotypes still guide[d] the vision of most of her politicians,” as Russian scholar Vladimir Brovkin (1999) concluded.¹⁰⁹ After the crisis, the non-liberal parts of the Russian custodianship had reconstructed a sense of Russian Self echoing visions from the Soviet past louder than since the end of the Cold War.¹¹⁰ As summarized by Arbatov in a contemporary policy report,

Kosovo reserved these trends [conformity with the UN Charter, compliance with international law, growing partnership between Russia and NATO etc. throughout the 1990s]. Once again, Russia perceives NATO as its primary defense concern for the foreseeable future (Arbatov, 2000: 1–2).

¹⁰⁶ For a contemporary Russian source on the turn away from the liberal vision, see “Cologne is History; Next Year—Okinawa,” *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, Nikolai Paklin, June 22, 1999.

¹⁰⁷ This is a reference to Soviet Foreign Minister Andrey A. Gromyko (1909–1989) who famously said “There is not a single important issue that today can be solved without or in spite of the Soviet Union.” Thanks to Igor Zevelev for enlightening me about the similarity between the intentions of the Russian General Staff and Gromyko’s foreign political thinking in 1999 (Meeting at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, May 15, 2017).

¹⁰⁸ “The Man Behind “Mr. No,” *The Washington Post*, Leonid Mlechin, June 24, 2009: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-adv/advertisers/russia/articles/features/20090624/the_man_behind_mr_no.html (accessed November 26, 2018).

¹⁰⁹ Similarly, Aleksey G. Arbatov noted that the crisis “caused an overwhelming vote for hard-line [sic] politicians and nationalists parties in both the parliamentary elections of December 1999 and the presidential elections of March 2000 (Arbatov, 2000, p. 3).

¹¹⁰ In *Reinventing Russia*, Yitzhak Brudny demonstrates how Russia’s post-Soviet liberal-democrats, like their historical predecessors, failed to develop a coherent “ideology of liberal nationalism that could legitimize the democratic form of government, a market economy, and nonimperial borders of the Russian State,” effectively leaving the task of defining a post-Soviet national identity to Russia’s non-liberal elites (Brudny, 1998, p. 261).

The different paths at the crossroads manifested by Chernomyrdin and Ivashov reflected a more fundamental dilemma in post-Soviet Russian society. The reconstructed Russian Self emerging from the Kosovo crisis translated into a foreign policy of Official Russia where the “the great dreams of post-Cold War integration, partnership, and even strategic alliances of the early 1990s” are hard to see revived (Arbatov, 2000, p. VII). As Samuel Charap and Timothy J. Colton (2017) argue in *Everyone Loses*, the current antagonistic Russo–Western relations are rooted in an inability to settle the conflicting expectations and visions elucidated in the 1990s with respect to the rules and roles for interaction between Russia and the West.

Having outlined the main currents of the plot and my main interpretations of the process and outcome of Russia’s intervention in Kosovo, the scene is set for the in-depth analysis empirically demonstrating whose and how claims of the Western Others’ unilateral actions and double standards found their way into how current Russian custodianship and decision-makers make sense of Russo–Western relations in terms of their senses and policies of national belonging to specific visions of the Russian Self fundamentally reconstructed during the Kosovo crisis. As I show below, the Kosovo crisis is a hallmark in understanding how visions for the Russian Self developed as well as how they subsequently translated into the disruptive foreign policy of Official Russia, currently materializing itself in more or less covert ways.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ The Kosovo crisis did not solely trigger the contestations between Russian voices in June 1999. Already at the outset of the Yugoslav War in 1992, Russian Foreign Minister Andrey V. Kozyrev offered outsiders to Russian society an example of how Western interference in the former Yugoslavia influenced the political climate in Russia in his famous “mock speech” at the Stockholm CSCE summit. Kozyrev’s speech was intended to provide a “firmly accurate compilation of the demands of the opposition, and not just the most radical opposition, in Russia [...] bringing home the danger of an alternative course of events” (Kozyrev in Altermatt, 1993, p. 7). In 1996, Yevgeny Primakov replaced Kozyrev as foreign minister. Kozyrev’s “Strategy for Partnership,” in which he stresses Russia’s need for “conducting a policy that pursues her national and state interests through interaction and partnership with the West” (1994), was replaced with Primakovian NATO skepticism. Particularly, Primakov saw claims of protecting human rights as a Western means to pursue illegitimate political ends in “International Relations on the Eve of the 21st Century” (1996). Where Kozyrev envisioned Russia closing its “institutional gap” to the surrounding world being part of a multipolar world consisting of democratic states based on mutual core values and intensive collaboration within the UN, OSCE, G8, and even NATO, Primakov envisioned Russia as part of a multipolar world. With Russo–Western relations based on “equal partnerships” in the OSCE and UN, but deliberately omitted mutually shared core values.

Reconstructing the “Russian Self” in Kosovo

The aim of this section is outlining and interpreting the reconstruction process Russian Self went through before, during, and after military intervention in Kosovo. Particularly, how key commonplaces and contestations—between different visions of Russian Self—devolved as the inner dialogue among Russian custodians proceeded. Additionally, I devote special analytical focus to identify the specific custodians voicing senses of ontological insecurity and how these senses of insecurity eventually rendered military intervention meaningful in Kosovo.

Encountering “Self”: From Bonn Agreement to “Dash to Slatina” (June 2–11, 1999)

On the Russian evening news on June 2, *TASS* journalist Tamara Zamyatina reports that a substantial split has emerged between the civilian and military parts of the Russian delegation in Bonn. Zamyatina reports:

The military has stated that, by signing these agreements, Russia has essentially removed the UN from fulfilling its peacekeeping role, handed over the solution of the Kosovo problem directly to NATO generals, and thereby violated the principles laid down in Russia’s position on the resolution of the Kosovo crisis.¹¹²

What started as allegations became evident the following day at a joint press conference in Moscow’s Vnukovo International Airport. Here, Lieutenant General Leonid Ivashov—Chief of the Main Directorate of International Military Cooperation of the Russian Defense Ministry—directly contradicts the statement given by President Yeltsin’s Special Envoy to the Balkans, Viktor Chernomyrdin, minutes earlier.

On live television, Ivashov explicitly declares the dissatisfaction of the Russian Military with the Bonn Agreement. According to Ivashov, the Russian military is

deeply dissatisfied with the many conditional aspects that were mentioned during the process of reaching the agreements. [...] much is still unclear [and] much depends today on the scrupulousness of our partners in the political settlement process.¹¹³

¹¹² “Disagreements reported inside Russian delegation at Kosovo talks,” *NTV*, Tamara Zamyatina, June 2, 1999.

¹¹³ “Russian envoy upbeat on Balkans peace but general casts doubt,” *NTV*, June 3, 1999.

From Ivashov's statement, we learn that the dissatisfaction of the military is caused by both the process and outcome of the negotiations in Bonn. According to Strobe Talbott's depiction of the negotiations preceding the Bonn Agreement, the rift between Chernomyrdin and Ivashov had grown deeper and increasingly irreconcilable as negotiations reached an end. During the negotiations on the night between June 1 and 2, Talbott overheard Chernomyrdin yell and curse at Ivashov in an intense argument. According to Talbott, Chernomyrdin shouted, "I'm not anybody's puppet! You assholes [the military part of the Russian delegation] can do this thing without me!" (Talbott, 2002, p. 325).

The public showdown between Chernomyrdin and Ivashov is of interest for several reasons. First, that a senior member of the Russian military publicly expressed open contempt for an agreement concluded by the leader of a delegation personally appointed by President Yeltsin testifies to the weak civilian control of the Russian military in 1999.¹¹⁴ As a Russian *NTV* journalist noted after the showdown:

It was an unprecedented event. A representative of the General Staff, who is our main military diplomat, expressed his own opinion while standing right next to Chernomyrdin [...]. When the military start interfering in politics, it means that the authorities are extremely weak.¹¹⁵

Kommersant journalist Gennady Sysoev writes what most Russians believe would be the outcome of Ivashov's scene: early retirement. That Ivashov criticized Chernomyrdin was not so alarming, but the indirect criticism of "the commander in chief [can] only a pensioner allow oneself," Sysoev concludes.¹¹⁶ In the days following the showdown, the confidence in Ivashov being

¹¹⁴ There are several excellent books on this topic. In the existing literature, Russia's dash to Slatina has primarily been interpreted as the result of an apparent breakdown of delegation and civilian control in a weak Russian state (e.g., Norris, 2005, Chapter 10). Considering the more or less autonomous behavior of the Russian defense ministry across the post-Soviet space throughout the 1990s and retrospective testimonies by members of the then Russian government (e.g., then Secretary of the Russian Security Council Vladimir V. Putin and Prime Minister Sergey V. Stepashin), it is plausible that the Russian military acted more unitarily than otherwise. Then Foreign Minister Igor S. Ivanov confided to Talbott that the Russian government would "tighten its control over the military" considering how events had unfolded in June, 1999 (Talbott, 2002, p. 345).

¹¹⁵ "Russian general's Kosovo complaints point to path of dictatorship," *NTV*, June 6, 1999.

¹¹⁶ "Российские генералы против мира в Югославии [Russian generals against the peace in Yugoslavia]," *Kommersant*, Gennady Sysoev, June 5, 1999.

on his way out of the delegation increases while at the same time the support for Chernomyrdin's less hawkish "common sense" approach strengthens.

Second, besides being an unprecedented event in Russian politics, Ivashov's criticism reignites the debate about the authenticity of the role Russia had played in Serbia vis-à-vis USA/NATO as well as how this role reflects Russia's seemingly waning influence and relevance in world politics more fundamentally. The sense of ontological insecurity Ivashov expresses at the airport press interview originates from anxiety caused by a perceived lack of symmetry and mutual recognition of the independence of the Russian Self from a distinctly different Western Other.

The Bonn Agreement elucidates the reduction of post-Soviet Russia to an object of NATO's subjection of the Balkans and—as the following inner dialogue among Russian voices reveals—eventually the Russian Self itself. Concluding the Bonn Agreement, Russia not only demotes its own role from that of an equal great power to a subordinate second-rate power, but it contributes to the Western Other's gradual engulfment of the Russian Self. If not directly encouraged, Chernomyrdin has not even tried to prevent further "Balkanization," which would ultimately target Russia.

Balkanization became a predominant and important concept in the contemporary inner Russian debate. Balkanization denotes an interpretation of the Kosovo crisis as an initial step in a grand American strategy to dominate the area of the former Soviet Union; domination installed via the destabilization of states and entire regions by turning ethnic and religious minorities against each other to weaken these states and regions sufficiently to exploit them and provide reason for unilaterally intervening in these. The concept appeared for the first time in "Европа переосмысливает войну в Югославии [Europe reconsiders the war in Yugoslavia]," brought by *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* June 4, 1999.

According to the article, NATO's Operation Allied Freedom caused considerable debate not only within but also beyond Russia. In Germany, Belgium, and Italy, politicians have allegedly orchestrated protests against the NATO air campaign. The article notes that a French historian notices a parallel between the air campaign in Kosovo and that of Nazi Germany in Guernica. According to the French historian, the air campaign was a "laboratory experiment to the balkanization of the entire continent and even the world."¹¹⁷ What was going on in the Balkans was comparable to such a show of force.

Returning to Ivashov—Ivashov's statement reflects more than an individual sense of ontological insecurity about the status of the Russian Self.

¹¹⁷ "Европа переосмысливает войну в Югославии [Europe reconsiders the war in Yugoslavia]," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, June 4, 1999.

Ivashov's statement became symptomatic of a fundamental sense of insecurity felt beyond the members of the Russian General Staff. When Ivashov publicly denounces the Bonn Agreement, Ivashov triggers a more fundamental sense of ontological insecurity in the wider group of Russian custodians who felt that Russia had been humiliated and treated like an inferior after the Cold War, which prohibited it from becoming an authentic version of Self. About this post-Soviet sense of humiliation, Dominique Moïsi writes that from being one of two exclusive superpowers,

Russia had become, at least in its own eyes, a mere card in the hands of U.S. diplomats. Making matters worse, its state, its empire, and its army, the three key elements of its national identity, had all imploded at the same time. [The area of the former Soviet Union was] transformed overnight from a source of pride into a source of anxiety (Moïsi, 2009, p. 125).

Consequently, the showdown between Ivashov and Chernomyrdin spread like wildfire across the Russian public sphere. Russian custodians suddenly found themselves standing at a crossroads between two idealized visions of the post-Soviet Russian Self. Depending on which of the two Russian Selves were envisioned as authentic, two markedly different roles and appropriate foreign political responses emerge as meaningful.

If Russian decision-makers decide to break the Bonn Agreement, this implies choosing a path toward reconstructing the Russian Self as a post-Soviet great power *in spite* of the Western Other. However, if deciding to honor the agreement, a future Russian Self increasingly intertwined in its relation with the Western Other will emerge; a Russian Self increasingly reviving itself *because of* the Western Other.

At this point, it is important to note that neither Ivashov nor Chernomyrdin dispute a vision involving the Russian Self on a path toward becoming a great power in the future. Russia reconstructing itself as a great power is beyond all doubt and discussion. The dispute between Ivashov and Chernomyrdin is about what sort of great power Russia should become. The dispute between Ivashov and Chernomyrdin provides a tangible framework for what had until then been an abstract discussion about what meaningfully constitutes the post-Soviet Russian Self.

The day after the showdown, Chernomyrdin explicitly outlines his interpretation of the dilemma facing Russia and the pathway to choose:

There are two paths: either to stop [the Kosovo crisis] using political means or to fight—put on your greatcoat and forward you march. There is a choice, but I don't think that we, Russians, need to choose that path.¹¹⁸

Like Ivashov, Chernomyrdin recognizes that Russia is facing a fundamental choice between two trajectories along which the Russian Self can develop. Besides the great power vision for the Russian Self, another key commonplace in the debate between Chernomyrdin and Ivashov is the Bonn Agreement actually manifests a crossroads for the Russian Self and the foreign political representation hereof in the shape of Official Russia. This interpretation is supported by a statement made by Chernomyrdin on June 23—after settling the occupation of Slatina Airbase—where, retrospectively reflecting on the meaning of the Kosovo crisis, Chernomyrdin concludes that

as never before in the post-war period, acutely raised the question of the contours and principles of the whole European structure [where USA and NATO actions have] created a precedent for direct military interference [...] without the permission of the UN.¹¹⁹

From Chernomyrdin's perspective, Russia faces the choice between intervening on behalf of Serbia against NATO—and, hence, starting what could escalate into a new great war—or stop the bombings by diplomatic means in collaboration with NATO—potentially creating a breakthrough and improving Russo–Western relations significantly.

The diplomatic response Chernomyrdin suggests entail compromises and concessions, but this is not interpreted as a sign of Russian weakness or submission to the intentions of the Western Other. Contrary to Ivashov—and the growing number of critics in the non-liberal opposition in the Russia State Duma and state administration—Chernomyrdin argues that the diplomatic trajectory is neither demoting nor undermining Russia's role in world politics, but rather increasing the international standing and influence of Official Russia by demonstrating its capacity to act as a responsible rising great power. In short, Chernomyrdin argues that the sense of ontological insecurity caused by critics' anxiety of a future Russian Self being demoted to a mere tool in the Western Other's toolbox is unfounded. Chernomyrdin tries to exorcise the critics' anxieties by stating that NATO

¹¹⁸ “Russian Balkans envoy indignant over Duma deputies' criticism of peace plan,” *NTV*, June 4, 1999.

¹¹⁹ “Russian envoy tells Europeans that bombing of Yugoslavia was a mistake,” *ITAR-TASS*, 10, June 23, 1999.

can't ignore Russia. They could ignore Russia, but they would have to waste another two or three months.¹²⁰

In other words, Russia is irreplaceable and anxieties about a future scenario of being engulfed by the Western Other paranoid. Official Russia has already proven its will and ability to successfully negotiate an international agreement with the world's superpower in Bonn. Given the successful outcome of the Bonn negotiations, Chernomyrdin wants to demonstrate that Russia was already on track to realizing the envisioned great power future in world politics.

A great power role free of the saber-rattling characterizing the former Soviet Self. Russia did not have to use a template from the past to reconstruct itself as a post-Soviet great power. The Bonn Agreement was among the most significant advancements in post-Soviet Russia, proving that the tragic spell of the past was broken. The Russian revival did not depend on an antagonistic relationship with the Western Other, as it is instead peacefully concentrating on internal development and favorable relations with Foreign Others, including the Western Other.¹²¹

Ivashov refuses Chernomyrdin's interpretation and explicitly contests the trajectory he envisions for the Russian Self. To Ivashov, Chernomyrdin's way of negotiating with the West is at best naïve and at worst treacherously deceptive. By neglecting to make "the Russian plan the basis for discussion" and

¹²⁰ "Russian Balkans envoy indignant over Duma deputies' criticism of peace plan," *NTV*, June 4, 1999.

¹²¹ Concentration on internal development—as a strategy to revive and reconstruct Russian greatness—dates back to 19th century Russia and the Russian prince Aleksandr M. Gorchakov (1798–1883). In his capacity as foreign minister, Gorchakov famously wrote, "la Russie qui ne boude pas, mais se recueille [Russia is not sulking, Russia is concentrating]" in an instruction to the Russian Empire's ambassadors after the defeat in the Crimean War (1853–1856). Several references to this renowned statement have since resurfaced in statements made by post-Soviet Russian prime ministers and foreign ministers. For a good study tracing the strategic development of Gorchakovian concentration, see Flemming S. Hansen's "Past and Future Meet" (2002). An example of a recent, explicit reference to Gorchakov's "concentration strategy" was in "Russia muscles up—the challenges we must rise to face," published in *Izvestiya*, January 16, 2012. The article was one of seven articles Vladimir V. Putin published in central Russian newspapers in connection to the 2012 Russian Presidential Election. In the article, Putin writes: "We needed, however, gargantuan efforts and resources to lift the country out of that hole, to restore Russia's geopolitical status, to rebuild its social system and revive the economy [...]. Russia is not the kind of nation to shirk a challenge. Russia muscles up, gathers its strength and responds appropriately to any challenge."

being too eager to reach agreement with the USA, Chernomyrdin's "compromise" crossed out the NATO concessions that the military part of the delegation claimed to have secured. By honoring the Bonn Agreement, Russia's future is effectively depending on the "good or evil will of NATO." Whether or not Chernomyrdin's actions were an outright betrayal, Russians had to "deliver a verdict on this in his own heart," as Ivashov concludes on June 4.¹²²

Ivashov's statement about betrayal did not solely manifest a serious accusation against Chernomyrdin, but also a clear rhetorical intensification of an already heated inner dialogue among an increasing number of competing Russian visions for the authentic Russian Self. Interpreting Ivashov's serious accusation against Chernomyrdin in context, already on June 1—the same day Chernomyrdin quite notably tells Ivashov off, according to Talbott's memoir—Ivashov had explicitly made his views on NATO publicly known.

According to Ivashov, NATO's actions in Kosovo reflected an alliance persistently overstepping its officially proclaimed goal to provide security for its members. Instead, NATO was facilitating the creation of new dividing lines in Europe and ultimately undermining Russian sovereignty. NATO was actively trying to undermine the confidence system guaranteed by the UN Security Council, where Russia had played a leading role since the end of World War II. By repeatedly conducting operations in the Balkans without a resolution from the Security Council, the US/NATO was systematically eroding international law and norms to suit its own interests.¹²³ In short, if Chernomyrdin supports such a grand strategy and outlook for the Russian Self, his patriotism, as defined by Ivashov, is questionable.

Despite Ivashov's clear-cut contestation of Chernomyrdin's vision, it is important to clarify that nowhere in the sources used for writing this in-depth study is Chernomyrdin supportive of NATO trying to avoid obtaining the approval of the UN Security Council to start bombing Serbia in March 1999 or to intervene in Kosovo without a clear mandate. Another central commonplace in the debate between Ivashov and Chernomyrdin is the commonplace about NATO's decision to unilaterally intervene in Serbia without a mandate being unacceptable.

By going solo, NATO undermines the Security Council's authority—and therefore also the central role Russia plays in world politics qua its seat herein.

¹²² "Senior Russian Defence Ministry official critical of Kosovo peace plan," June 4, 1999 & "Viktor Chernomyrdin is Accused of Betraying the Interests of Russia and Yugoslavia," *Sevodnya*, Andrey Smirnov, June 5, 1999.

¹²³ "Russia sends out different messages on Yugoslavia," *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, June 1, 1999 & "Russia acting to enhance military capability in light of Yugoslav developments," *RIA Novosti*, June 1, 1999.

The prospect of losing one of its few remaining prestigious and influential positions in world politics—and potentially becoming even more irrelevant in a USA-dominated, unipolar world—causes a sense of insecurity about the existing ontologies to which Chernomyrdin and Ivashov subscribes. Thus, it was the choice of which trajectory toward reconstructing and maintaining Russia's great power identity contestation exists between the two.

Let me elaborate on the contestation between the two idealized depictions of envisioned post-Soviet Russian Selves. Chernomyrdin suggests strengthening the international collaboration between Russia and NATO/USA. The intention underlying Chernomyrdin's vision was that forcing the USA to play by the same rules of the game—and securing necessary Western support for Russia's internal revival process—would increasingly bind Russia and the West together in various international organizations and treaties.

The logic guiding Ivashov's vision was to withdraw Russia from what he—among others—perceives as international organizations and arrangements that keep Russia weak and divided. Russia should only collaborate with the Western Other if the terms of collaboration are clear and equal. Western attempts at bypassing Russia—and treating it inferiorly—should be sanctioned. Ivashov's understanding of what constituted a meaningful future vision for Official Russia can best be summarized in the words of Soviet Foreign Minister Andrey A. Gromyko, who famously declared: “There is not a single important issue that today can be solved without or in spite of the Soviet Union.”¹²⁴

In short, Ivashov suggests nudging Russian foreign policy closer to the renowned antagonistic bipolar relation characterizing the USA and Soviet Union, whereas Chernomyrdin suggests Russia to finally break away from such antagonism. This rests on the view that antagonistic relations between the Russian Self and multiple Others have historically been costly in terms of eco-

¹²⁴ “The Man Behind ‘Mr. No’,” *The Washington Post*, Leonid Mlechin, June 24, 2009: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-adv/advertisers/russia/articles/features/20090624/the_man_behind_mr_no.html (accessed November 26, 2018).

conomic well-being and military security but ultimately “Self-defeating” for Russia.¹²⁵ Deciding to negotiate—instead of historically disrupting such negotiations—Russia finally confronts and moves beyond its dysfunctional Self-defeating behavior.¹²⁶

To support this argument, Chernomyrdin evokes a historical analogy to Russia’s Self-defeating behavior in connection with World War I. Here, Russia—among other European great powers—sleepwalked¹²⁷ into a tragic war, triggering domestic political unrest. In an interview on Russian TV, Chernomyrdin elaborates on the intentions guiding his negotiations in Bonn using this analogy:

War could break out on our own doorstep. [...] Russia went to war once before over Serbia. Everyone seems to be forgetting the main thing today when we wonder how things should be worded or portrayed. [...] Our pride should be directed towards revival here in Russia. [...] I was thinking about Russia and about our own security. I was thinking that we should not get involved there [Kosovo]. [...] We Russians lost 7 million there. After that intervention we were left alone against all the others. Is that what some people want again? We can see them under their red banners. But it will not happen. It must not be allowed to happen. Otherwise that would be the last war ever.¹²⁸

In Bonn, with the historical lesson from the Russian misstep in World War I in mind, Chernomyrdin had allegedly tried to avoid yet another unwanted war over essentially non-vital events unfolding in the Balkans potentially shattering the Russian revival. Chernomyrdin stresses that a new great power war could easily break out on Russia’s doorstep, and escalating the situation in Kosovo could easily draw Russia into such a war.

Consequently, instead of focusing on reaffirming Russian great power identity abroad, Russia should focus on its revival from within. Russian inter-

¹²⁵ Paul Kennedy’s *Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1989) offers a convincing historical account of the structural origins to Russia’s self-defeating foreign policies. Kennedy argues that a “Russian tradition of devoting too high a share of national resources to the armed forces—with deleterious consequences for its ability to compete with other societies commercially” is to blame (1989, p. 630).

¹²⁶ For an excellent account of the historical dysfunctionality underlying Russia’s Self-defeating foreign policies, see Colin S. Gray’s “Strategic Culture as Context” (1999, pp. 65-66).

¹²⁷ Here, I draw on Christopher Clark’s core argument from *The Sleepwalkers* (2012) about the tragic onset of World War I.

¹²⁸ “Balkans mediator says Russia’s interests were top priority in his talks,” *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, June 5, 1999.

vention would undermine the basis for such an internal revival. Again, Chernomyrdin argues, assertive Russian foreign policy obstructs—not facilitates—the Russian development toward a better way of life, both in terms of material well-being and existential meaningfulness.

Explicitly addressing the leader of Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), Gennady A. Zyuganov, who was orchestrating an official investigation to find out whether Chernomyrdin had betrayed Russia, Chernomyrdin warned against intervening in the conflict to aid Serbia. The only reasonable reason for intervening on behalf of Serbia, Chernomyrdin notes, might be Zyuganov wanting to use the intervention in the Balkans to kickstart his own revolution in Russia as had occurred in 1917. Chernomyrdin’s public use of historical analogies was the first of several salient events in Russian and Soviet history being used to de- or legitimize the choice of trajectory for the Russian Self.¹²⁹

In Kosovo, historical analogies generally play a role in dealing with the collective sense of ontological insecurity stemming from the Bonn Agreement. By placing contemporary ontological insecurities in familiar historical contexts, Russian custodians use analogies to support or undermine the trajectory they or their opponents, respectively, envision as authentic for the Russian Self.

Similar to Yuen F. Khong’s findings regarding historical analogies working as ways of diagnosing unfamiliar policy situations in his study of the US decision to increase its involvement in the Vietnam War (Khong, 1992), I find historical analogies are used to decrease the sense of ontological insecurity felt among the Russian custodians in opposition to Chernomyrdin in the initial phase of the Kosovo crisis preceding intervention.¹³⁰

Keeping the political and economic chaos haunting Russians throughout the 1990s in mind—in addition to the search for a post-Soviet sense of Russian Self—the prospect of another revolution was anything but desirable, which made Chernomyrdin evoking the historical analogy to the Russian Revolution

¹²⁹ For studies of how historical analogies are used concretely in foreign political decision-making, see Yuen F. Khong’s *Analogies at War* (1992) and *Explaining Foreign Policy* (2004) by Steven A. Yetiv. Both Khong and Yetiv draw on Robert Jervis’ pioneering *Perception and Misperception* (1976).

¹³⁰ Unlike Khong, I am not interested in establishing a generalizable, causal relationship between certain historical analogies and certain foreign policy outcomes. Instead, I observe that historical analogies are evoked to render intervention more or less meaningful in the case of Russia’s intervention in Ukraine. Various historical analogies to different parts of Russian history are used to diagnose and motivate different foreign policy actions as more or less meaningful.

as an outcome of the last major Russian intervention on Balkans a smart move.

Rhetorically posing the question, “Is that what some people want again?”, followed by “We can see them under their red banners”—suggesting the Russian Communist opposition’s call for Russian intervention being motivated by a desire for revolution and not the security and well-being of the Russian people—Chernomyrdin tries to undermine the opponents (here, Zyuganov) of his vision for an authentic Russian Self and the non-interventionist foreign policy such represents.

The State Duma hearings

Having mentioned the opposition against Chernomyrdin coming from the Russian State Duma, I now focus on who and how deputies from the Duma participated in the inner dialogue provoked by the showdown between Chernomyrdin and Ivashov. On June 4, on suspicion of Chernomyrdin having made unnecessarily large concessions in Bonn and deceiving Slobodan Milošević during Russo–Serbian talks in Belgrade, Duma deputies demand a hearing about the process and outcome of the Bonn negotiations.

To shed light on the matter, the State Duma invites Chernomyrdin and Ivashov as well as Defense Minister Sergeyev, Foreign Minister Ivanov, and Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Avdeyev to testify on the matter in a closed-door session (Talbot, 2002, p. 334). Much to the annoyance of the Duma, only Avdeyev and Ivashov show up.¹³¹

The same day that Ivashov and Avdeyev give their testimonies, Russian radio reveals what Avdeyev has said during the hearing (based on three independent sources among members of the Duma representing different party factions). According to these sources, Avdeyev declares that “the Foreign Ministry dissociated itself from what the president’s special envoy, Viktor Chernomyrdin, was doing.”¹³² According to Avdeyev, representatives from the Russian military and Foreign Ministry have tried to steer the negotiations away from appeasing Western demands, but were “presented with a fait accompli—the president’s special envoy was taking decisions unilaterally.”¹³³ The scandal was brewing and opposition against Chernomyrdin was not merely coming

¹³¹ Aleksandr Kotenkov—the Russian President’s representative in the State Duma— informed that neither members of the Russian government nor Chernomyrdin would participate in the Duma’s hearing (“Russian Duma unhappy with presidential Balkans envoy,” *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, June 3, 1999).

¹³² “Scandal brewing in Moscow around Balkan envoy’s peace efforts,” *Ekho Moskvy*, June 4, 1999.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

from the General Staff and non-liberal opposition, but also senior civil servants. Chernomyrdin was increasingly isolated and few Duma deputies outside of Chernomyrdin's own Our Home is Russia party defended him. In short, the result of the closed-door session was a significant undermining of Chernomyrdin's position in the ongoing dialogue.

Briefly stepping away from the growing opposition from the State Duma and senior civil servants and helping to understand the mental climate of contemporary Russia, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* brought several important reflection pieces that were useful in reconstructing the climate wherein the inner dialogue is embedded before intervention. These items are written to help the Russian audience understand and reflect about what is at play and to offer a variety of interpretations. Thus, these reflections are extremely useful for an outside observer of Russian society in 1999 to understand what was at play for Russians and elucidate the meanings embedded in the complex process of reconstructing the Russian Self below the surface of the heated debates between Ivashov and Chernomyrdin as well as their respective supporters.

Here, I would like to highlight an *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* article titled “Реальные результаты и мнимые выгоды [Actual results and doubtful advantages],” which explicitly elaborates on what is gained and lost with regard to Russia's influence on the international scene, its interests in the Balkans, and how this influence and these interests will affect Russia domestically.¹³⁴ Unlike the previous *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* articles after the split in the Russian Bonn delegation became public, this article is overly sympathetic to what it interprets as Chernomyrdin's more thoughtful position in terms of defending the victims of the Balkan crisis by preventing “ultra-nationalistic statements” within Russia from disrupting Russo–Western negotiations.

Due to Ivashov's criticism of Chernomyrdin, Russia's relations with the West and its international influence—to which the article acknowledges Russia's influence being highly dependent on—were severely damaged, the implications of which might mean a return to the situation “15–20 years ago—again the ice cold wind of the Cold War is blowing.”¹³⁵

Unlike what some understand as a chance to develop friendly ties with the East or South, the article does not see any significant progress between Russia and China. The bombings of the Chinese Embassy (May 7, 1999) should not “create illusions about the possibility of creating a future strategic triangle” with China and India, which is still dragging its feet regarding commitment to

¹³⁴ “Реальные результаты и мнимые выгоды [Actual results and doubtful advantages],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, June 4, 1999.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

strategic collaboration with Russia. Furthermore, the Eastern European countries that are not already members of NATO want to accelerate the accession process. Russia should abandon the building of its national interests on old “geopolitical categories” as quickly as possible. Instead, Russia should understand that only by

building one’s own home and by making it safe and comfortable for its own Russian citizens, we can only make our home attractive to our neighbors and for those who live far away from Russia.¹³⁶

In the modern post-Soviet world, “national pride” is not

determined by the number of rockets, airplanes or tanks, but the pace of economic growth, level of education, the living conditions, the cultural influence—those are the qualitative rather than quantitative characteristics.¹³⁷

Instead of creating national consensus, Russia’s pro-Serbian position worsens the domestic political situation. Even though most Russians condemn the bombings—as a humane response to war, the article interprets—most Russians also refuse to side with Serbia in the case of war. Consequently, the anti-Western reaction from Russian custodians

reflects finding a common enemy that in the shape of NATO is an overcompensation for the mistakes in the country’s reformation process, for the problems with the economy.¹³⁸

The article argues that anti-Western rhetoric will merely increase in the future, because it’s the nationalist-oriented opposition’s only asset—that is, a smoke screen.

Instead, Russia has to reestablish dialog with the West—including NATO—through the UN, OSCE, and NATO. Confronting the West and escalating the crisis—by withdrawing from the conventional arms agreement and calling its representatives back from NATO—are the real threats to Russian national interests. Both “financial and technical aid” from the West precedes the much-needed modernization of Russia and its integration into Europe and the world economy, as represented by Chernomyrdin’s “sober foreign policy,” and not a foreign policy based on “myths and stereotypes of bipolar confrontation.”¹³⁹

¹³⁶ “Реальные результаты и мнимые выгоды [Actual results and doubtful advantages],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, June 4, 1999.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ “Реальные результаты и мнимые выгоды [Actual results and doubtful advantages],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, June 4, 1999.

After the State Duma hearings

After a relatively peaceful weekend, the inner dialogue about what defines the authentic post-Soviet Russian Self—thus far, primarily between Chernomyrdin and Ivashov—moves into political debates in the State Duma on June 7, where discussions break out between various political factions. In particular, discussions between deputies from the Russian Communist Party and Head of the Committee on International Affairs of the State Duma, Vladimir P. Lukin (Yabloko), on one side, and Grigory A. Yavlinsky (also Yabloko) and Deputy Party Leader of Our Home is Russia, Aleksandr E. Lebedev, on the other.

Communist Party leader Gennady A. Zyuganov openly accuses Chernomyrdin of “bargaining with Russia’s national state interests and has betrayed the interests of our friends and allies.”¹⁴⁰ According to Zyuganov, Chernomyrdin has effectively gone from being “a special destroyer [to becoming] a special traitor [who brings] to life the position of his masters [USA and NATO], not his people.”¹⁴¹ Zyuganov echoes earlier accusations made by Ivashov: that Russians ought to blame Chernomyrdin for becoming “an accomplice to the tragedy in Yugoslavia.”¹⁴²

Yavlinsky responds to Zyuganov’s attack that same day, arguing that, if successful, Chernomyrdin’s negotiations would “be a good thing and could enable the lives of thousands of people to be saved.”¹⁴³ Despite Yavlinsky and others attempting to safeguard Chernomyrdin against the strong accusations of betrayal, Chernomyrdin’s reputation did not recover after the Duma hearings. The apparent lack of support from the Foreign Ministry, which was revealed during the closed-door session with Avdeyev, and rumors about a formal appeal being drafted to President Yeltsin demanding the denouncing of Chernomyrdin and his removal as Special Envoy to Yugoslavia undermined Chernomyrdin significantly, along with the diplomatic path he envisioned Russian Self developing along.

Officially, Yeltsin neither denounced nor removed Chernomyrdin. However, Chernomyrdin was unofficially disassociated from the Russian government and Yeltsin on June 7. When Foreign Minister Ivanov left for Cologne to

¹⁴⁰ “Communist leader accuses Russian envoy of selling out Serbs,” *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, June 7, 1999.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² “Duma prepares to debate suitability of Chernomyrdin as Kosovo negotiator,” *Interfax*, June 7, 1999.

¹⁴³ Grigory A. Yavlinsky in ‘Excerpt from report’, *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, June 7, 1999.

negotiate a draft of the UN resolution about Kosovo, it was without Chernomyrdin. Instead of going with Chernomyrdin, Defense Minister Sergeyev and senior generals accompanied Ivanov. This effectively left Chernomyrdin out of the official game, and—unofficially—he was becoming persona non grata in the Kremlin.

On June 8, based on “informed sources” from the Russian Foreign and Defense Ministries, the Kiev-based tabloid *Sevodnya* reported that

over the past two days, those departments have suddenly “forgotten” about the existence of the President’s special envoy for Yugoslavia [...]. [...] Boris Yeltsin, too, has carefully sidestepped the question of his special envoy’s contribution to the peace process. Henceforth, the “patriotic” Foreign Ministry, with the support of the equally “patriotic” generals, will handle the negotiations.¹⁴⁴

In addition to the smear campaign targeting Chernomyrdin, the Head of the State Duma Geopolitics Committee, Aleksey V. Mitrofanov (Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, hereafter LDPR), announced on June 8 that an appeal entitled “On another betrayal of international security interests” would be put to a vote the following day in the Russian State Duma.¹⁴⁵ The appeal demands that Yeltsin relieve Chernomyrdin from his official duties due to his “line that flies in the face of Russia’s national interests” and that he undertake “an investigation into a possible breach of instructions by special envoy Viktor Chernomyrdin on Yugoslav settlement negotiations.”¹⁴⁶ Action was deemed necessary to reduce the damage already caused by Chernomyrdin’s “treacherous position [and] ominous role in compelling Yugoslavia to accept NATO’s ultimatum [which damages] the international reputation of Russia” by the co-signers.¹⁴⁷ Thus, the appeal demanded that it was necessary for President Yeltsin to “adopt urgent measures to safeguard Russia’s national interests in the Balkans” immediately.¹⁴⁸ Instead of selling Russia out, the President should force the negotiating officials to adopt a firm stance against the Western Other.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ “Chernomyrdin’s Contribution to the Cause of Peace has been Frozen—Generals Will Now Handle Balkan Settlement,” *Sevodnya*, Andrey Smirnov, June 8, 1999.

¹⁴⁵ The draft is being submitted by leaders of the left-wing faction consisting of Gennady A. Zyuganov (Communist Party of the Russian Federation), Nikolay Ryzhkov (People’s Power), and Nikolay Kharitonov (Agrarian Party).

¹⁴⁶ “Russian left urges examination of envoy’s role in Yugoslavia,” *Interfax*, June 8, 1999 & “Internal statements,” *Interfax*, June 8, 1999.

¹⁴⁷ “Internal statements,” *Interfax*, June 8, 1999.

¹⁴⁸ “Russian left urges examination of envoy’s role in Yugoslavia,” *Interfax*, June 8, 1999.

¹⁴⁹ “Russian left-wing MPs call for tougher stand on Yugoslavia settlement in UN,” *ITAR-TASS*, June 8, 1999.

The appeal is testimony to a group of voices who believe that Official Russia needs to engage the Western Other, thereby standing up for itself and defending the rights of Russia to define bi- and multilateral negotiations about Kosovo to reaffirm its international standing from an ideational perspective and to maintain and augment a vision for a Russian Self from an ontological perspective; a Russia daring to authentically take and defend an independent position, here with regard to Kosovo, fending off Western engulfment, despite (from a materialist perspective) a significant, likely adverse impact on current well-being.

According to the wording of the appeal draft—evoking another historical analogy countering Chernomyrdin’s references to World War I and the Russian Revolution as consequences of historical Russian interventionism in response to events in the Balkans—the Bonn Agreement was

identical to the Munich conspiracy,¹⁵⁰ which paved the way for World War II, [and] Russia will undoubtedly be the next target of NATO aggression.¹⁵¹

Similarly, State Duma Deputy Aleksey I. Podberyozkin uses the historical analogy to the Munich Agreement on Russian *TV6*. If Russia did not react firmly and insist on a UN-sanctioned agreement, NATO would surely develop into a

global organization [using] military force in its own interests, under various pretexts, including totally invented ones. [We] are obliged—this is our fundamental position—to defend the priority and unique position of the United Nations; that is, to maintain the position we had after World War II.¹⁵²

Similar to Chernomyrdin, Podberyozkin envisions two trajectories for further Russian development: Either Russia could preserve and “develop the United Nations” or begin thinking of how to create a

¹⁵⁰ Similarities between the Munich Agreement and the Bonn Peace Accord were further elaborated in an article in *Sovetskaya Rossia* by G. A. Zyuganov, N. I. Ryzhkov and N. M. Kharitonov, entitled “Leftist Leaders Issue Statement Condemning Chernomyrdin for Forcing Fraternal Yugoslavia to “Capitulate””. If honoring the “shameful agreement,” the outcome would be “identical to the Munich compact.” A central lesson was that appeasing an aggressor “is a sure way to spur it to launch other predatory wars. There can be no doubt that Russia will be the next target of NATO aggression” (June 10, 1999).

¹⁵¹ “Internal statements,” *Interfax*, June 8, 1999.

¹⁵² “Podberezhkin in ‘Senior left-winger Podberezhkin talks to Russian TV about Yugoslavia,” *TV6*, June 8, 1999.

counterweight, because the world is returning to the history of the 19th and 20th centuries, when military coalitions faced off against each other in Europe.¹⁵³

In short, either maintain and augment the influence of Russian Self within the confines of international law or simply return to the act of balancing the Western Other militarily. Either way, the Western Other's unilateralism clearly needed to be tamed to preserve the international status of Official Russia vis-à-vis Foreign Others, but more importantly to actually *do something*—either within or beyond the confines of the international law paradigm—to secure the Russian sense of authentic Self.

On June 9, “On Urgent Measures for a Settlement of the Conflict Over Yugoslavia” was passed by a majority of State Duma deputies (271 for, 92 against, one abstention). That same day, in a radio interview to Moscow-based radio *Ekho Moskvy*, Chernomyrdin reacts to the harsh criticism and appeals targeting him. Again, Chernomyrdin tries to argue for why he negotiated as he did in Bonn and how he managed to secure the settlement about Kosovo moving back into the realm of the UN Security Council. On June 9, it became clear that a UN resolution would sanction the peacekeeping operation in Kosovo; hence, it would not be a unilateral NATO action.

Chernomyrdin supports his narrative with a historical analogy to the inter-war period. To illustrate the stakes, Chernomyrdin asks the interviewer and audience to recall that in the

1930s Hitler effectively disregarded the League of Nations and how that ended up. In my opinion, we were, essentially, on the brink of possibly losing universal peace which was secured with the establishment of the UN.¹⁵⁴

With a historical parallel to the peace that inter-war era statesmen failed to establish with Nazi Germany, Chernomyrdin claims that the outcome of his negotiations in Bonn had secured the UN resolution expected to be passed the following day. In short, the inner dialogue—about if and how to intervene in Kosovo—becoming increasingly hostile toward the vision for the Russian Self represented by Chernomyrdin was passé.

With the radio interview, Chernomyrdin simultaneously tried to rehabilitate his status as a competent and successful politician within Russia as well as the alignment between the contested Bonn Agreement and an authentic Russian Self. Evoking historical comparisons between what statesmen before him had failed to achieve with Hitler and the resolution expected to be passed the following day in the Security Council, Chernomyrdin not only legitimized

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ “Russian president’s Balkans envoy sets out his stance on Kosovo,” *Ekho Moskvy*, June 9, 1999.

the contested process and outcome of the Bonn Agreement, but the performance of a diplomatic Russian Self had—unlike the Gromykin vision for Russian Self—already proven successful. The Bonn Agreement was a prelude to the UN resolution. Chernomyrdin might have been the writer and spokesperson for the imagined Russian community, but the resolution was done by and for all Russians. The agreement had primarily been

done by us, by Russia. We have become involved and, most importantly, convinced the leaders of this very important matter.¹⁵⁵

Russia had finally and successfully implemented a new trajectory for the Russian Self by putting “history [...] in its place and we have put things onto a legal footing”—thereby preventing Kosovo from escalating into “another great war.”¹⁵⁶

“Official Russia,” as represented by Chernomyrdin and his vision for Russian Self, demonstrated its capacity to maintain an authentic Russian Self in negotiations without having to resort to the use of hard power or resorting to the appeasement of and subjection to the will of the Western Other. Breaking with Russia’s own Self-defeating history of getting involved in meaningless wars and conflicts, Chernomyrdin had shown the fruits of a credible yet unfamiliar alternative vision for Russia to develop along. A vision promising to prevent Russia’s Self-defeating history from repeating itself and accelerating the internal economic and political Russian revival due to the good relations with the Western Other and prospects of Russo–Western relations further intertwining without having to pay the expected increasing economic well-being and international status with the authenticity of an autonomous Russian Self—hence, without jeopardizing Russia’s onwards quest for post-Soviet ontological security.

On June 10, the day after Chernomyrdin’s radio interview, NATO bombings against Serbia ceased. In this context, Lebedev tries one last time to legitimize Chernomyrdin’s negotiations in Bonn by narrating them as the main reason for NATO stopping its bombings and the adoption of the UN resolution the same day. Indeed, according to Lebedev, Chernomyrdin’s critics now found themselves on the losing side of developments:

It turns out that Chernomyrdin has secured a cessation of the bombing. Russia was not drawn into the war, and the process of finding a settlement in Kosovo is

¹⁵⁵ “Russian president’s Balkans envoy sets out his stance on Kosovo,” *Ekho Moskvy*, June 9, 1999.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

underway. Well then, those who are criticizing Chernomyrdin's mission are therefore opposing these results.¹⁵⁷

The General Staff and oppositional voices from the LDPR and CPRF have proven nothing for themselves or their vision for the Russia Self. Luckily, the leftist factions in the State Duma did not succeed in using the Kosovo peace settlement to “stir up passions” that would “draw Russia into a war.” Now, an “overwhelming majority of our population” had an alternative trajectory for a future Russia in front of them.¹⁵⁸

Similarly, Yavlinsky argues that the positive unfolding of events in Kosovo presents a golden opportunity for Russia to “work out proposals for creating a new concept in world security,” distancing the conduct of Russian foreign policy even further away from “nationalistic policy in a federation like Russia [which may lead] to full-scale state and national catastrophes.”¹⁵⁹ In continuation of Chernomyrdin, Yavlinsky interprets the crisis as a special opportunity for Russia to “learn its lesson” and decisively choose the alternative diplomatic trajectory for the Self.

The Kosovo crisis demonstrated two things, Yavlinsky argues. First, “the world security system ceased to exist after 1991.”¹⁶⁰ NATO had demonstrated its willingness to use military might to enforce its own vision for the development of world politics and “double standard, which would never procure peace anywhere.”¹⁶¹ Second, and importantly, “Russian diplomacy, which had failed to overcome crisis in the past two years,”¹⁶² finally proved its worth. With the adoption of Resolution 1244, Russia demonstrates its capacity and willingness to act as a responsible great power and protector of international law—even when NATO tried to bypass it. What seemed to become a disastrous outcome ultimately proved to be a significant foreign political victory and success regarding the further development of the Russian Self.

However, neither Yavlinsky nor Lebedev successfully repelled Chernomyrdin's persistent criticism. Politically, Chernomyrdin was *persona non grata* despite the adoption of Resolution 1244 and the cessation of NATO bombings.

¹⁵⁷ “Russia's Balkans envoy is an asset to his party, says his party's deputy leader,” *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, June 10, 1999.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ “Russia should work for new world security order - Yabloko leader Yavlinsky,” *Interfax*, June 11, 1999.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² “Russia should work for new world security order - Yabloko leader Yavlinsky,” *Interfax*, June 11, 1999.

In an interview with *TASS*, Chernomyrdin once again tries to legitimize his negotiations in Bonn on June 10. Besides outlining what he identifies as significant concessions gained during the controversial negotiations in Bonn (e.g., placing peacekeeping operations under UN flag, avoiding unilateral NATO occupation of Kosovo, and securing the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia) Chernomyrdin directly confronts the accusations of having betrayed Russia and making unnecessary major concessions to NATO:

[T]hey [critics from the General Staff and State Duma] say I have “surrendered” something. What was there to surrender? [...] Russia did all the work: *We made everyone sit at the talks table, we brought the UN back to the Balkans, we made sure Yugoslavia kept its territorial integrity* [my italics].¹⁶³

To whom exactly Chernomyrdin was referring with “we” is uncertain. Virtually all of his supporters had fallen silent at this point. Interestingly, however, Chernomyrdin now argues that he always actively pursued “in effect not leaving the Balkans, but going there” in the tripartite negotiations.¹⁶⁴

In contrast to the quote above with the earlier historical analogy to interventionism in the Balkans as a prelude to revolution in Russia, I interpret Chernomyrdin’s apparent choice of narrative—from avoiding to actually going to the Balkans—in two quite different ways. On one side, Chernomyrdin’s latest statement retains the Bonn Negotiations as the breeding ground for the cessation of NATO bombings and adoption of Resolution 1244. Chernomyrdin once again underscores the necessity of the controversial negotiation process and outcome. Consequently, Chernomyrdin’s critics must acknowledge that Russia is currently a relevant actor on the international scene with significant status, as NATO would otherwise still be bombing and no resolution adopted in the Security Council. Thus, Chernomyrdin’s negotiations did not originate from a traitorous, but a more experienced position than the General Staff and other oppositional voices perceived. In short, Chernomyrdin had been on the Russian Self “we” and not the Western Other “them” all along.

On the other side, there is also handed over a significant concession to those who contest Chernomyrdin’s vision for the Russian Self and the foreign political implementation. While Chernomyrdin has not spoken out against the presence of Russian peacekeepers in Kosovo, he was cautious about discussing the whole question of their size and responsibilities. That Chernomyrdin now explicitly emphasized that his negotiations never entailed any ambition of

¹⁶³ “Russia saved Yugoslavia, says Yeltsin’s Balkans envoy,” *ITAR-TASS*, June 10 1999.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

“leaving the Balkans, but going there,”¹⁶⁵ suggests that he was trying to break his political isolation by harmonizing his vision of the Russian Self with that of his critics.

On June 11, Ivashov voices a new public statement. Ivashov had otherwise kept quiet after leaving for Cologne (without Chernomyrdin) with the Defense and Foreign Minister on June 7. Initially, Ivashov acknowledges the important role played by Official Russia in settling the Kosovo issue peacefully with a UN resolution; thereby partially acknowledging Chernomyrdin’s contribution to this outcome.¹⁶⁶ I interpret Ivashov’s partial acknowledgement of Russia’s role as a tip of the proverbial chapeau to Chernomyrdin. In relation to the accusations of treason directed against Chernomyrdin, Ivashov no longer implies Chernomyrdin to be a traitor. Instead—and parallel to Chernomyrdin’s depiction of the Russian General Staff—Chernomyrdin is portrayed as a naïve politician, inexperienced in the actual conduct of foreign policy.

However, the second half of Ivashov’s statement maintains that NATO’s recognition of Russia is no more than cheap talk, which will not spill over into actual action. The appreciation NATO officials expressed in the wake of concluding the UN resolution is, thus,

not reflected in the role NATO generals are prepared to give Russia [...]. The recognition of our decisive role in peace settlement in Yugoslavia must show not in words, but in specific action. However, we are being made to ask for an area to look after in Kosovo.¹⁶⁷

On a theoretical note, Ivashov’s statement is an interesting example of an agent experiencing a mismatch between narrative and performed identity; that is, experiencing how words are one thing and deeds another. Consequently, Ivashov argues that NATO’s reaffirmation of Official Russia is not authentic.

A similar accusation of NATO being unauthentic is expressed during a meeting between Talbott and Defense Minister Sergeyev (where Ivashov and Chief of the Russian General Staff Anatoly V. Kvashnin also participate) merely hours before Russian armed forces dash into Kosovo on June 12. During the meeting, Defense Minister Sergeyev seems both agitated and angry that Russia was not permitted to play an equal role in the implementation of

¹⁶⁵ “Russia saved Yugoslavia, says Yeltsin’s Balkans envoy,” *ITAR-TASS*, June 10 1999.

¹⁶⁶ “Russian general calls for simultaneous entry of Russian and NATO troops to Kosovo,” *Interfax*, June 11, 1999.

¹⁶⁷ “Russian general calls for simultaneous entry of Russian and NATO troops to Kosovo,” *Interfax*, June 11, 1999.

the peacekeeping mission. Unlike Ivashov, Sergeyev was not interested in discussing military details, instead “interrogating” Talbott about the nature of Russo–US relations in a future joint peacekeeping operation in Kosovo:

Did the U.S. and its allies *respect* Russia? Were we prepared to treat Russia on the basis of *equality*? It was Rodney Dangerfield in uniform. [...] Kvashnin and Ivashov kept pulling him [Sergeyev] back with objections, accusations and filibusters. (Talbott, 2002, p. 340)

To gain a more in-depth understanding of the ideational and ontological insecurity aspects underlying Sergeyev’s interrogation of Talbott, I build my interpretation on inside knowledge gained from an opinion piece brought in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* by Moscow State Institute of International Relations professor Aleksey K. Pushkov, who argues that if Official Russia enters joint collaboration with the Western Other, it runs the risk of accepting the Western Other’s “scanty symbolic concessions, and then just stop paying attention to us.” If accepting these concessions and subsequently just being turned down, Russia will effectively be demoted to “a postman” of the interests of the Western Other in the eyes of Foreign Others in world politics; but more fundamentally—beyond the ideational aspect concerning international status—have been selling out of the authenticity of the Russian Self—a decision “deliberately set up to defeat.”¹⁶⁸ Pushkov denotes this inability of Official Russia to dare to act authentically as the “Chernomyrdin syndrome.” This syndrome unfolds in a rather puzzling way. According to Pushkov, the more Russian custodians

accommodate the US and NATO, the less our relations are based on a balance of interests and the more they rest on the absolute priority of American approaches. [...] the US will have even fewer compelling reasons to take Moscow’s opinion into account.¹⁶⁹

To turn this development in the direction of an increasingly ontologically insecure Russian Self around, the Official Russian foreign policy must “defy and disrupt US/NATO interest and policies in order to earn their respect and achieve a more central role in world politics.”¹⁷⁰ To gain the international status and authenticity that Official Russia and the Russian Self strive for, it is in itself important to disrupt the Western Other—despite Resolution 1244 just being passed—Pushkov argues.

¹⁶⁸ “Синдром Черномырдина [The Chernomyrdin Syndrome],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Aleksey Konstantinovich Pushkov, June 11, 1999.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

In alignment with my theoretical argument about crisis as a two-dimensional phenomenon, the premise behind Pushkov's argument is that the Kosovo crisis manifests the

sharpest in the last 10 years for relations between Russia and the West [and] will determine the nature of their relationship in the coming years.¹⁷¹

To part with this "Chernomyrdin syndrome," Official Russia must demonstrate to the Western Other that the West never exactly knows where it has Russia. Concluding the UN-sanctioned resolution proves a unique opportunity to surprise the Western Other when it thought it knew where it had Russia. Thus, Pushkov argues from a premise of unpredictability as a virtue in Russian foreign policy. After intervention, another opinion piece in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* concludes that a lack of predictability strengthens Russia's standing "not only in the Balkans but in the world, and especially European politics."¹⁷²

I will return to praises of the unpredictability of Russian foreign policy after military intervention materialized June 12. In the second part of the chapter, focusing on the translation of the reconstructed Russian Self into foreign policy, I examine how unpredictability (as virtue) subsequently translated into developing Russian foreign policy in a more disruptive direction.

A fundamental reflection of the past

Another source of inside information to enhance my knowledge about ideational and ontological concerns (respectively, the loss of status to and anxiety concerning the engulfment by the Western Other) associated with Russo-Western collaboration about Kosovo is "Мир на перепутье [The World at a Crossroads]" brought by *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* the day before Russia's intervention. The article addresses some of these fundamental concerns by highlighting some of the differences between ontological outlooks and premises constituting the ideal lifeworld of the Russian Self and Western Other.

The most significant difference between the Russian and Western ontologies is located at the respective interpretations of the

¹⁷¹ "Синдром Черномырдина [The Chernomyrdin Syndrome]," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Aleksey Konstantinovich Pushkov, June 11, 1999.

¹⁷² "Прыжок Москвы в Косово [Moscow's dash into Kosovo]," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Vitaly Tretyakov, June 17, 1999.

fate of their peoples, the meaning of history, its place in history and the various human communities.¹⁷³

The crisis elucidates the “underlying differences in the understanding of the people and nations of its historical mission,” which are causing the “serious contradictions” and “aggravated differences with Russia [and] the West.”¹⁷⁴

Interpreted through the lens of ontological security, these contradictions are not rooted in “geopolitical, military or economic interests” (in other words, materialist concerns) but in a fundamental difference between a “rationalistic understanding of life on earth” claiming universalism, which places “selfish human interests at the center of the universe.”¹⁷⁵ The core of the conflict between the Russian Self and Western Other relates to ontology and the role that players are expected to perform within these different ontologies. In short, the core of Russo–Western crisis is located between

two fundamental philosophical principles—the priority of the physical existence of man and the priority of the spiritual foundations of existence.¹⁷⁶

In the case of Russo–Western relations, since the fall of the Soviet Union, this self-proclaimed universal rationalism by the Western Other has spread uninhibitedly across various

representations of earthly human existence, including its cultural, intellectual and other similar aspects, as an absolute measure of good and evil, the supreme criterion of truth and justice.¹⁷⁷

Having disclosed the universal mission being pursued by the Western Other under the pretext of humanitarian intervention, Russian custodianship needs to kindly—yet firmly—explain Western Other that its desire to “change” Russian Self by imposing “alien ideological and cultural clichés” onto Russian custodianship would be futile.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³ “Мир на перепутье [The World at a Crossroads],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, June 11, 1999.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Interestingly—and as a remark concerning Russia’s own war in Chechnya—the “Russian elite could not imagine that any military ‘whip’ or economic ‘carrot’ will not keep the Chechen people to give up their own identity, the right to organize life according to their own ideas of right and wrong” (“Мир на перепутье [The World at a Crossroads],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, June 11, 1999).

¹⁷⁷ “Мир на перепутье [The World at a Crossroads],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, June 11, 1999.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Trying to force the Russian Self to accept these clichés as its own will inevitably cause rejection. The Western Other’s disapproval of “national identity in terms of faith, ethnicity and culture” will eventually—and contrary to its proclaimed intent—end in a “great loss of life.”¹⁷⁹

In sum, the conflict over Kosovo underscores that the Russian Self is at a crossroads between self-proclaimed universal–secularistic rationalism and “spiritual aspirations of people who do not consider the human mind to be the sole criterion of truth” as a model for its “post-Soviet Self.”¹⁸⁰ In line with historical clashes between so-called Slavophiles and Westernizers within Russian custodianship, the Russo–Western crisis manifests a wake-up call for the entire Russian custodianship and their respective idealized visions for the Russia Self.¹⁸¹

A puzzling silence of voices from the Russian government

Before turning to how senses of ontological insecurity and security as well as the reconstruction of the Russian Self developed after the Russian dash to Slatina, I address the puzzling absence of the voices of senior members of the Russian government before, during, and after the State Duma hearings.

With the exception of Prime Minister Sergey V. Stepashin, senior members of the Russian government and President Yeltsin fell—besides repeatedly rejecting the existence of disagreement among members of the Russian delegation to Bonn—puzzling silent after the showdown between Ivashov and Chernomyrdin.¹⁸² President Yeltsin, Foreign Minister Ivanov, and Defense

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ For a more elaborate outline and analysis of how the historical divide between Slavophiles and Westernizers developed from toward the mid-19th century and have influenced understandings of what constitutes a meaningful sense of the Russian Self, see Orlando Figes’ *Natasha’s Dance* (2003) and James H. Billington’s *Russia* (2004).

¹⁸² Foreign Minister Igor S. Ivanov denies any split within the Russian delegation on both June 4 and 5, 1999 (“Russian foreign minister denies differences in Russian delegation over Kosovo,” June 4, 1999 & “Russian foreign minister denies major split with Balkans envoy,” June 5, 1999). Unlike Ivanov, Defense Minister Igor Sergeyev openly states that there are of course different approaches within the Russian delegation in terms of how to conduct the negotiations on Yugoslavia: “Naturally, opinions were divided on choosing the best way to carry out the Russian president’s instructions on negotiations on the situation around Yugoslavia,” Sergeyev said, noting there “were debates” on this subject (“Russian minister on Yugoslavia peacekeeping force, divisions within delegation,” *ITAR-TASS*, June 4, 1999).

Minister Sergeyev made puzzlingly few significant media appearances and official statements before the intervention. The fundamental inner dialogue sparked by the showdown was primarily propelled by senior military officers, civil servants, and State Duma deputies from the Russian opposition.

On June 3, Stepashin makes his first public appearance on Russian television about the escalating crisis. A journalist in the crowded room asks Stepashin: “What would make Russia great?”¹⁸³ Stepashin replies that the revival of Russian greatness must come from within Russia itself. In other words, expression of support to the notion that the reconstruction of the Russian Self as a post-Soviet great power based on the concentration of internal resources. Stepashin clarifies that Russian greatness “should not be based on force or cannon but on culture, respect, a strong economy and intelligence.”¹⁸⁴ Two days later, at a meeting with members of the Russian military industrial complex, Stepashin boldly suggests increasing “broad-scale military cooperation with the West.”¹⁸⁵ At the same meeting, Stepashin also makes an announcement (in a rather different, somewhat contradictory direction), that 28.5 percent of the federal budget has been allocated to increased spending on defense, state security, and law enforcement in 1999.

I interpret Stepashin’s statements as mostly favorable to the Russian Self that Chernomyrdin envisions. In line with Chernomyrdin, Stepashin argues for a Russian reconstruction process driven internally and requiring a non-conflictual relationship with the Western Other. Stepashin openly argues for increased Russo–Western collaboration on areas as sensitive as military technology (during the most severe foreign political crisis since the end of the Cold War), which provides clear testimony to his sympathies.

Nevertheless, Stepashin was very aware of the adverse impact that the Russo–Western crisis might possibly inflict on the domestic balance of power between the competing visions for the Russian Self presented by Chernomyrdin and Ivashov. In private conversation with Strobe Talbott (at the aforementioned meeting on June 9 in which Avdeyev also participated) Stepashin warned Talbott that

the majority of the Russian people and our political elite think that the U.S. is trying to dictate to everyone else in the political and military spheres. I would like to recall the situation of Germany after World War I. Several years after the war, following its humiliating defeat and the armistice, Germany was engulfed

¹⁸³ “Russian PM at government sitting on deputy’s role, greatness of Russia,” *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, June 3, 1999.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ “Russian premier offers to cooperate with the West in weapons production,” June 5, 1999.

by hysteria, which led to Hitler coming to power. [...] No Hitler will come to power here, but the psychology is similar (Talbot, 2002, p. 334).

Besides offering a vivid inside view of the contemporary Russian ideational landscape, Stepashin tries communicating the more fundamental sense of ontological insecurity in post-Soviet Russia with a historical analogy to the sense of ontological insecurity influencing Germany after its defeat in World War I. As Stepashin explains to Talbot, the lesson from the past was not that the perceivably asymmetrical Russo–American relationship will give rise to a new Hitler in post-Soviet Russia, but such asymmetry reinforces the hysteria and sense of humiliation felt by a majority of Russians— among the elites and masses alike. Such increased sense of ontological insecurity could potentially result in desperate actions fundamentally changing Russo–Western relations and—simultaneously—the Russian sense of ideal authentic National Self.

As demonstrated above, alternative senses of the Russian Self were already articulated, voiced, and proliferated after the showdown between Chernomyrdin and Ivashov diffused into the State Duma, Federation Council, and Russian press on June 3. After Ivanov sidelined Chernomyrdin on June 7—significantly weakening those supporting the rise of a Russian great power in collaboration with the Western Other—Talbot experiences firsthand a glimpse of how this gradually reconstructed sense of Russian Self materializes. Before the very same meeting with Stepashin mentioned above, Avdeyev explicitly told Talbot that

we were now in the *post-Chernomyrdin phase* of Russian engagement in Kosovo [my italics], and the real defenders of Russia’s national interest [like himself, he implied, Talbot’s words] were now back in charge (Talbot, 2002, p. 334).

To Talbot, Avdeyev explicitly signals that the Russian Self Chernomyrdin represents—from the perspective of Avdeyev and other critics, Russia as a mere unauthentic mailman—belongs to the past. Onwards, Russia will not tolerate US/NATO treating it as an irrelevant or inferior “Foreign Other.” Avdeyev threatens Talbot that if the US does not accept Official Russian demands of getting its own sector independent of the NATO command in Kosovo, “there could be difficulties ahead” (Talbot, 2002, p. 334). Even at the meeting between Talbot and Stepashin, Avdeyev was so openly agitated that he interrupted Stepashin, telling Talbot that if “we keep talking and talking, NATO will move in and leave us with nothing to talk about” (Talbot, 2002, p. 335).

Moving on from Stepashin to Yeltsin, besides a meeting with foreign diplomats in which he gave a speech, the only public statement given by Yeltsin

was at a joint press conference at the Kremlin on June 11.¹⁸⁶ Both Ivanov and Chernomyrdin participated at that press conference in person. In the course of the interview, a journalist asks Yeltsin to comment on NATO suspending its bombings in Yugoslavia the previous day. Yeltsin answers:

We have done our job in full. He has done [pointing to Ivanov], he has done [pointing to another other man], this one has done [pointing to himself]. [Ivanov whispered “Viktor Stepanovich” to Yeltsin] also, Viktor Stepa ... [Chernomyrdin].¹⁸⁷

Yeltsin forgetting to mention Chernomyrdin is symptomatic of at least two important features at this point of the crisis. First, at the height of the crisis, Yeltsin is incapable of formulating coherent and concise answers. Based on telephone conversations he overheard between Bill Clinton and Yeltsin, Talbott suggests in his memoir that Yeltsin was under immense pressure from the Russian opposition while at the same time suffering from deteriorating health and significant alcohol consumption that blurred his decision-making.

Second, with respect to the diminished resonance of the Russian Self envisioned by Chernomyrdin: despite his own and several other attempts that he supported to legitimize the contested process and outcome of the Bonn negotiations in public—both before and after NATO stopped its air campaign and the adoption of Resolution 1244—Chernomyrdin was unable to rehabilitate his reputation and voice successfully. By June 11, Chernomyrdin was therefore effectively in the periphery of the intensified inner dialogue among Russian voices about which path to choose for a post-Soviet Russian Self in crisis: How should Russia react in the Russo–Western encounter about Kosovo?

¹⁸⁶ One of the few public appearances Yeltsin makes is June 8, when he welcomes foreign ambassadors. In his speech, Yeltsin noted that: “The aggression against sovereign Yugoslavia has seriously aggravated the international climate [...]. The world has come to face another attempt at affirming diktat by force. It has trampled underfoot the very foundations of international law and the UN Charter. Russia resolutely rejects this approach. It contradicts the tendencies toward developing a multipolar world order and the legitimate interests of the absolute majority of states. I am confident that only by joining hands—not destroying but consolidating civilized foreign policy norms—will we be able to settle the global problems that mankind is facing today” (“Russia: Yeltsin welcomes foreign ambassadors, condemns Kosovo “aggression”,” *RIA Novosti*, June 8, 1999).

¹⁸⁷ “Yeltsin says Russia has done its job in settling Yugoslav crisis,” *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, June 11, 1999.

Intervening “Self”: From “Dash to Slatina” to Helsinki Agreement (June 12–18, 1999)

Russia’s military intervention in Kosovo was one of several possible reactions to the sense of ontological insecurity triggered by anxiety regarding the consequences of the Bonn Agreement for the Russian Self. Russian forces dashing to Slatina Airbase was neither a priori given nor solely intended to increase the sense of ontological insecurity. The dash was rendered increasingly meaningful as contestations and commonplaces emerged and proliferated during the intensified inner dialogue among Russia voices preceding it. In the inner dialogue about what constitutes the authentic Russian sense of Self from June 2 to 12, the Western Other was increasingly perceived as an opponent rather than a partner in the post-Soviet Russian revival of great power status and the Russian Self.

The Russian intervention manifests a critical turning point in Russo–Western relations since the end of the Cold War as well as the inner dialogue about the Russian Self. I argue that Putin’s famous speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007 in which he harshly condemned US unilateralism was more an instance of continuity than the origin of Russia’s increasingly disruptive foreign policy. The intervention in Kosovo promotes the disruptive foreign political trajectory, which was further entrenched as Western politicians, journalists, and NGOs increasingly criticized Russia’s fight against Chechen separatists during the Second Chechen War, erupting August 26, 1999.

As soon as Russia’s intervention became a reality, the various voices in the fundamental dialogue about Russia’s National and Official Selves had to—despite their opinion about the meaningfulness of the intervention itself—acknowledge the fact that Russia *had* militarily intervened in its encounter with the Western Other. While it was still up for debate whether the “dash” was a wise and legitimate reaction, the dialogue about whether Russia was capable and willing to act unilaterally and defy the Western Other as well as if and how intervention should be undertaken were pushed off the table the very moment Russian forces crossed into Kosovo.

Intervention changes the inner Russian dialogue. Those who argue for a more independent role for Russia in world politics significantly strengthened their visions concerning the Russian Self, whereas those subscribing to an alternate vision have to counterfactually argue what would have been a more preferable reaction than intervention. The supporters of the alternative visions for the Russian Self have to infuse a sense of doubt about the appropriateness and feasibility of the daring act of military intervention. How the Western Other decides to react to the dash is crucial; reacting too firmly could further undermine the few Russian voices still calling for a more collaborative

relationship between Russia and the Western Other. By acting too firmly, the Western Other could provide grist to the mill for those voices that were increasingly convincingly arguing—from a Russian point of view—that Russo–Western collaboration is not a feasible path to follow toward realizing an authentic Russian Self.

As Yavlinsky warned Strobe Talbott earlier, the NATO response could lead to “fallout on these in Russian politics who most want Russia to be part of the West” (2002, p. 301). While a firm Western response could discourage those parts of the Russian custodianship who envision an assertive Official Russia from taking further risky action, such a response could obviously also be interpreted in the context of an already existing narrative of a Western Other treating Russia as a subordinate that is to be punished for its wrongdoing. In short, a firm Western response could potentially further undermine the few voices still envisioning the Russian Self developing toward becoming a great power *because of* the Western Other.

In sum, whether or not Russia should intervene in Kosovo was no longer a topic for inner dialogue after June 12. Rather, the inner dialogue centered around the extent to which “Intervening Russia” was an authentic representation of the Russian Self and if Official Russia could get away with defying the Western Other or if the dash would become a regrettable mistake.

Was intervention a mistake?

Shortly after *CNN* showed live pictures of Russian armored vehicles crossing into Kosovo after midnight on June 12, Russian Foreign Minister Igor S. Ivanov appeared on *CNN* for a live interview. Here, Ivanov states that the intervention reflects an “unfortunate mistake” and that Russian troops had already been “ordered to leave Kosovo immediately.”¹⁸⁸

A few hours earlier, Ivanov reassures U.S. officials that Russian troops would enter Kosovo simultaneously with NATO.^{189,190} In the interview, Ivanov declared that

¹⁸⁸ “Russian troops enter Kosovo: Moscow orders them to leave,” *CNN*, June 11, 1999.

¹⁸⁹ “NATO peacekeepers stream into Kosovo,” *CNN*, June 12, 1999.

¹⁹⁰ On multiple occasions, Ivanov reassured US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott that the Russian troops would stop before crossing into Kosovo. Russia would enter Kosovo simultaneously with NATO, not unilaterally. Meanwhile, at a lower level of command, Ivashov and Avdeyev had explicitly told their American counterparts that they would unilaterally establish their own sector if NATO would not surrender one voluntarily (Ivashov, Ivanov, and Avdeyev quoted in W. K. Clark, 2002, Chapters 375, 377, 381, 387–388 & 390).

neither Russia nor anyone else wishes a split-up of Kosovo [that] fundamentally contradicts all of the agreements reached within the G8 framework and the UN Security Council resolution.¹⁹¹

Ivanov notes, however, that “various contingents had entered Kosovo that night, including the Russian one.” Whose contingents entered Kosovo first was merely “a technical question [...]. An hour or two doesn’t make much difference.”¹⁹²

In the interview, Ivanov admits that it was an “unfortunate mistake” that Russian troops entered Kosovo prematurely. However, Ivanov also notes that several NATO contingents had already crossed into Kosovo, thereby accusing NATO of also violating the UN resolution. On behalf of Official Russia, Ivanov admits the dash to be a regrettable mistake but claims that NATO also made one. The solution offered was that Official Russia is willing to withdraw its troops, since the matter was merely about technicalities.

While Ivanov’s interview was subject to heavy scrutiny in the Russian media, it becomes evident that Official Russia is not breaking the occupation of Slatina Airbase.¹⁹³ The following day, June 13, Aleksandr Avdeyev is interviewed on Russian TV. Having downplayed the Russian deployment and stating that “especially the Americans are wrong to call this group a contingent” — accordingly to Avdeyev, the Russian troops should be referred to as a “small advance party” — deployment itself was discussed;¹⁹⁴ particularly, who ordered the intervention was of interest to the journalist testifying to the doubt about whether the Russian President had actually ordered the intervention or the General Staff had been acting independently.

On one hand, Avdeyev replies that the deployment “changes nothing and has changed nothing.” On the other hand, the intervention was clearly a kind reminder to Russia’s “respected partners” in the West. Thus, if the Western

¹⁹¹ “Russian foreign minister upbeat on KFOR talks,” *Interfax*, June 13, 1999.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ Yeltsin remained completely silent on the matter. On June 13, the Russian occupation of Slatina Airbase had officially been confirmed. Upon official confirmation, Yeltsin personally calls Bill Clinton and suggests they themselves resolve the crisis. According to Talbott’s memoir, Yeltsin suggests they immediately meet “if necessary on a ship or even on a submarine” (2002, p. 346). Clinton recalls Yeltsin seems to be in bad shape, which is exemplified by Yeltsin asking Clinton to spell Viktor M. Zavarzin’s last name. Despite having field-promoted him to Colonel General the very same day for his successful “dash” to Slatina, Yeltsin could not apparently recall the name of his own local Russian commander in Kosovo.

¹⁹⁴ “Russian first deputy foreign minister justifies pre-emptive move into Kosovo,” *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, June 13, 1999.

partners “appreciate Russia [they should give] Russia an appropriate role in the execution of the Kosovo security operation.”¹⁹⁵

Avdeyev’s statement is central testimony regarding possible intentions concerning underlying intervention. Thus, despite having transferred the authority back into the hands of the Security Council with Resolution 1244, certain Russian voices still expressed dissatisfaction with being treated as a subordinate in the implementation of the peacekeeping operation. Unilateral intervention was one of several Russian ways to react to secure an appropriate role. As Avdeyev explains, between

black and white you have a dozen intermediate options allowing us to keep our ground and to give us the deserved place to which we are entitled.¹⁹⁶

Reactions from the broader Russian public

In the broader Russian public, Russia’s intervention fosters a diverse field of positive and critical assessments of its implications for Russian Self and its influence and status in world politics. On the critical side of the spectrum, the Russian intervention was delegitimized with the analogous reference to “erecting a “Berlin Wall”¹⁹⁷ and waging a new Cold War against the West,¹⁹⁸ which would ultimately end in another defeat for Russia, once and for all condemning it to a destiny as a “second-class status in the system of international relations.”¹⁹⁹

Russia now faced a very simple dilemma: Either “retreat with our tail between our legs” or build-up “our forces there [Slatina Airbase] and embark upon Cold War II.” While the

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ “Russian first deputy foreign minister justifies pre-emptive move into Kosovo,” *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, June 13, 1999.

¹⁹⁷ “Yeltsin is building what Gorbachev destroyed - the Berlin Wall,” *Sevodnya*, June 16, 1999

¹⁹⁸ “[...] in banging his shoe [Nikita S. Khrushchev] on his desk at the UN, was doing just that—bluffing—for he knew that the USSR was losing the arms race. Boris Nikolayevich is bluffing too, knowing full well that Russia doesn’t have the strength to lock horns with NATO. But Khrushchev had a strategic advantage—he wasn’t dependent on Western loans” (“Paratroopers occupy Pristina Airport, To NATO’s Contestation,” Natalya Kalashnikova & Andrey Smirnov, *Sevodnya*, June 14, 1999).

¹⁹⁹ “Наша страна может оказаться на задворках Европы [Our country may be on the periphery of Europe],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Sergey Mihailovich Rogov, June 16, 1999.

brief “national high” will then turn into agonizing “withdrawal.” [...] building up our forces [...] would mean just one thing—that Russia has clearly set a course toward a new cold war. The division of ill-starred Kosovo would become completely analogous to the Berlin Wall. What a wonderful plan—waging a cold war against the West at the West’s expense!²⁰⁰

Compared to later public criticisms of Russia’s foreign policy decisions, the critical voice quoted above is much more controversial in tone and content. Pointing out how Russia was getting itself into a conflict resulting in something analogous to the Cold War—with a Western Other who was providing the loans preventing the Russian state from bankruptcy—highlights the seriousness and likely consequences of intervention.

In wake of the doubt about the appropriateness and consequences of military intervention, a sense of worriedness about the Kremlin’s reliance on generals “who have shown the West more than once that the era of liberalism in foreign policy is no longer the ‘general’ line” to manage Russo–Western relations in need of adjustments is voiced. Would this illiberal trajectory within Russian foreign policy also eventually become “true to other fields of policy?” Or is the defiant gesture “intended mostly for domestic consumption [...] to beat the opposition at its own game?”²⁰¹

Similarly, in an *NTV* broadcast from June 13, the journalist notes that while the military success in Slatina might support Russian diplomats renegotiating a better agreement about Russia’s future role in Kosovo in the short run, it might also shatter the Russo–Western relations required to reconstruct the economic performance of an authentic great power, not merely a hollow one:

The generals who conducted this blitz operation are as happy as if the Russians had beaten the French in the football world championship. They may be rejoicing prematurely, though. The military have achieved some tactical success, and this may strengthen the position of Russian diplomats at talks on Kosovo. However, [...] Russia has acquired a problem on a grand scale for the future that may complicate relations with the West for a very long time. In any case, this looks like the biggest crisis between Russia and the West, including the USA, since the end of the Cold War.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ “What are we getting ourselves into?,” *Sevodnya*, Leonid Radzikhovskiy, June 15, 1999.

²⁰¹ “Paratroopers occupy Pristina airport, to NATO’s consternation,” Natalya Kalashnikova & Andrey Smirnov, *Sevodnya*, June 14, 1999.

²⁰² “Russian generals rejoice over troops getting into Kosovo ahead of NATO,” *NTV*, June 13, 1999.

As another critical Russian voice notes, not only was “Moscow’s relations with Europe and America [at stake], but also the future of the Russian economy.”²⁰³ A central commonplace among critical voices disapproving of the Russian intervention is the anxiety of the West disowning Russia, puncturing much-needed economic reforms. The short-term benefits of intervention were contested, but also more fundamentally how the dash would influence Russian domestic politics in the future. In other words, whether intervention was primarily for “domestic consumption”—to beat the opposition—or a manifestation of a more fundamental ideological reorientation away from liberalism.

Like critical voices disapproving of Russia’s intervention, several overly positive reactions were also uttered in its wake. A key commonplace among these voices was that intervention was fully justified by how NATO and the US used “all sorts of pretexts to force us out of the decision-making on important issues.” The deployment of Russian troops was only “a first step [to] maintaining Russia’s prestige and supporting a peaceful settlement of the Kosovo problem.”²⁰⁴ Unlike the commonplace among the critical voices—primarily relying on materialist concerns—the commonplace among the positive ones consists of ideational considerations about maintaining Official Russia’s international status to secure a better position in the negotiation of its future role in the peacekeeping operation.

Like the overly critical voices identified above, the positive voices can be placed on a continuum from unconditional to cautious support of the Russian dash to Slatina. On June 16, representing the more cautious voices, Igor Korotchenko and Vladimir Mukhin write in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* that

this calculation [to intervene or not] has fully justified itself. The sudden appearance of Russian troops in Pristina [...] has radically changed Moscow’s position in the semi-dormant negotiations with the US [...]. Meanwhile, the euphoria of the blitz may soon melt. The Russian-held airfield is surrounded by Albanian villages. 200 people can clearly not be sufficient for its defense if the Kosovo Liberation Army will start fighting against our Marines [...]. The situation is aggravated by the fact that the representatives of NATO and the US tightened the negotiation process, and Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria do not provide an air corridor for the passage of Russian peacekeepers in Kosovo.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ “После блицкрига [After the Blitzkrieg],” Maksim Yusin, *Izvestiya*, June 15, 1999.

²⁰⁴ “A question of a flourish,” Yury Vasilkov, *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, June 16, 1999.

²⁰⁵ “”Добро” на переброску Российских военных в Косово дал Борис Ельцин [”Go ahead” for sending Russian military into Kosovo given by Boris Yeltsin],” Igor Korotchenko & Vladimir Mukhin, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, June 16, 1999.

The intervention was in itself the right thing to do, Korotchenko and Mukhin argued. However—considering the presence of hostile Albanian separatists and NATO having cut off Russian reinforcements—the situation might end in a Russian fiasco, harming its prestige.

Other voices are less concerned about the facts on the ground in Kosovo. In an article entitled “In the Wake of the Russian Heroes Suvorov-style Forced March,” the author triumphantly concludes that Russian troops have done what “diplomats and special envoys forgot to do—they restored its proper role in world affairs.”²⁰⁶ Russia was no longer only fighting for its troops in Kosovo, but more fundamentally “its battered prestige in world politics.”²⁰⁷ By standing up to American unilateralism, Russia had finally prevailed as the only “dissident in the world,” which was something Russians could feel proud of.²⁰⁸ Russia’s success in Kosovo should be consolidated quickly, however, because several groupings within “NATO and, frankly speaking, in the Russian political elite are waiting impatiently for Russia to stumble in the current unsettled situation.”²⁰⁹ In short, intervention manifest a window of opportunity, which must be exploited promptly.

In contrast to the two Cold War analogies drawing critical implications regarding the Russian intervention, two positive analogies are evoked. Both of these analogies draw parallels to nostalgic jubilant scenes from the Great Patriotic War. The first compares the scenes from Russian intervention with when the Soviet forces drove Nazi Germany out of Eastern Europe in World War II:

It’s been more than 50 years since we met with a reception anywhere in the world like the one we got on a short, warm June night in Kosovo last week. The feeling that Russia had won a complete, albeit brief, triumph—that’s the only way to describe what happened. Hundreds of Serbs, young and old, waited several hours to welcome our liberators.²¹⁰

A similar analogy appears on June 17 in an article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, comparing the cheerful welcome offered to Russian troops by Serbs in 1999

²⁰⁶ “In the Wake of the Russian Heroes Suvorov-style Forced March—China Considers Possibility of Joining Our Peacekeepers in Kosovo,” *Slovo*, June 16, 1999.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ “Прыжок Москвы в Косово [Moscow’s dash into Kosovo],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Vitaly Tretyakov, June 17, 1999.

²⁰⁹ “In the Wake of the Russian Heroes Suvorov-style Forced March—China Considers Possibility of Joining Our Peacekeepers in Kosovo,” *Slovo*, June 16, 1999.

²¹⁰ “In the Wake of the Russian Heroes Suvorov-style Forced March—China Considers Possibility of Joining Our Peacekeepers in Kosovo,” *Slovo*, June 16, 1999.

and the jubilant welcome of Soviet liberators immortalized on newsreels from 1945. On the front of the first armored vehicle was

Russian, Serbian and Greek flags, symbolizing the unity of the Orthodox, and the entrance of the Russian contingent in Pristina resembled newsreel footages from spring 1945.²¹¹

Again, analogies are evoked to reduce the uncertainty of the Russian actions into a familiar historical context and—unlike Chernomyrdin’s negative use of historical analogies to the Russian Revolution or earlier mentioned analogies referencing the Cold War era—stressing the positive implications. By evoking analogies from the Great Patriotic War, which is one of the most prominent periods in the Russian historical consciousness, the analogies above support and legitimize the intervention by narrating “Intervening Russia” as “Liberating Russia.” This narration conveys a different story than the negative narratives telling the story of Official Russia repeatedly making the same mistake to get involved in armed conflicts and rivalries leading to its own defeat—pointing to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which was in fresh memory. According to the positive historical analogies, Russian troops driving into Kosovo was not a symbol of Official Russia violating the UN sanctioned resolution—which NATO had been criticized for—but rather liberators bringing peace to obviously cheerful Serbs who were finally free of NATO’s air campaign.

US–Russian negotiations in Helsinki

On June 16, Russia and the USA resume bilateral negotiations aimed at finding a diplomatic solution to the Kosovo crisis. The negotiations took place in Helsinki and, once again, Finish President Ahtisaari mediates the diplomatic talks taking place at the presidential palace under intensive Russian and Western media coverage.

The main point of disagreement was the deployment of Russian troops. At the onset of the negotiations, Russia insists on its own sector of responsibility. If Russia could force the US to surrender an independent sector in Kosovo—aided by the presence of its troops in Kosovo—Russia would not only score a significant diplomatic victory, but more importantly the US would be reaffirming Russia’s role as a great power in world politics.

As I see it, the prospect of obtaining the reaffirmation of Russia’s role as great power helps explain why Russia insists on negotiating directly with the USA despite KFOR being a NATO operation. Thus, from the Russian perspective, the US–Russian bilateral negotiations manifest an important symbolic

²¹¹ “Сербы массами покидают Косово [The Serbs leave Kosovo in scores],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Maxim Shevchenko, June 16, 1999.

and more tangible political role. First, bilateral negotiations are important because Official Russia needs to resolve the issue about its encircled troops occupying Slatina Airbase. The troops had only brought supplies for five days. With the negotiations starting on June 16, Russian soldiers in Kosovo were running out of water and food, and they were easily pinned down by the Kosovo Liberation Army while the negotiations proceeded in Helsinki.²¹²

Second and more important, the mere fact that Official Russia succeed in orchestrating an urgent crisis summit with the USA—something not all states are able to do—represents a significant recognition of the great power role Russia assumed by unilaterally intervening.

With the eyes of the world resting on Helsinki, the media attention surrounding the negotiations suit the Russian Foreign and Defense Minister very well. Orchestrating a setup where solving the “Kosovo knot” entirely and exclusively depends on the USA and Russia reaching agreement brings with it a nostalgic sense of former Soviet glory. The US–Soviet summits and Helsinki serving as the backdrop nostalgically re-establish the irreplaceable role played by Soviet Russia in the solution of foreign policy crises during the Cold War.

An example of such Soviet nostalgia is found in *Izvestiya* on June 16. An article draws a parallel between the contemporary and historic summits between the Soviet Union and the US during the Cold War:

It was here on this neutral ground, where every stone still remembers the “cold war,” détente, and Gorbachev’s “new thinking,” Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov and Defense Minister Igor Sergeev spend the most difficult round of talks with their US counterparts.²¹³

As mentioned, one obvious difference between the Soviet and post-Soviet eras was that post-Soviet Russia is in a situation where its economy depends heavily on renewing IMF loans to avoid state bankruptcy. A Russian journalist wrote:

²¹² “Россия сегодня договорится с НАТО если не помешают генералы [Today Russia strikes a deal with NATO unless the generals interfere],” *Kommersant*, Genady Sysoev, June 16, 1999.

²¹³ “Судьбу наших миротворцев решат в Хельсинки [The fate of our peacekeepers will be decided in Helsinki],” *Izvestiya*, Nikolay Vukolov & Vladimir Mikheev, June 17, 1999.

Russia has failed to integrate into the group of leading world powers. [...] in economic terms, the country is still very far away from becoming a full-fledged member of the world elite.²¹⁴

Russia and the USA relative quickly agree on joint access and the use of Slatina Airbase—which remains under Russian responsibility—and issues surrounding the Western interest in a single command structure for the UN-sanctioned international peacekeeping mission. However, the main point of disagreement remains unresolved: The conditions for the deployment of Russian troops in Kosovo.

On June 18, an acceptable solution is reached. Russia will not get its own sector, but “zones of responsibility” within the German, American, and French sectors—besides responsibility for running a local hospital.

Compared to the Bonn Agreement concluded earlier, Russia has not achieved any significant concessions from the Western Other. As former Foreign Minister Kozyrev notes, the most significant differences between the two agreements are that, unlike in SFOR, Russian peacekeepers in KFOR will be paid for by Russian taxpayers:

By getting into the Kosovo saga, the General Staff bosses evidently mixed it up with the Bosnian story, where all expenses were paid by the rich UN.²¹⁵

Despite the apparent lack of significant concessions, the Russian media is expressing overly positive assessments of the outcome in Helsinki. Russian correspondent Sergey Brilev offers an example in his thoughts regarding how Russia’s strategy of

freezing relations with the entire North Atlantic Alliance and maintaining a pragmatic dialogue with the Americans alone has *proved justified*. [my italics]²¹⁶

From the materialist perspective, Russia achieves little in Helsinki. If anything, it jeopardizes its economic security significantly by risking Russo–Western disagreement about Kosovo spilling over into ongoing IMF negotiations about the renewal of Russian loans preventing it from bankruptcy.

As viewed through the ideational and ontological lens, however, the gains are significant compared to the Bonn Agreement. Ideationally, the bilateral

²¹⁴ “Президента вновь заменяет премьер [The Prime Minister once again replaces the President],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Dmitry Gornostaev & Victor Sokolov, June 17, 1999.

²¹⁵ “Russia’s Kosovo operation not entirely legal or feasible, TV says,” *TV6*, June 20, 1999.

²¹⁶ “Russian TV chronicles events leading up to Russian-US deal on Kosovo,” *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, June 18, 1999.

summit between Russia and the US in Helsinki resonates nostalgically with the Soviet past, where Russia was an irreplaceable factor in the solution of world problems. The orchestration of this summit enabled Russia to take yet another step in the direction of reaffirming a post-Soviet identity of an independent great power with a more significant role in future world politics. The Russian intervention demonstrates how even the world's mightiest military and economic power has to negotiate directly with Russia to solve its problems. In terms of ontological security, intervention was an indication of a Russia gradually overcoming the "Chernomyrdin Syndrome" of appeasement—improving the defense against gradual engulfment by Western Other—by actively countering the "Balkanization" of world politics and daring to stand up and defend what became associated with an authentic Russian Self.

Closing "Self": Entering KFOR and G8 (June 19–25, 1999)

Upon the conclusion of the Helsinki Agreement, the heated inner dialogue about what meaningfully constitutes Russia's post-Soviet Self on the doorstep of the 21st century was confronted by harsh economic realities.

Based on Russian government calculations, the presence of Russian troops in Kosovo in accordance with the Helsinki Agreement would inflict an extraordinary USD 64–65 million annual expense on Russian taxpayers.²¹⁷ In 1999, an additional annual cost of this size was significant and demanded immediate adjustments to the federal budget. Consequently, cuts had to be made to other budget posts to accommodate the increased military spending. In short, concrete price tags could now be placed on the intangible sense of ontological insecurity regarding the authenticity of the Russian Self. In the following, I investigate how Russian voices discussed the trade-off between ontological, ideational, and material concerns.

The prospect of budget cuts led Konstantin Titov, the governor of the Samara Region, to note pessimistically that such a long-term peacekeeping operation—especially given the difference in "national character" among the involved parties—raised questions about how Russia could obtain needed funds for its presence in the Balkans.²¹⁸ Other regional governors express similar concerns regarding the financing of the Russian peacemakers. Ingush President Ruslan Aushev notes that an

²¹⁷ "Defence official presents finance case for Russian contingent in Kosovo," *RIA Novosti*, June 24, 1999.

²¹⁸ "Influential Russian senator critical of plans for Kosovo contingent," *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, June 21, 1999.

economic dwarf [Russia] must not pose as a great power [...]. Just remember Afghanistan and Chechnya, and we all know how things turned out there.²¹⁹

In short, when Russia tries to be something it is not—suggesting that the “Intervening Russian Self” is not an authentic representation—the prospect of reviving the genuine post-Soviet Russian Self from within is jeopardized.

Besides the obvious economic consequences, some Russian governors also express anxiety about the dissent Russia’s military participation in a conflict imbued with multiple religious, national, and ethnic cleavages may provoke among Russia’s multiple religious, ethnic, and national minorities.²²⁰ The Russian presence in Kosovo risks provoking “an interethnic conflict [that could lead to the] break-up of this country,” Titov warns.²²¹ Like the Soviet Union, Russia is a multiethnic state, and stationing troops in Muslim-dominated Kosovo may upset Russian Muslims at home.

Titov’s warning touches upon the origins of another fundamental sense of ontological insecurity historically felt by Russian custodianship: Is Russia capable of realizing a coherent and homogenous Russian Self at all? Historically, Russia has always been a multiethnic and multireligious state. Throughout the Czarist, Soviet, and Federal eras, ethnic and national issues have been at the center of the political. Given the multicultural status of the imagined Russian community, what Russia does abroad has entirely different domestic consequences is the case in other states.

Particularly after the fall of the Soviet Union, the federal structure of Russia opens up for the expression of otherwise latent and coerced separatist sentiments. Some examples of widespread separatism within the frontiers of the Russian Federation include Dagestan, Ingushetia, Siberia, and most prominently Chechnia throughout the 1990s. Anxiety caused by the prospect of Kosovo accelerating separatism across the young Russian Federation is a serious source of ontological insecurity for contemporary parts of the custodianship, who envisioned a strong Russian nation-state emerging from within.²²²

²¹⁹ “Russian governors speak out against peacekeeping mission to Kosovo,” *Interfax*, June 24, 1999.

²²⁰ “Russian upper house divided on whether Russia can afford Kosovo peacekeepers,” *TV Centre*, June 24, 1999.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² The sense of ontological insecurity caused by anxieties about domestic separatism will not be further explored here. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to inquire about how the use of military force against separatists in the Northern Caucasus—particularly Chechnya—were rendered a meaningful way to proceed in wake of the end of the Kosovo Crisis in August 1999.

From one summit to another

Besides the inner dialogue regarding the economic and national ideational consequences of Russian participation in KFOR, the Helsinki summit is followed by intensive Russian media coverage of the G8 summit in Cologne (18-20 June, 1999).

Like the US–Russia summit in Helsinki, the G8 summit plays an important symbolic role for the Russian custodianship. The Cologne Summit was the first event where the Russian and American presidents would meet in person since the Russian intervention in Kosovo. Would the meeting depict two equal partners, thereby demonstrating Russia having successfully reclaimed an equal great power identity from the Western Other? Or rather a Russia still treated as a subordinate, second-rank power that was trying to make up for its disobedient behavior to avoid sanctions by its Western superior?

According to Foreign Minister Ivanov and Defense Minister Sergeyev, Russia has successfully secured a “worthy role in the peacekeeping” in Helsinki.²²³ In Cologne on June 19, Stepashin confirms that Russia has achieved the goal of being recognized for once and for all as a “full-scale and active” participant in G8 and not G7+Russia (as critical Russian voices label the Russian participation in G8).²²⁴

Along the lines of Chernomyrdin’s former statements, Prime Minister Stepashin concludes that the summit in Cologne demonstrates that “problems similar to the Kosovo one, and especially in Europe, cannot be resolved without Russia.”²²⁵ US President Bill Clinton provides unprecedented support to Stepashin’s statement about Russia’s equal role in the G8 on June 20. In a live broadcast on Russian *NTV*, President Clinton confirms that:

United States and NATO regard Russia as a friend, and we believe that Russia should play a corresponding role in the Balkans [...]. It is G8, not G7 plus Russia. [...] Russia played a full role [alongside] all the rest of us.²²⁶

Clinton’s reaffirmation of Russia’s equal role in settling Kosovo—and world politics more generally—was well received by critics of Chernomyrdin’s positive assessment of Russia’s role in world politics. For instance, Vladimir Lukin

²²³ “Russia–NATO relations halted until the end of NATO’s operation in Yugoslavia,” *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, June 19, 1999.

²²⁴ “Russia has become full member of G8 thanks to Yeltsin—Russian premier,” *ITAR-TASS*, June 19, 1999.

²²⁵ ““Russia is full member of G8 and that is the main thing”—Russian premier,” *Interfax*, June 20, 1999.

²²⁶ “US President tells Russian TV he wants strong, prosperous Russia,” *NTV*, June 20, 1999.

acknowledges that “what happened in Cologne is satisfactory [...]. We are a member of the G8. We played an active role there.”²²⁷

Other voices remain more critical. For instance, Duma deputy Aleksandr Shikhin argues that “Russia did not get all it could have from this meeting [G8 summit], specifically taking advantage of its peacemaking in Kosovo.”²²⁸ The leader of LDPR, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, remarks that the Russian contingent is not big enough²²⁹ and predicted that NATO would use a similar strategy like the one in Yugoslavia to support “uprisings by national minorities” in both Ukraine and Transcaucasia in the next 10–20 years.²³⁰

Communist Party leader Gennady A. Zyuganov responds somewhat more ambiguously to the outcome of the Helsinki and Cologne summits. According to Zyuganov, “Yeltsin and [his Balkans envoy] Chernomyrdin betrayed our last ally in the Balkans: Yugoslavia.”²³¹ In this body of sources, this is the first time Zyuganov extends his accusation of treason against Chernomyrdin to Yeltsin. One obvious interpretation is that Zyuganov wants to retain the political pressure on Yeltsin and avoid him politically profiting excessively on the—from the Russian perspective—successful dash to Slatina. From the onset of the inner Russian dialogue, the Russian opposition obviously saw its window of opportunity to facilitate a change of government besides an alteration of the future development of the Russian Self (e.g., Brovkin, 1999). In other words, Zyuganov was trying to kill two birds with one stone.

However, Zyuganov’s extension of his accusation did not successfully materialize in maintaining or increasing political pressure on Yeltsin. In the second part of Zyuganov’s statement, he more moderately admits that if the alternative was Russia not participating at all in an international peacekeeping force in Kosovo,

[...] the situation will be even worse and more dramatic. In the Balkans, the Americans have tried out a new type of war, the sixth-generation war [...]. Only history will tell which country will be next.²³²

²²⁷ “Russian Duma official says Cologne results for Russia “modest,” “insufficient,”” *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, June 21, 1999.

²²⁸ “Russian politicians believe Russia got Cologne G8 summit outcome the G7 prepared,” *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, June 21, 1999.

²²⁹ “Russian nationalist says Kosovo peacekeeping contingent should be bigger,” *Interfax*, June 23, 1999.

²³⁰ “Ultranationalist leader predicts NATO will bomb Ukraine,” *Interfax*, June 23, 1999.

²³¹ “Russian Communist leader calls for efficient cabinet, Yeltsin to resign,” *NTV*, June 23, 1999.

²³² *Ibid.*

In other words, the statement testifies that Zyuganov maintains his criticism of the Western Other's conduct toward Serbia and that "Balkanization"—the alleged US grand strategy to conquer states around Russia by weakening and dividing them by actively supporting separatists—continues to manifest a significant threat to Russian ontological and material security.

Zyuganov becomes even more optimistic after the Federation Council votes for the future presence of Russian peacekeepers on June 25. With reference to diffuse Russian "geopolitical interests," Zyuganov applauds the Federation Council's decision to ensure the Russian presence in the Balkans:

The Federation Council made the right decision [...] everybody understands that Russian peacekeepers and Russia as a whole must be present [in order to] not lose the Balkans [and] protect, among others, Russia's geopolitical interests.²³³

After the Federation Council approves the presence of Russian peacekeepers in Kosovo, previously heated domestic dialogue about Russia's prospective role in Kosovo—and world politics more generally—gradually die down. Former explicit contestations and commonplaces about the Russian Self are gradually replaced with a reconstructed sense of Russian Self—a Russian Self *in spite* of the Western Other.

Yegor S. Stroyev, Chairman of the Federation Council, interprets the vote in the Federation Council as a reaffirmation of a new sense of Russian Self and the Official Russia to represent such in its foreign policy. The new vision for Russia looked brighter and clearer than before the crisis. The Russian intervention and successful negotiations in Cologne and Helsinki have clearly demonstrated that

NATO countries have lost the diplomatic war in Yugoslavia. Now Russia is in the best position and it should use this position.²³⁴

Defense Minister Sergeyev addresses the former key contestation as to whether Russia should insist on an independent sector in Kosovo. Pleased with the outcome of the negotiations in Helsinki, where Russia did not secure itself a sector, Sergeyev responds to expected criticism of not having achieved more than Chernomyrdin by stressing how

²³³ "Russian Communist leader welcomes decision to send troops to Kosovo," *ITAR-TASS*, June 25, 1999.

²³⁴ "NATO has lost diplomatic war in Yugoslavia - Russian Federation Council chairman," *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, June 25, 1999.

we should not make [providing a separate] sector a panacea necessary for Russia to be fully satisfied [...]. I think it is hard to imagine a better outline to jointly perform the tasks and to be in key positions in Kosovo.²³⁵

Three days later, on June 25, Sergeev concludes that the crisis had

checked our understanding of Russia's role and place in Europe at the global political level [and] our views are considered here.²³⁶

In line with Sergeev, Ivashov supports this interpretation and concludes that intervention secures "the fate of Russia and its future position in the world and Europe" while at the same time restoring a new sense of pride and confidence.²³⁷

More surprisingly—and a central testimony to the successful reconstruction of the Russian Self—Viktor Chernomyrdin also expresses full support for the Russian intervention; intervention which Chernomyrdin now claims prevented something akin to the Nazi Germany attack on the Soviet Union in World War II and pushed negotiations back into the realm of the UN.²³⁸ Evoking the analogy to the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union, Chernomyrdin concludes that

fifty-eight years ago, World War II started [i.e., the Nazi Germany attack on the USSR]. We are very glad that something similar has been stopped in the Balkans. This is deeply symbolic.²³⁹

Similar to the dominating voices, Chernomyrdin associates intervention with an Official Russia capable of securing itself "a dignified future in the family of European nations."²⁴⁰ Besides evoking the historical analogy to the Great Patriotic War, which was also used above by his former critics, Chernomyrdin concludes that Russia once and for all demonstrates that "no problems [in

²³⁵ "Russian defence minister satisfied with arrangements for Kosovo force," *NTV*, June 22, 1999.

²³⁶ "Russian defence minister happy with decision on peacekeepers for Kosovo," *ITAR-TASS*, June 25, 1999

²³⁷ "Senior general expects Russian zone in Kosovo to expand," *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, June 25, 1999.

²³⁸ "Russian envoy for Balkans on Russia's chances in Yugoslavia," *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, June 22, 1999.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ "Russia will never be "closed country" again—envoy," *ITAR-TASS*, June 23, 1999.

world politics] can be solved without it,”²⁴¹ echoing Gromykin’s aforementioned vision for Russia’s role in world politics aligned with the Russian Self uttered by voices critical of Chernomyrdin’s vision for the Russian Self. Chernomyrdin refuses to back down, however, maintaining his own criticism of those from the Communist Party who are criticizing him, stating that “the revenge [backlash] of those, who want to return to the past, will be prevented.”²⁴²

On June 25, in a lengthy article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* entitled “Russia in a changing world,” Igor S. Ivanov elaborates on the implications of the Kosovo crisis for Russia’s future role in world politics and the challenges lying ahead. In Kosovo, Russia (together with the rest of humanity) was “faced with a fundamental choice: either a multipolar world order [or] a unipolar model with the dominance of one superpower.”²⁴³ By condemning and defying NATO aggression and persistently pursuing an “active and independent course,” Russia managed to reclaim the “rights and obligations, which are fully aligned with its major contribution to the Kosovo settlement.”²⁴⁴ Russia emerged from the Kosovo crisis as a nation with an authentic sense of Self resembling a great power with a significant role to play in world politics.

This sense of authentic Russian Self is found in President Yeltsin’s concluding speech at the G8 summit in Cologne. Here, Yeltsin calls for the adoption of “A concept for peace in the 21st Century” at the UN 2000 Summit. The concept outlines the “legal aspects of the use of force in International Relations against the backdrop of globalization,” which the recent Kosovo crisis demonstrated a need for. Yeltsin concludes that a key lesson from the crisis was that the UN Security Council “bears the main responsibility for ensuring international peace and security” and should be strengthened to avoid certain states—obviously referring to the USA—dictating terms to Foreign Others “through force.”²⁴⁵

In contrast to Yeltsin’s puzzling absence and silence before the Russian dash to Slatina Airbase and the occupation of the same, Yeltsin now performed the role of a president representing a “Self-confident” great power reclaiming

²⁴¹ “Yeltsin’s envoy on Yugoslavia says Russia must be present in the Balkans,” *ITAR-TASS*, June 25, 1999.

²⁴² “Russian Balkans envoy urges UN reform, says peace in Balkans must be fair,” *Interfax*, June 23, 1999.

²⁴³ “Россия и меняющийся мир [Russia in a changing world],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Igor Ivanov, June 25, 1999.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ “Text of Boris Yeltsin’s speech at the Cologne G8 summit,” *ITAR-TASS*, June 20, 1999.

its right to be part of the exclusive group of states willing and capable to influence world politics; suggesting, for instance, a new concept for world politics in the 21st century.

Translating the “Russian Self” after Kosovo

Having addressed the first and second key research questions above—how ontological security concerns rendered military intervention meaningful and how the reconstruction of the Russian Self proceeded before, during, and after the intervention—this section addresses the third key research question about how reconstructed visions for the Russian Self translated into the foreign policy of Official Russia after intervention in Kosovo.

Contemporary Russian foreign political actions beyond the Balkans demonstrate how an increasingly Self-confident Official Russia was reaffirming reconstructed visions for a meaningful post-Soviet great power identity in action as well as words. Coinciding with the heated inner dialogue about what path to choose in the crossroads facing Russian custodianship were the first public Russian missile tests, unprecedented Chinese–Russian military negotiations, and the largest joint strategic military exercise (Zapad-99, or “West-99”] since the end of the Cold War.

There was also an increase in patrol activity close to NATO borders carried out by Russian strategic bombers capable of carrying nuclear weapons. On June 25, 1999, American and Norwegian fighter jets intercepted, respectively, Russian strategic TU-95 Bear and TU-140 Blackjack bombers close to the Icelandic and Norwegian coastlines. According to NATO officials, such probing of NATO defense readiness was standard operating procedure during the Cold War, but “no such activity had been recorded in a decade and the appearance of the Russian long-range bombers over Iceland and Norway surprised NATO.”²⁴⁶

Officially, the Russian military and government officials blankly reject any ties between the missile tests, Russo–Chinese negotiations, Zapad-99, the increased number of bomber patrols, and the Kosovo crisis. Despite the official Russian denial of the ties between the missile tests and increasingly tense Russo–Western relations, Russian journalists interpret the tests as clear messages addressed to the Western Other. Missile tests demonstrate that the “Yu-

²⁴⁶ “Russian Flight Shocks West,” *The Washington Post*, Dana Priest, July 1, 1999.

goslav scenario will not be played out somewhere in Abkhazia, the Dnestr republic, or Nagorno-Karabakh in the near future.”²⁴⁷ Quite remarkably, Commander of the Russian Strategic Missile Troops Vladimir Yakovlev was quoted as saying that the “main difference between Russia and Yugoslavia is that Russia is a nuclear power.”²⁴⁸

When Zapad-99 began on June 21, the Russian General Staff denies any connection to the Kosovo crisis. Deputy Chief of the General Staff Yuri N. Baluyevskiy refuses all speculation about the timing of the largest military exercise as “a demonstration of muscle” targeting the Western Other. General Baluyevskiy, however, admits that the “ended Balkan military operations are being taken into consideration.”²⁴⁹

Despite Baluyevskiy’s denial of direct ties to the Russo–Western encounter, *Kommersant* journalist Ilya Bulavinov notes a recent change in the naming of the opponent (Zapad-99); “previously they [military exercises] were called ‘Red’ and ‘Sphere’.”²⁵⁰ Igor Y. Korotchenko—journalist at *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*—notes a similar change in the characterization of the opponent. However, Korotchenko was more direct when reporting that

few people have any doubts that the “blues” on the maps the Russian general Staff is using in “Zapad-99” exercises stand for NATO’s joint armed forces in Europe.²⁵¹

Similarly, the increased Russo–Chinese collaboration underscores the link between the reconstruction of a new vision for Russian Self and foreign policy. As mentioned earlier, Primakovian ideas about Russian multi-vector diplomacy with China and India together with a tougher response to NATO’s enlargement toward Russia’s Western frontier resonate well during and after the Russian occupation of Slatina Airbase.

However, the concept of multi-vector diplomacy and a tougher Russian stance against NATO was not a novel outcome solely produced by the Kosovo crisis. Yeltsin had previously threatened NATO due to its enlargement plans,

²⁴⁷ “Russian Topol-M missile tested successfully yet again,” *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, 20 June, 1999.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁹ “Top Russian officer says West-99 exercise biggest since 1985,” *Interfax*, June 22, 1999 and “Russian TV links current military exercise to worsening relations with NATO,” *TV Centre*, June 22, 1999.

²⁵⁰ “Российской армии дан приказ — на Запад [The Russian Army got an order — go West],” *Kommersant*, Ilya Bulavinov, June 22, 1999.

²⁵¹ “Russian Army Preparing to Repulse Aggression,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Igor Korotchenko, June 23, 1999.

and movement toward increased Russian collaboration with China and India preceded the escalation of the Kosovo crisis in June 1999.

Parallel to the argument about the altered notion of the Russian Self, I argue that the crisis manifests more a tilting point than a critical juncture in the unsettled spatiotemporal context surrounding the revision and translation of Russian foreign policy thinking and behavior. Using the notion of “unsettledness” to denote the contexts surrounding crisis reconstruction and subsequent translation processes, I draw on how Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische have expanded Ann Swidler’s distinction between “settled” and “unsettled” lives (Swidler, 1986, pp. 278-282). A core characteristic in their understanding of unsettledness is the ability of agents to “develop greater capacities for creative and critical intervention” in reconstructing existing structures (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 1007). Differentiating between the capacity of agents to creatively and critically reconstruct structures during unsettled times, I rely on aforementioned William H. Sewell’s theorization about the capacities of agents to reconstruct structures as contingent upon their respective distribution of resources and their knowledgeability of the relevant schemas within which they operate (Sewell, 1992, pp. 8-10).

The Russian intervention in Kosovo supports the argument of those parts of Russian custodianship envisioning a more active, independent Russia in world politics by demonstrating its capacity to successfully disrupt the foreign policy agenda of the Western Other. As journalist Yuri Vasilkov notes, the disruption brought about by the intervention successfully achieved what Russian politicians and diplomats had been trying to do since the dissolution of the Soviet Union:

The soldiers seem to have done for Russia what the diplomats and special envoys forgot to do—they restored its proper role in world affairs. [...] Russia must now act quickly and decisively on several fronts simultaneously.²⁵²

After the success in Kosovo, Russia needs to dare to seize the day, exploit the opportunity offered by the crisis, and drastically revise the existing foreign political thinking and behavior guiding Official Russia’s foreign political representation of the reconstructed Russian Self.

Russian foreign policy after Kosovo

In this section, I interpret how the reconstructed sense of Russian Self translated into Russia’s foreign policy after the intervention. In short—echoing Nira

²⁵² “A Question of a Flourish,” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, Yury Vasilkov, June 16, 1999.

Yuval-Davis' (2011) key distinction—the aim is to interpret how reconstructed Russian “sense of belonging” translated into a “foreign policy of belonging.”

Elaborating on the aspiration of this analytical step, I am not investigating if and to what extent there is a 1:1 relationship between the Russian Self and revised foreign policy. Rather, I explore how the reconstructed Russian Self translated into the foreign policy formulations of Official Russia. In that sense, I am not trying to erase or ignore any ambiguities in the translation of national identity into foreign policy, but rather to enhance our understanding of the potential sources of these ambiguities. Such inquiry aligns with my relationist understanding of human action, including formulation of foreign policy, as one of several outcomes of meaning-making processes by and for people situated in a specific spatiotemporal context. In short, in the words of Valerie Hudson (2014), foreign policy is human all the way down.

In the following, I contrast the original and revised editions of the Russian Foreign Policy Concept, Military Doctrine, and National Security Concept representing the most central official policy documents that are of relevance to Russian foreign policy.²⁵³ The doctrines were already undergoing revision during the Kosovo crisis (Donaldson & Nøgee, 2009, pp. 117-121). The timing of the revision process testifies that the “growing rift between Russia and the West [translated into] the new editions of the highest official documents,” as Aleksey G. Arbatov concludes in a contemporary policy report (2000, p. VI and 15).

The revised doctrines adopted throughout 2000, manifest a tilting point toward the articulation of an increasingly disruptive foreign political thinking and behavior in Russia following the Kosovo crisis. I argue that the foreign political consequences of the Kosovo crisis are important to enhance our understanding of current Russo–Western antagonism. I argue further that this disruptive Russian foreign policy goes further back than President Putin's 2007 Munich speech or even his official inauguration as President of the Russian Federation in May 2000. Instead, the decision to intervene militarily in Kosovo represents the tipping point toward the development of a disruptive foreign policy.

National security concept

The National Security Concept of the Russian Federation (NSC-2000) was officially adopted by acting President Vladimir Putin on January 10, 2000. As

²⁵³ It is important to stress George F. Kennan's key insight that Russian foreign policy—like the foreign policy of any other state—takes place at an official and unofficial level, which can be more or less representative for states' actual actions (1946).

former Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation²⁵⁴ during the Kosovo crisis, Putin had presumably participated in the outlining of the draft of NSC-2000 during the spring of 1999 and approved by Yeltsin in October 1999 (Donaldson & Noguee, 2009, p. 117).

Compared to the national security concept adopted two years earlier on December 19, 1997 (NSC-1997), NSC-2000 was significantly shorter, more concise, and explicit about the fundamental threats against Russian national security (both regarding how these threats were defined and ranked as well as the multiple ways of facing them).

This increased awareness and conciseness is reflected in the decreased number of pages. Russian decision-makers apparently became better at concisely articulating if, what, and how Foreign Others posed a threat to the post-Soviet Russian Self. In contrast, the form and content of NSC-1997 testifies to the lacking sense of clarity dominating the younger Russian Federation. In the following, I substantiate my interpretation by identifying some of the most significant similarities and differences between NSC-1997 and NSC-2000, and I situate these findings in light of the reconstructed Russian Self.

An initial key deviation is the narrative background used to frame the respective concepts. The narrative of Russia coming to a crossroads—identified in the analysis above—is also present in the formulation of NSC-2000. The sense of the Russian Self in an existential dilemma is used to frame the need to revise the national security strategy.

The underlying ontology guiding NSC-2000 is that “two mutually exclusive trends” characterize the “dynamic transformation” of the international system after the Cold War. The first trend constitutes “strengthened economic and political positions of a significant number of states and their integrative associations [and] multilateral management” of international relations.²⁵⁵ The second trend constitutes an international system based on

domination by developed Western countries [that] under U.S. leadership and designed for unilateral solutions (above all the use of military force) of key issues in world politics circumventing of the fundamental rules of international law.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ In March 1999, President Yeltsin appointed Putin Secretary of the Security Council. Until Putin was appointed Prime Minister in August 1999, he simultaneously held the positions as Secretary of the Security Council and Director of the Federal Security Service (appointed in July 1998).

²⁵⁵ “The National Security Concept of the Russian Federation,” January 10, 2000 in R. Brannon (2009), *Russian Civil-Military Relations* (pp. 269-285), p. 270.

²⁵⁶ “The National Security Concept of the Russian Federation,” January 10, 2000 in R. Brannon (2009), *Russian Civil-Military Relations* (pp. 269-285), p. 270.

This pessimistic outlook deviated significantly from the optimism expressed in NSC-1997. Here, from the Russian perspective, the international scene was “characterized primarily by the strengthening trend toward the formation of a multi-polar world” where military force retained its significance while “economic, political, scientific, and technical, ecological, and information factors are playing an increasing role.”²⁵⁷ The lengthy process toward multipolarity manifested challenges to Russia owing to the negative “change in Russia’s status within the world and [...] internal reforms,” but also significant opportunities due to the decreased “danger of direct aggression against” and “prospects of broader integration of” Russia.²⁵⁸ In NSC-1997, contemporary military expenditures are perceived as “burdensome to the state.”²⁵⁹

All in all, the outlooks are optimistic given the presence of the “preconditions for ensuring reliable national security for the country in the 21st century.”²⁶⁰ The most important and fundamental task ahead for ensuring national security, as identified in NSC-1997, was boosting the Russian economy by improving Russian legislation and state oversight.²⁶¹ NSC-1997 explicitly denounced Russian attempt to “maintain parity in arms and armed forces with the leading states of the world,” instead calling for the implementation of a “principle of realistic deterrence” based on credible nuclear deterrence to avert potential aggression at a lower cost due to there being less need for conventional forces.^{262,263}

In three short years, the Russian perception of world politics and military expenditures tilted significantly. NSC-2000 maintains Russia’s future projects for “broader integration into the world economy and for expanded cooperation,” and a significant number of “commonality of interests” existed between Russia and others states in the international community; “a number of

²⁵⁷ “The National Security Concept of the Russian Federation,” December 19, 1997 in R. Brannon (2009), *Russian Civil-Military Relations* (pp. 193-242), p. 215.

²⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 216.

²⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 221.

²⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 217.

²⁶¹ Ibid. pp. 228-229.

²⁶² Ibid. p. 236-237.

²⁶³ Here it is worth noting the similarities between the military reforms of the Red Army undertaken by Nikita S. Khrushchev in the 1950s, which also privileged nuclear deterrence over conventional forces. As in NSC-1997, Khrushchev’s rationale was to save financial resources needed for envisioned progressive economic and social reform. Just like Khrushchev’s military reform, cutting military budgets and relocating resources from conventional to nuclear deterrence caused significance criticism among the General Staff and between the Russian Armed Forces and government (Donaldson & Noguee, 2009, pp. 145-146).

states [stepping up] efforts to weaken Russia politically, economically, militarily and in other ways.”²⁶⁴ As regards the “other ways” in which Russia can be weakened, “information warfare” was added to NSC-2000. NSC-2000 defines information as

exerting dangerous effects on other countries’ information systems, of disrupting information and telecommunication systems and data storage systems, and of gaining unauthorized access to them.²⁶⁵

This addition is particularly interesting from the perspective of the current actions undertaken by Russia and the West within the realm of information warfare aimed at influencing the foreign and domestic political development of foreign states through disinformation campaigns targeting relevant domestic and international audiences.

I return to the role of disinformation and information warfare in next chapter in relation to the Ukraine crisis. However, I will briefly foreshadow the analytical point that Russian decision-makers already in 2000—probably due to the heated public and political discussions within Russia spurred by the foreign political developments in the Balkans—learned the potentially powerful role played by domestic audiences in bringing about desired policy changes in states of interest during the unsettled times characterizing crisis contexts.²⁶⁶

Increased efforts to weaken Russia were also mentioned in the opening of NSC-1997, but the revised concept was more explicitly singling out “developed Western countries” and “NATO,” which under “U.S. leadership” manifest challenges to Russia’s international and domestic revival. In NSC-2000, No fewer than eight bullet points explicitly summed up the most fundamental threats to Russian national security from the international sphere. In addition to the aforementioned perception of efforts by “some states” to diminish Russia’s great power role, NATO’s eastward expansion, the possible emergence of

²⁶⁴ “The National Security Concept of the Russian Federation,” January 10, 2000 in R. Brannon (2009), *Russian Civil-Military Relations* (pp. 269-285), p. 270.

²⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 274.

²⁶⁶ Accusations and the current investigation of Russian meddling in the 2016 US presidential election might be the most prominent example of Russian information warfare. A less prominent but important alleged Russian cyberattack took place in Estonia in April 2007 in the wake of the relocation of the Bronze Soldier of Tallinn, a Soviet World War II War memorial. The Russian attack targeted the Estonian parliament, banks, newspapers, and government institutions. The Russian cyberattack in Estonia is an interesting case of a cyberattack triggered by disagreement over a non-material issue rooted in conflicting conceptions of the past.

“foreign military bases and major military presences,” the “outbreak and escalation of conflicts near the state border,” and “territorial claims” are identified as fundamental threats.²⁶⁷

I interpret these additions as a testimony to how important and widespread the “Balkanization thesis” was among Russian politicians when they outlined the new national security strategy: The perceived threat of further Balkanization as an American grand strategy to deliberately contain and ultimately engulf Russia, anxiety for future separatism in neighboring states diffusing into dissent among ethnic or nationalist minorities in Russia. To counter these threats, Russia needed to make up for previously “inadequate funding for the defense.”²⁶⁸ Whereas NSC-1997 denoted military spending as “burdensome” and suggested a principle of “realistic deterrence,” NSC-2000 introduced a principle of “rational spending on defense” that maintained credible nuclear deterrence as the backbone of national security but added an aspiration of Russian armed forces being able to “carry out strategic deployments for missions in a large-scale war.”^{269, 270}

The addition of this aspiration to increase spending on Russian Armed Forces is a natural consequence of the Russian peacekeeping operation, but also a meaningful addition given the altered conception of the Russian Self in crisis. Russia had reaffirmed its role as a great power and demonstrated both its willingness and capacity to defy and disrupt the agendas of other states in international relations. Having reconstructed a sense of Russian Self—envisioning Russia playing a more active and independent role in world politics—demands that adjustments be made to the role of the Russian military.

While the Russian military must accommodate the increased number of states it will deter—particularly US/NATO—from attacking Russia, Russia also has to develop its conventional operational capacities to assume a more active military role in large-scale war as well as peacekeeping.

²⁶⁷ “The National Security Concept of the Russian Federation,” January 10, 2000 in R. Brannon (2009), *Russian Civil-Military Relations* (pp. 269-285), p. 274.

²⁶⁸ Ibid: p. 275.

²⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 282.

²⁷⁰ Another crucial addition to NSC-2000 was the plausibility of the “use of military force inside the country [...] in strict conformity with the Constitution” (Ibid.), which had otherwise been explicitly denounced the domestic use of military force in NSC-1997. Thus, “utilization of military force against civilians to achieve domestic political objectives is not permitted” (“The National Security Concept of the Russian Federation,” December 19, 1997 in R. Brannon (2009), *Russian Civil-Military Relations* (pp. 193-242), p. 238).

This need for conventional operational capacities aligned with the shift in the military doctrine. Whereas the Russian military doctrine from 1993 outlined specific goals for the withdrawal of Russian troops stationed outside of Russia's external frontiers—in addition to “reduction in the numerical strength of the Armed Forces”—the doctrine from 2000 mentions neither withdrawal nor reduction of existing Russian troops.²⁷¹

This dominating sense of an increasingly active and independent role for Russia was stated on the first page of the new 2000-concept, which characterizes Russia as one of the world's great powers, because of

centuries of history and rich cultural traditions [that] continue to play an important role in global processes due to its great economic, scientific, technological, and military potential and its unique strategic location on the Eurasian continent.²⁷²

Given its promising potential and significant role in world politics, Russia should actively seek to “facilitate the formation of an ideology of establishing a multipolar world.”²⁷³ This statement aligns well with Yeltsin's Self-aware performance at the G8 summit, as mentioned above, with a Russian President starting to act like the leader of an independent great power, but not until after having used military force in Kosovo.

Military doctrine

The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation was adopted on April 21, 2000 (MD-2000) and replaced the former military doctrine from November 2, 1993 (MD-1993). The contextual outlook of the two doctrines differs substantially. MD-1993 defined itself as a “document of the transitional period,” where Russia reconstructed its state apparatus and implemented political and economic reforms in the context of a new international system in which “ideological antagonism is being overcome” by partnership and cooperation among the states in the international community significantly reducing threats to peace.²⁷⁴

²⁷¹ “The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation,” November 2, 1993 in R. Brannon (2009), *Russian Civil-Military Relations* (pp. 193-213), p. 207.

²⁷² “The National Security Concept of the Russian Federation,” January 10, 2000 in R. Brannon (2009), *Russian Civil-Military Relations* (pp. 269-285), p. 270.

²⁷³ “The National Security Concept of the Russian Federation,” January 10, 2000 in R. Brannon (2009), *Russian Civil-Military Relations* (pp. 269-285), p. 270.

²⁷⁴ “The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation,” November 2, 1993 in R. Brannon (2009), *Russian Civil-Military Relations* (pp. 193-213), p. 194.

Contrary to MD-1993, MD-2000 describes the context as a period in which the achievement of “military–political goals through indirect, non-close-quarter operations predetermines the particular danger of modern wars,” deeming it necessary to “take exhaustive measures” to prevent the further deterioration of Russian security at an early stage.²⁷⁵

Whereas MD-1993 explicitly declared that Russia “regards no state as its enemy,” MD-2000 explicitly identifies the first and second most severe sources of instability of the military–political situation as unnamed states attempting “to weaken (ignore) the existing mechanism for safeguarding international security” and the use of “humanitarian intervention without the sanction of the UN Security Council.”²⁷⁶ In contrast, MD-1993 identified the two primary threats as the “buildup of groupings of troops (forces) on the border” and direct “attacks on facilities and installations on the state border,” respectively.²⁷⁷ Whereas the conception of military threat in MD-1993 was primarily their proximity to Russian borders, MD-2000 introduces

attempts to ignore (infringe) the Russian Federation’s interests in resolving international security problems, and to oppose its strengthening as one influential center in a multipolar world.²⁷⁸

The addition of attempts to ignore Russia’s role in world politics is a key testimony of how the sense of the ascent of Russia in spite of the Western Other subsequently translated into official Russian foreign policy.

Besides adding threats against the international role and status of Russia to the list of perceived threats, MD-2000 includes the emergence of “modern war” as a phenomenon.²⁷⁹ In particular, MD-2000 expanded NSC-2000’s emphasis on the increased role of “information warfare” together with the increased use of “irregular armed formations” alongside regular troop formations, “extensive utilization of sabotage and terrorist methods,” and the manipulation of the “complex moral and psychological atmosphere in which the troops operate.”²⁸⁰

Contrary to pre-Modern warfare, modern war is characterized by its influence on “all spheres of human activity” and the “extensive use of indirect, non-

²⁷⁵ “The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation,” April 21, 2000 in R. Brannon (2009), *Russian Civil-Military Relations* (pp. 287-309), p. 289.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ “The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation,” November 2, 1993 in R. Brannon (2009), *Russian Civil-Military Relations* (pp. 193-213), p. 196.

²⁷⁸ “The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation,” April 21, 2000 in R. Brannon (2009), *Russian Civil-Military Relations* (pp. 287-309), p. 290.

²⁷⁹ Ibid. pp. 299-301.

²⁸⁰ Ibid. pp. 299-300.

close-quarter, and other [nontraditional] forms of means,” which fundamentally changes the “coalition nature” and dynamics of war.²⁸¹ In the following case study focusing on the reconstruction of the Russian Self before, during, and after intervention in Ukraine and subsequent alterations to Official Russian foreign policy, I return to the increasingly important role that policy documents ascribe to cyber and information warfare over time.

The entry of information warfare and modern war pushes Russian decision-makers to rethink what constitutes potential threats to Russian security and how to face these new threats. In contrast to MD-1993, MD-2000 particularly deals with abstract threats to Russia’s role and prestige. In other words, threats concerning the ontological dimension of Russian security. The newly identified threats facing Russia in 2000 are not solely material (e.g., military capabilities inflicting direct physical harm and death using fire power) but increasingly thought of in terms of immaterial threats against distinctively Russian “spiritual and cultural values.” I interpret the introduction of explicit thoughts about the capacity and willingness to defend Russian values as an important testimony to the heightened awareness about what meaningfully constitutes the Russian Self provoked by the senses of ontological insecurity encountering the Western Other in the Kosovo crisis.

Foreign policy concept

The revised *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation* was adopted on June 28, 2000 (FPC-2000). Similar to NSC-2000 and MD-2000, FPC-2000 was also more concise and explicit than the previous concept from 1993 (FPC-1993). About 70% of the pages in FPC-1993 addressed Russian foreign policies toward various states, regions, and organizations in general terms. The main message was that Russia wanted to be more active in these states and regions while at the same time expanding its political-economic ties to the world.

The lack of a clear vision, focus, and conciseness was bluntly admitted in the final four lines of the FPC-1993:

Suggestions promoting compliance of the policy with the national interests will be adequately received and considered. Ideally, it would be in the country’s interests to reach as broad a consensus as possible with regard to foreign policy options and principles.²⁸²

²⁸¹ Ibid. p. 299.

²⁸² “The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation,” April 23, 1993 in T. Melville (2005), *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition: Concepts and Realities* (pp. 27-64), p. 290.

These final lines offer clear-cut testimony regarding the absence of a vision for the post-Soviet Russian Self in 1993. The absence of clear demarcations between the Russian Self and Foreign Others—in addition to the post-Soviet Self and Soviet Other—made formulating a clear vision for Russia domestically as well as in foreign policy terms extremely delicate so close to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Observable testimony to the significant unsettledness characterizing 1993 is the constitutional crisis, which culminated on October 4, when President Yeltsin ordered tanks to shell the Russian White House. A key outcome of the crisis was the approval of a new constitution on December 12 of the same year, which consolidated and strengthened the Russian presidency with the right to issue decrees.

The delicateness surrounding these transitional debates is reflected in the introduction of FPC-1993. The background of Russian foreign policy was one of a post-communist state, which had recently embarked “on a path of democratic development” accompanied by a “complex search for a new political identity.”²⁸³ As the authors of the concept argued, a prerequisite for efficient Russian foreign policy was a strengthening democratic Russian state and overcoming “outdated perceptions rooted in confrontation between ‘two systems’.”²⁸⁴

Following the final lines of FPC-1993 stated above, the success of Russia’s post-Soviet foreign policy was contingent on the degree of consensus among the Russian custodians. As already discussed in the Introduction above, there was still a long way to go to reach such a consensus in 1993. Consequently, like several other contemporary policy areas, Russian foreign policy was only vaguely defined. Without a clear or meaningful sense of belonging, clear and concise articulations of politics of belonging could not be constructed and implemented.

In FPC-1993, the aforementioned sense of the revival of Russian greatness in collaboration with, even integration into, the Western Other dominated. In FPC-1993, Russian authors expressed convictions that both Russia and the West shared the same “core values of world civilization” and that the further development of partnerships, on equal terms, were necessary to reconstruct Russia’s great power status in world politics. In fact, the key condition for the “survival of the country and the salvation of the national” was to develop an efficient and dynamic economy to secure Russia’s integration into the world economy. Without economic revival, Russia could not reaffirm its role as an

²⁸³ “The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation,” April 23, 1993 in T. Melville (2005), *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition: Concepts and Realities* (pp. 27-64), pp. 28 & 30.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p. 28.

equal member of the “great power’s club of the late 20th and early 21st centuries.”²⁸⁵ The task ahead was to realize the “scientific and technological potential” within the military branches by reorienting them toward satisfying civilian needs, facilitating access to “foreign expertise, technology, and investments,” and to “establish favorable conditions for international trade.”²⁸⁶ Instead of burdening the Russian economy with expensive military spending, Russia needed to funnel financial resources into a realization of the tasks ahead; a message resonating with the supporters of the initial vision for the Russian Self proliferated by Viktor Chernomyrdin.

With respect to Russia’s bilateral relations to the US, EU, and Eastern European states, an underlying idea was to develop strategic partnerships to secure the “successful[l] implementation of our reforms” and to overcome the suspicion existing in Russia as well as the USA, EU, and Eastern Europe.²⁸⁷ FPC-1993 explicitly denounced the “imperial arrogance and egocentrism [...] typical of the former USSR”²⁸⁸ and strived to “actively involve the USA in resolving conflicts and protecting human rights in the CIS and Baltic states.”²⁸⁹

At the same time, however, the concept also explicitly stipulated that Russia retained the right to “actively oppose any attempts to enhance the military-political presence of third states in the countries adjacent to its territory”²⁹⁰ in the near abroad. While the concept explicitly invited third party states in the EU and the USA to play an active role in the near abroad, it also echoed a notion of Russian exclusivity and dominance similar to the American Monroe Doctrine.²⁹¹

The ambiguity found in FPC-1993 was symptomatic of the indecisiveness mentioned above among the ruling Russian elite regarding the future vision

²⁸⁵ “The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation,” April 23, 1993 in T. Melville (2005), *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition: Concepts and Realities* (pp. 27-64), p. 38.

²⁸⁶ Ibid. p. 39.

²⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 42.

²⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 45.

²⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 43.

²⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 36.

²⁹¹ Mette Skak (2011) traces the development of the Russian edition of the Monroe Doctrine back to Yuri Skovo, head of the Russian Security Council, who in 1992 contributed to the formulation of the “Guidelines for The Russian Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation.” Over the course of several articles in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*—building on the thoughts of the Head of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Duma Evgeny Ambartsumov—Andranik Migranian formulated the key idea to the Russian Monroe Doctrine as defining the “Soviet Union’s geopolitical space as Russia’s vital sphere of interest” (Skak, 2011, p. 144).

for relations between the Russian Self and Western Other. There was consensus about the visions for a future Russia reaffirming its role as an independent and active great power in world politics. However, the path to greatness via Russian integration into the world economy was controversial, as it meant integration into and aid from institutions dominated by the West and a decreased sense of military-political exclusiveness in the territories surrounding the young federation.

As already mentioned, the dilemma between which paths to Russian greatness to pursue was hardly new. In order to be a great power and enjoy exclusive status in world politics, Russia needed to import modern technology and capital to draw its backward economy into the international economy. For centuries, Russian rulers have been acutely aware of how Russian backwardness has been the most significant factor in repeatedly thwarting plans to revive former Russian greatness. Nevertheless, they also abandoned reforms aimed at modernizing the economy and increased military spending instead. Paul Kennedy concludes that the fundamental dilemma haunting Russia over the course of history:

Without its massive military power, it counts for little in the world; *with* its massive military power, it makes others feel insecure and hurts its own economic prospects. It is a grim dilemma. (Kennedy, 1989, p. 664)

The traumatic Russian past seems to have fostered a dysfunctional strategic culture among Russian decision-makers, which over the course of history has socialized them into being more prone to allocating funds to military capabilities instead of easing the burden for the Russian economy, resulting in a chronic need for modernization (e.g., Jones, 1990; J. L. Snyder, 1977). The massive military spending makes surrounding states less prone to trade with a seemingly assertive Russia, which in turn harms both the national economy as well as security.

In FPC-2000, the Russian foreign policy toward single states and regions has shrunk significantly, with the exception of Russo–NATO relations. Russia's relations to NATO are addressed at length in the 2000 concept. From once being a strategic partner Russia considered joining in FPC-1993,²⁹² NATO is now interpreted as something not coinciding with Russia's interests

²⁹² "The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation," April 23, 1993 in T. Melville (2005), *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition: Concepts and Realities* (pp. 27-64), p. 49.

and occasional even “directly contradic[ting] them.”²⁹³ Previously held hopes for increased partnership—as outlined in FPC-1993—between Russia and the rest of world “have not been justified,” the new concept notes.²⁹⁴

The Kosovo crisis had once and for all demonstrated that the envisioned relationship between the Russian Self and Western Other was obsolete. Instead, securing and strengthening the endangered “sovereignty and territorial integrity,” Russia needed to “achieve firm and prestigious positions in the world community.” To do so, Russia needed to speed up the creation of a multipolar world order, which respected the “diversity of the modern world with its variety of interests”—unlike the existing unipolar order.

Under American leadership, the unipolar structure relocated solutions to fundamental problems away from the UN to various illegitimate “Western institutions and forums of limited composition.”²⁹⁵ With so-called humanitarian interventions based on “selective legitimacy,” the Western Other actively undermined the principle of non-interference; a principle that has been fundamental to international relations since the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) secured sovereign states their freedom to arrange their own domestic affairs, particularly the choice of values and norms constituting a meaningful life in independent states (Bogaturov, 2005, p. 307). FPC-2000 therefore stipulates that Russia actively strives to “oppose attempts to belittle the role of the United Nations and its Security Council.”²⁹⁶ In short, the era of Russia being the “mailman” for the Western Other is passé and replaced with a more authentic and independent post-Soviet vision for Russian Self striving to revive former greatness *in spite* of the Western Other.

Disruptive foreign policy taking shape

Four key commonplaces emerge across the revised national security, foreign policy, and military doctrines adopted after the Kosovo crisis. First, Russia is not equal to other great powers. Russian protests have persistently been overheard, which culminated on March 23, 1999, when NATO initiated the Operation Allied Freedom despite Russian protests. Second, authority in the international system was gradually sliding away from the UN and OSCE toward

²⁹³ “The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation,” *Federation of American Scientists*, June 28, 2000: <https://fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/econconcept.htm> (accessed November 23, 2018), p. 7.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 1.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 2.

²⁹⁶ “The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation,” *Federation of American Scientists*, June 28, 2000: <https://fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/econconcept.htm> (accessed November 23, 2018), p. 3.

NATO and the USA. NATO's intervention in Serbia demonstrated the Western Other's contempt for international law. From the Russian perspective, the air campaign against Serbia represents a clear-cut violation of the state sovereignty principle. The crisis discloses how obtaining a resolution from the UN Security Council is a "nice to have" (not a need to have) for the Western Other. More fundamentally, crisis reaffirms the sense of ontological insecurity among Russian custodians concerned with the ambiguous and at times uncomfortable relation between the Russian Self and Western Other. In short, the crisis reveals an Official Russia that has deceived itself for too long by playing the role of an equal great power without actually being one. Western contempt for international law and the use of military force against Serbia elucidates what several members of the Russian custodianship have argued since the end of the Cold War: Russia is not the great power it thought it was.

The Russian sense of belonging was transformed in the encounter with Western Other and, consequently, the politics toward the Western Other. This brings me to the third commonplace regarding a shift in the relations to new and existing partners in world politics. Across revised doctrines, it is apparent that Russia is increasingly seeking to revive the Primakovian strategy of multi-vectoral foreign policy in order to speed-up the development toward multipolarity. As already mentioned above, the strategic reorientation toward multi-vectoral foreign policy was under way prior to Kosovo (Mankoff, 2012, p. 94).

For instance, Russia and China concludes the "Russian-Chinese Joint Declaration of a Multipolar World" in 1997.²⁹⁷ While Chinese-Russian rapprochements were not novel, they increased in number parallel to the growing severity of the Kosovo crisis. Simultaneously with the escalation of the crisis, those among the Russian custodians who argued that the US constitutes a smaller vector gradually won support. In particular, Russo-Chinese collaboration increases after the faulty NATO bombings of the Chinese Embassy on May 7, 1999. Throughout June 1999, an unprecedented number of bilateral Chinese-Russian negotiations about diplomatic and military collaboration are concluded.

The development of new bi- and multilateral partnerships continues thought 1999 and into 2000. On July 5, 2000—about a year after the Russian

²⁹⁷ In the statement, Russia and China announce that they are "forging a new type of long-term inter-State relations that are not directed against third countries" in order to "promote the multipolarization of the world and the establishment of a new international order" ("Russian-Chinese Joint Declaration on a Multipolar World and the Establishment of a New International Order," *General Assembly of the United Nations*, May 20, 1997: <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/docs/52/plenary/a52-153.htm> (accessed November 3, 2018)).

dash to Slatina—the Dushanbe Statement is concluded. The statement commits the militaries of the Shanghai Five to actively pushing forward to conduct joint exercises. According to the statement, this is in response to the “use of force or threat of force in international relations without the UN Security Council’s prior approval” (Excerpt from “Dushanbe Statement” in Gill, 2001).

The following year, the Shanghai Five is upgraded to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) on June 15, 2001. The SCO treaty stipulates the firm conviction that the world is in a dynamic process toward “political multipolarity” and that a multilateral mechanism for cooperation among the former member states constituting the Shanghai Five²⁹⁸—plus Uzbekistan—is needed. This mechanism should secure the more effective use “of emerging possibilities and addressing new challenges and threats.”²⁹⁹ Rapprochement in Central Asia was initiated parallel to the ongoing Kosovo crisis, and is still ongoing today. Since 2003, annual joint military exercises have taken place among its members.

Besides increased collaboration with China and India, Russia takes serious steps toward actual integration between the former Soviet republics. I use the word actual to separate the integration process that followed before and after Kosovo. Before Kosovo, Russia made some half-hearted attempts at integrating the former Soviet republics. Key regional organizations, like the *Commonwealth of Independent States* and the intergovernmental military alliance, *Collective Security Treaty*, under the overview of the former, established in 1991 and 1992, respectively, resemble paper tigers (e.g., K. J. Møller, 2009). While the CIS and CST formally appeared powerful and the member states united, in reality the member states lacked the will and resources for the organizations to work as intended. In early October 2002, Russia took the initiative to transform the CST into the *Collective Security Treaty Organization* (CSTO).

Unlike former bilateral and multilateral collaboration between Russia and its partners in the near abroad and internationally, the Kosovo crisis helped convert international collaboration from words into deeds. Paradoxically, the

²⁹⁸ A central element in the establishment of the Shanghai Five Group was confidence-building among China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan’s respective military organizations (“Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions” signed in Shanghai, 1996) and the reduction of armed forces in the border areas between the five members (“Treaty on Reduction of Military Forces in Border Regions” signed in Moscow, 1997).

²⁹⁹ “Declaration on the Establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” *GSDRC*, June 15, 2001: <http://www.gsdr.org/docs/open/regional-organisations/sco,%202001,%20establishing%20declaration.pdf> (accessed November 23, 2008), p. 1.

Russian dissatisfaction with NATO's lack of will to transform words into deeds helped Russia and its non-Western partners to overcome their differences and actively collaborate on the creation of something similar to NATO.³⁰⁰

The fourth and most central commonplace relates to the use of force—conventional and modern—as an acceptable and effective means to reaffirm Russia's role as a great power on equal terms with its Western peers.³⁰¹ In other words, the use of force despite the risks and adverse impacts associated with it offers an effective way of creating the desperately needed ideational demarcation between the Russian Self and Western Other.

Before the dash to Slatina, the Russian irrelevance in world politics was demonstrated in full by NATO repeatedly overruling Russian protests. After the dash, Russia successfully performs the role as a great power at the Helsinki Summit and G8 meeting in Cologne. Unprecedentedly, US President Bill Clinton reaffirms Russia's key role in Kosovo and world politics on live Russian television.

Another, equally important lesson was that while the use of force might not push the Western Other to change their strategic goals, it might disrupt how they had initially planned on realizing them.³⁰² By disrupting Western policies in Kosovo, Russia was not preventing a NATO-led occupation of Ko-

³⁰⁰ Another, although more tacit, element in the increasing Russo–Chinese collaboration is that SCO offers Russia a chance to keep an eye on Chinese foreign political behavior in Central Asia and along the Russo–Chinese border. Thus, Jeffrey Mankoff notes, China's economic growth and military modernization is like a two-edged sword; China's rise is a Russian force multiplier that can be used to balance the West, but it can eventually place Russia in an unsavory position (providing for goods) or ultimately threaten its territorial sovereignty. Thus, Russia and China have a history of disputes along their lengthy border (2012, pp. 179–181).

³⁰¹ Similarly, Aleksey G. Arbatov argues: “The attack on Serbia suddenly removed the Russian taboo against the use of military force that followed the first war in Chechnya [...]. The use of force is the most efficient problem solver, if applied decisively and massively” (2000, p. V).

³⁰² There is a comprehensive scholarly literature about foreign policy learning, which draws on a web of multidisciplinary insights from psychology, sociology, and political science (e.g., Bennett, 1999; Breslauer & Tetlock, 1991; Etheredgē, 1985; Levy, 1994; Mendelson, 1998; Nye, 1987; Stein, 1994; Ziv, 2013). I do not intend to venture into this literature. Instead, I recommend reading *Condemned to Repetition* (1999), where Andrew Bennett examines changes in Soviet and Russian military interventionism from a learning perspective. Bennett emphasizes the important role played by affiliation to competing schools of thought for concrete Soviet and Russian decisions regarding military intervention.

sovo. However, the decision to militarily intervene disrupts the planned occupation, forcing the Western Other to renegotiate the terms of occupation with Russia. A central Russian lesson from Kosovo is that while it did not have the necessary capacity to achieve—or even formulate—its own foreign policy goals, Russia did have enough power to *disrupt* the goals of Foreign Others. This disruptive strategy of being unable to realize Russian goals but being strong enough to prevent others from realizing theirs—I argue—becomes an increasingly important component in the post-Kosovo Russian foreign policy strategy.³⁰³

Disruptive foreign policy is a second-best³⁰⁴ strategy aiming at hindering—ideally preventing—Foreign Others from realizing their goals, due to a lack of novel and alternative Russian foreign policy goals as well as insufficient means and resources to realize eventual goals.

An observable testimony to the introduction of a disruptive foreign policy strategy are the deleted passages about the withdrawal of Russian troops and reducing the financial burdens of Russian defense spending. Contrary to earlier doctrines, the revised doctrines explicitly declare that Russia will increase its conventional and non-conventional capabilities in order to face the threat of modern warfare.³⁰⁵ Other visible evidence of the revived faith in the effective- and appropriateness of the use of force in world politics are exemplified

³⁰³ For a similar observation using *raiding* instead of *disruption* to describe Russian foreign policy, see “Raiding and international brigandry: Russia’s strategy for great power competition,” *War on the Rocks*, Michael Kofman, June 14, 2018: <https://warontherocks.com/2018/06/raiding-and-international-brigandry-russias-strategy-for-great-power-competition/> (accessed November 14, 2018). According to Kofman, raiding is not about “territorial expansion or global domination”, but an “effective riposte to a strong but distracted opponent, [popular] when the technologies of the time create a rift between the political objectives sought and the means available to attain them.”

³⁰⁴ My understanding of disruptive foreign policy is inspired by “The General theory of Second Best” (Lipsey & Lancaster, 1956). A key point is that when realizing the optimal outcome is not achievable, the second-best outcome may look starkly different from the optimal one. Put into the context of Russian foreign policy, realizing Russia cannot formulate and pursue an alternative foreign policy goal—say Russia getting its independent zone of responsibility in Kosovo—the second-best is pursuing something entirely different Russia has the means and resources to do well. For instance, disrupt Foreign Others in realizing their optimal foreign policy goals—say Russia entirely subordinate to NATO in KFOR. Consequently, nobody entirely wins or losses. This outcome may not be optimal, but it is less suboptimal than Russia being the only losing great power.

³⁰⁵ However, the altered understanding of the effectiveness and appropriateness of the use of military force meant that it was no longer reserved for use beyond Russia’s

by the changes made to Russian military budgets and acquisitions. According to Aleksey G. Arbatov, a clear difference between the revised and earlier Russian doctrines is that the revised doctrines do not merely contain empty words, but that they were actually implemented (2000, p. 4). The 2000 SIPRI Report supports Arbatov's conclusion. According to SIPRI, the Russian 2000 defense budget was more likely to "be more fully implanted than the budgets for previous years" (Arbatov, 2000, p. 248).

Despite the Russian financial hardship referred to above, military spending increased 24% in real terms in 1999, manifesting a landmark in Russia's decreasing military spending since the end of the Cold War (SIPRI, 2000, p. 248).³⁰⁶ President Yeltsin signed the military budget for 2000 the same day he resigned from office: December 31, 1999. The new budget includes four areas that are to be increased more than average: arms procurement, military research and development, paramilitary, and peacekeeping forces. The defense orders for 2000 increased by more than 50% compared to 1999, further underscoring the sincerity surrounding the translation of the reconstructed vision for a Russian Self *in spite of* Western Other into Official Russian foreign policy after Kosovo.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was threefold: First, identifying whose senses of ontological insecurity rendered military intervention meaningful in Kosovo—and how. The live-transmitted showdown between General Leonid Ivashov and Viktor Chernomyrdin at Moscow Vnukovo Airport on June 3 manifests the public emergence of the ontological insecurity about losing Russian Self triggering inner dialogue about what actually defined an authentic post-Soviet Russian Self. I identify this showdown to be the start of an inner dialogue among various Russian voices rendering military intervention meaningful; a sense of ontological security brought about by the potential to lose the prospect of an authentic Russian Self if honoring the Bonn Agreement. Initially, this sense of ontological insecurity was felt among the members of the Russian General Staff, but quickly diffused into the halls of the Russian Duma and to the wider public through opinion pieces and articles in central Russian newspapers as well as interviews in Russian radio and TV.

borders. A domestic implication of the altered understanding of the use of force was the overwhelming use of force against Chechen separatists in the Second Chechen War (1999–2009), which erupted in late August.

³⁰⁶ According to SIPRI 2000, military spending almost doubled between 1998 and 1999, increasing from 85.6 to 171.1 billion rubles (SIPRI, 2000, p. 248).

The domestic debate between those who supported and refused the Bonn Agreement became a central issue to the Russian custodians, where the prospects of what honoring or dishonoring the Bonn Agreement would entail for the respective visions of a meaningful Russian Self were discussed. The heated debate between Chernomyrdin and Ivashov following the Bonn Agreement manifests a crossroads for reconstructing the greatness of the Russian Self. Russia faced a fundamental dilemma: either collaborate with or defy the Western Other in the encounter over Kosovo. Russian custodians could therefore choose between two fundamentally different paths to reconstruct its former great power role and sense of authentic Self: collaboration or defiance. These two paths build on two idealized visions for the Russian Self based on markedly different understandings of national identity and the ontological make-up of the Western and Russian lifeworlds. Ultimately, Official Russia intervened in Kosovo by dashing toward the Slatina Airbase on June 12, 1999.

The second aim was to answer by whom and how visions for the Russian Self were reconstructed before, during, and after the military intervention in Kosovo. To Chernomyrdin and his supports, the Bonn Agreement showcases what a post-Soviet Russian Self was capable of achieving with diplomacy, whereas according to Ivashov and his supporters, the same agreement was symptomatic of a vaguely defined post-Soviet Russia moving one step closer to losing an authentic and independent Russian Self entirely. To Ivashov, the Bonn Agreement was not a manifestation of post-Soviet Russian greatness, but rather a continuation of treating Russia as an inferior mailman for the Western Other. If not daring to stand up to the Western Other in Kosovo, however, Russia might not be able to stand up later at all. A testimony of such reasoning is expressed by Aleksey Pushkov, who argues that Official Russia needs to “defy and disrupt US/NATO interests and policies in order to earn their respect and achieve a more central role in world politics.”³⁰⁷

Paradoxically, the ontological threat posed by the Western Other raises fundamental questions about post-Soviet Russian national identity and its role in world politics, which have been left unanswered since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The unsettledness of crisis facilitates a window of opportunity to more creatively and critically reconstruct the meaningful ideational boundaries between the Russian Self and Western Other. Facing the dilemmatic crossroads, custodians subscribing to the vision of the revival of post-Soviet Russian Self *in spite of* the Western Other successfully used this window of opportunity to articulate a breakthrough for their alternative vision for what constitutes a meaningful Russian Self.

³⁰⁷ “Синдром Черномырдина [The Chernomyrdin Syndrome],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Aleksey Konstantinovich Pushkov, June 11, 1999.

Despite the initial controversy surrounding Ivashov’s unprecedented criticism of Chernomyrdin, the path toward a Russian Self deviating from the one personified by Chernomyrdin gained significant strength when Foreign Minister Ivanov decided to bring Ivashov—instead of Chernomyrdin—to Russo–Western negotiations in Cologne on June 7. The Duma’s adoption of an appeal to relief Chernomyrdin on June 9 further undermines the position of those subscribing to the revival of the Russian Self *because of* the Western Other.

In Table 4 below, I summarize key contestations and commonplaces elucidated in the inner dialogue among Russian voices before, during, and after the Russian military intervention in Kosovo.

Table 4: Key commonplaces and contestations in the Russian inner dialogue before, during, and after military intervention in Kosovo

| Commonplaces | Contestations |
|---|---|
| (1) Envisioning post-Soviet Russia as a great power, which must be treated on equal terms with Western ones. | (1) Bonn Agreement reflects a responsible versus a subordinate Russia. |
| (2) The UN Security Council as the supreme authority in world politics. | (2) Successfully reconstructing Russian Self as a great power <i>because or in spite of</i> the Western Other. |
| (3) Russia must be present in the Balkans and participate in the peacekeeping mission in Kosovo. However, the terms of participation are contested. | (3) The primary prerequisite of Russian great power revival is located inside (versus outside) its state borders. |
| | (4) The Russian Self is distinctively different from or similar to the Western Other |

While custodians criticizing Chernomyrdin partially recognize his role in ending the NATO air campaign and the adoption of Resolution 1244 in the UN Security Council, a majority of Russian voices continue to utter support for reconstruction of post-Soviet Russian Self along the path *in spite of*—in contrast to *because of*—the Western Other, disregarding the end of the air campaign and resolution. Russia’s military intervention on June 12 cemented this pathway, and the Russo–Western Helsinki Summit and G8 Summit reaffirmed it.

The third key research question is how reconstructed visions of the Russian Self translated into the foreign policy of Official Russia after the intervention in Kosovo. Here, I would like to highlight two key revisions across the central official Russian foreign policy documents revised after the Russian intervention. First, a revival of the Primakovian multi-vectoral foreign policy strategy is visible in the revised documents. Second—and most significantly—determining when the use of conventional and modern force is appropriate and acceptable has changed. Together, these two revisions herald the introduction of a *disruptive* Russian foreign policy strategy. The key logic behind

this strategy is that Official Russia might not have the capacity to realize or formulate its own foreign political goals, instead holding the capacity to prevent the Western Other from realizing theirs by directing the means and resources available toward disrupting them. Evidence of this disruptive reorientation in Russian foreign policy is found in the deleted passages about the withdrawal of Russian troops and reducing the financial burden of Russian defense spending compared to earlier versions of official central foreign policy documents. Unlike earlier defense budgets, the budget adopted after the intervention in Kosovo was going to be implemented.

In sum—as Russian scholar Andrey Melville concludes—the “deep identity crisis” following the dissolution of the Soviet Union remained intact after Kosovo (2005, p. 440). Indeed, the fundamental question about Russian national identity remained:

What is Russia today? [...] the successor to the USSR? [...] merely one of the fifteen “fragments” of the Soviet Union? [...] “skeleton” of the world’s last great empire? [...]. A new intendent state in transition? (Melville, 2005, p. 440).

No fixed post-Soviet Russian Self was reconstructed or reaffirmed before, during, or after Russia’s intervention in Kosovo. However, the most dangerous Russo–Western encounter since the Cold War presents a window of opportunity used to reconstruct a seemingly more authentic Russian Self in spite of the Western Other, which translates into a more intendent and self-confident foreign political stance introducing disruption as a goal in itself.

The main achievement of Russia’s intervention in Kosovo was not material, but ideational and particularly ontological. As Yeltsin concludes in his memoir, the crisis manifests “the moment of truth for our relations with the West,” and the Russian Self seemingly emerged from the Kosovo crisis with a greater degree of Self-awareness about what constitutes a meaningful sense and foreign policy of post-Soviet national belonging:

Russia had reaffirmed its status as an equal political partner. Without whom it was unthinkable to resolve world conflicts and decide important issues [...] there were not seven but eight full-fledged members in their [the West’s] club (Yeltsin, 2000, p. 346).

An indication of this reconstructed vision of the post-Soviet Russian Self emerging in the wake of the intervention in Kosovo was when the first post-Soviet national anthem³⁰⁸ was replaced with State Anthem of the Russian Federation [Госуда́рственный гимн Росси́йской Федера́ции] combining

³⁰⁸ “Патриотическая Песнь Глинки [The Patriotic Song]” adopted on November 23, 1990. Mikhail Glinka composed the song in the 19th century.

the renowned melody from the Soviet national anthem with new lyrics adopted by the Russian Federation on December 27, 2000.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁹ Former President Boris Yeltsin, who had not been commenting on Russian politics since leaving the Kremlin in December 1999, heavily criticized President Vladimir Putin for changing the Russian national anthem (“Yeltsin attacks Putin over anthem,” *BBC*, December 7, 2000).

Chapter 4: The Ukraine Crisis

If the Banderovites take Sevastopol before our very eyes and organize a slaughter there, and we stand by and watch, I am afraid that we ourselves will not be able to survive as a nation after such a betrayal. [...] there will be no forgiveness for us, neither from others, nor from ourselves.
— *Yegor S. Kholmogorov, February 24, 2014*³¹⁰

The Olympics became a pleasant prelude to Russia's return to real politics. The national idea sought for the last 20 years, as it turned out, lay beyond the formal borders of Russia [...] only by saving the world can we save ourselves.
— *Oleg Bondarenko, March 13, 2014*³¹¹

The quotes from conservative intellectual Yegor Kholmogorov and director of the Progressive Politics Foundation Oleg Bondarenko are illustrative of two central meanings present in the context before and after the Russian intervention in Ukraine. First, the Russian imagined community is risking the loss of its vague sense of “National Self” if failing to dare to encounter the perceived Western-backed Ukrainian instigators of the coup against Viktor Yanukovych. This testifies to the heightened sense of ontological insecurity about the future for “Russian Self” caused by ousting Yanukovych on February 21, 2014. Second, the conviction expressed by some Russian custodians that the path towards an ontologically secure Russian Self with a meaningful idea about what it meant, means, and would mean to belong to Russian imagined community goes beyond the Russian Federation's formal borders. It is only by saving the world that Russia can save itself.

Before, in-between, and after these two illustrative quotes proceeded an inner dialogue riddled with contestations and commonplaces about what constitutes threats against what meaningfully defines the Russian Self. The overall aim of this chapter is elucidating the development of these contestations

³¹⁰ “Time to save our own people in Ukraine,” Yegor Kholmogorov, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, February 24, 2014.

³¹¹ “Крым как национальная идея [Crimea as a national idea],” *Izvestiya*, Oleg Bondarenko, March 13, 2014.

and commonplaces about senses of meaningful belonging to visions of Russian Self and how these senses subsequently translated into the foreign policy of belonging represented by “Official Russia.”

To fulfill this overall aim, the chapter is structured around the three key research questions outlined in the Introduction. First, I identify whose and how senses of ontological insecurity or security rendered military intervention meaningful in Ukraine. Second, I address whose and how visions for the Russian Self were reconstructed before, during, and after military intervention. Here, I pay special analytical attention to how contestations and commonplaces develop in the inner Russian dialogue about what defines an authentic sense of Russian Self. Third, I examine how reconstructed visions of the Russian Self translated into the foreign policy of Official Russia.

Setting the Scene

On February 21, 2014, Ukrainian President Viktor F. Yanukovich fled Kiev the same evening he signed a truce with the Ukrainian opposition groupings at Maidan Square. The following day, a congress for deputies from Ukraine’s eastern regions convened in Kharkiv. At the congress, Crimean deputies raise the radical idea of splitting Ukraine. That same day, Yanukovich appears in his last television appearance on Ukrainian soil. In his last appearance before being extracted to Russia, Yanukovich compares ongoing political developments in Ukraine with those surrounding the rise of Nazism in Germany and Austria in the 1930s and insisted he would continue to travel around Ukraine’s southeastern regions.³¹²

Instead of showing up in Kharkiv the following day, a Russian military helicopter extracted Yanukovich, who went into exile in Moscow. At a press conference in Rostov-on-Don on February 28, Yanukovich urges President Vladimir Putin not only to “act,” but reminded him that Russia was “obliged to act” in Ukraine to prevent the Maidan putschists from undertaking political purges and ethnic cleansings, which was a concern that was resonating particularly strongly in Ukraine’s southeastern regions and Russia after a majority of the Supreme Rada voted to abolish the Ukrainian Language Law on February 23. Though the proposal was vetoed the same day, the event was pivotal for the escalation of separatist sentiments in southeastern Ukraine and the inner Russian dialogue about if and how to support separatists. I will elaborate on the consequences of the delicate attempts to abolish the Language Law below.

³¹² “Euromaidan—Fled president Viktor Yanukovich first official statement,” *Euro-maidan PR*, February 22, 2014: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VsoGnOe_Wos (accessed October 24, 2018).

Parallel to the developments in Kiev, pro-Russian protests erupt in Sevastopol and spread throughout Crimea. After the Supreme Rada in Kiev dissolves the Supreme Council of Crimea on February 27, pro-Russian separatists seize control of the Council of Crimea in Simferopol and elect Sergey V. Aksyonov as the new prime minister of a now-independent Crimea. That same day, so-called “green men”—unmarked, masked, and in what look like Russian military uniforms—appear across the Crimean peninsula, occupying infrastructural and military key points without widespread conflict between opposing forces.³¹³

On March 16, the Crimean status referendum replaced occupation with Russian annexation. Merely 2.5 percent of participating voters wanted to restore the borders of Ukraine’s 1992 constitution, keeping Crimea as part of Ukraine.³¹⁴ On March 18, Crimean and Russian representatives sign “The Treaty on Accession of the Republic of Crimea to Russia” in the richly ornate Hall of the Order of St. George at the Kremlin Palace.³¹⁵ Three days later, the Russian Constitutional Court and Federal Assembly ratify the treaty, and Crimea officially became a subject of the Russian Federation.

³¹³ “Green men” is a direct translation from the Russian зелёные человечки. In the Russian press, these green men were sometimes referred to as “polite people” [вежливые люди]. The use of polite people underscored a narrative about the occupation of Crimea stressing the limited use of force and inference in daily life. For more information about local interpretations of the Russian forces on Crimea, see ““Little green men” or “Russian invaders”?,” *BBC*, Vitaly Shevchenko, March 11 2014: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26532154> (accessed September 25, 2018).

³¹⁴ According to official voting data, 96.77% of the participating voters voted in favor of Crimea joining the Russian Federation. However, the percentage of registered voters who actually voted is a moot point. Whether the status referendum is legal and the result valid remain points of controversy. Only voters who found the referendum legitimate voted. Thus, a significant share of the Crimean Tatar population boycotted the referendum. Since the controversial March 2014 referendum, follow-up surveys suggest a majority of the Crimean population wanted Crimea to become part of Russia. Even if the surveys are valid, however, the referendum’s legality remains disputed.

³¹⁵ The treaty was signed by: Russian President Vladimir V. Putin, Chairman of the Crimean State Council Vladimir Konstantinov, Crimean Prime Minister Sergey Aksyonov, and Chairman of the Coordinating Council for the establishment of the Sevastopol municipal administration Aleksey Chaly (“Agreement on the accession of the Republic of Crimea to the Russian Federation signed,” *The Kremlin*, March 18 2014: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20604>, accessed November 18, 2018).

In April 2014, pro-Russian separatism flared up in Donetsk and Lugansk, culminating in the establishment of the independent People's Republics of Lugansk and Donetsk on May 11 of the same year. On April 7, Russian Armed Forces actively began supporting separatist endeavors to push back Ukrainian government Forces from southeastern Ukraine. Despite concluding two Minsk Agreements,³¹⁶ the fighting continues through November 2018 between Ukrainian government and Russian-backed separatists throughout southeastern Ukraine.

Looking back, events escalated quickly in February and March 2014. The pace of development caught decision-makers in Washington, Brussels, Moscow, and Kiev off guard. Less than a month after ousting Yanukovich from Kiev, Russia occupied and annexed Crimea, fighting broke out between Ukrainian government and separatist forces, and Russo–Western relations hit their lowest point since the end of the Cold War.

According to director of the Russian think tank Institute of Political Studies Sergey Markov, Russia's military intervention in the Ukraine crisis manifests the lowest point in Russo–American relations since the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962). This triggers debate about whether it could potentially kick-start a new Cold War.³¹⁷ According to Markov, Russia is leading the struggle against “the global domination of Washington and the new values of postmodernism” in this new Cold War.³¹⁸ Since the Russian intervention, both Western and Russian pundits frequently refer to the ongoing conflict as the prelude to a new Cold War³¹⁹ and point out the difficulties in finding place for constructive Russo–Western dialogues since March 2014.³²⁰

³¹⁶ The Minsk Protocol was signed on September 5, 2014. The ceasefire had broken down by January 2015. The follow-up protocol—Minsk II—was adopted on February 12, 2015.

³¹⁷ “Programme summary of Russian Centre TV “Postscript”,” *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, February 22, 2014.

³¹⁸ “Russia must stop U.S. expansion in Ukraine,” *The Moscow Times*, Sergey Markov, March 14 2014.

³¹⁹ Dmitry Trenin argues that the ongoing Russo–Western conflict is as systemic as the Cold War, but lacks the static division of space—an Iron Curtain—as well as the economic, political, and ideological struggles of the 20th century. The new systemic conflict is characterized by undivided space and features “political adversity and mutual moral rejection, economic restrictions, intense information warfare, and cyber and other forms of sabotage” (Trenin, 2018). Similarly, Robert Legvold argues in *Return to Cold War* (2017) that we are witnessing a return to the Cold War.

³²⁰ During my research stay at American University's School of International Service, I attended the first of several planned meetings between scholars from the Center for Strategic & International Studies and Russian International Affairs Council under

A consequence of the intervention was suspension of Russia's accession to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and The Group of Eight (G8) membership, respectively, on March 12 and 24, 2014. As of March 17, a line of Western sanctions and Russian counter-sanctions follow. Ultimo June 2017, Russia announces it cancelled the annual payment to the Council of Europe and considers withdrawing from the organization entirely.³²¹ Militarily, inter-military collaboration between the West and Russia remains sparse in Syria, endangering both the civilians and servicemen operating there, and the Russo–NATO showdown in the Baltics has grown increasingly tense. Moreover, the use of cyber capabilities and disinformation to project political and economic disruption are further complicating the already sinister threat assessment.

As some Russian custodians see it, Russian intervention resolutely averted yet another engulfment attempt by the “Western Other” to keep Official Russia weak and irrelevant in world politics. By destabilizing the post-Soviet republics along Russia's Western border, the Western Other's Balkanization grand strategy remains operational. What happened at Maidan Square was clearly perceived as an EU-coordinated Russophobic overthrow targeting Moscow; hence, no different from what NATO tried to achieve with its air campaign in Kosovo.³²²

The link between the crises in Kosovo and Ukraine becomes explicitly evident in the frequent references made by the Russian custodianship to the

the title “A Roadmap for U.S.–Russia Relations” in Washington D.C. (March 23, 2017). The aim of the meetings is developing “clear and actionable paths forward for U.S.–Russian cooperation in key areas critical to the security and prosperity of both countries” (“A Roadmap for U.S.–Russia Relations,” *Center for Strategic & International Studies & Russian International Affairs Council*, March 23, 2017: <https://www.csis.org/events/roadmap-us-russia-relations>, accessed September 25, 2018). Similarly, Carnegie Moscow Center launched ‘Minimizing the Risk of an East–West Collision: Practical Ideas for European Security’ in 2017 to gain insights about how to navigate in the “increasingly contentious relationship between Russia and the West” (“Security in Europe, *The Carnegie Moscow Center*: <http://carnegie.ru/specialprojects/securityineurope/all/1624?lang=en&pageOn=1>, accessed September 25, 2018).

³²¹ “Russia cancels payment to Council of Europe after claiming its delegates are being persecuted over Crimea,” *The Independent*, Tom Batchelor, June 30, 2017: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-cancels-council-of-europe-payment-members-persecuted-a7816951.html> (accessed November 28, 2018).

³²² “Russian daily TV roundup for Thursday 20 February 2014,” *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, February 20, 2014.

past. Numerous segments in Russian State TV feature clips from NATO bombings of Yugoslavia and stress the similarity of the independence of Kosovo and Crimea.³²³ On March 18, Putin personally legitimized the Russian intervention with explicit reference to the responsibility to protect ethnic Kosovo-Albanians from Serbians used by NATO 15 years earlier:

Crimean authorities referred to the well-known Kosovo precedent—a precedent our colleagues created with their own hands in a very similar situation, when they agreed that the unilateral separation of Kosovo from Serbia, exactly what Crimea is doing now, was legitimate and did not require any permission from the country's central authorities. [...] things that Kosovo Albanians (and we have full respect for them) were permitted to do, Russians, Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars in Crimea are not allowed [...]. We keep hearing from the United States and Western Europe that Kosovo is some special case. What makes it so special in the eyes of our colleagues? It turns out that it is the fact that the conflict in Kosovo resulted in so many human casualties. Is this a legal argument? The ruling of the International Court says nothing about this. This is not even double standards; this is amazing, primitive, blunt cynicism. One should not try so crudely to make everything suit their interests, calling the same thing white today and black tomorrow.³²⁴

In an interview with German *BILD* in January 2016, Putin further insists on the validity of the Kosovo–Ukraine comparison. With direct reference to Kosovo's independence from Serbia, Putin asks, “if the Kosovans in Kosovo have the right to self-determination, why don't the Crimeans have the same right?”³²⁵ Putin repeats his accusations regarding the Western Other's double standards with regard to Crimea versus Kosovo in the wake of the latest Catalanian independence referendum in October 2017. After speculating why members of the EU unanimously condemned Catalanian independence—while previously having supported the independence of Kosovo—Putin turns to recent condemnations of Crimean accession to Russia, concluding:

It turns out that some of our colleagues think there are “good fighters” for independence and freedom and there are “separatists” who are not entitled to defend their rights, even with the use of democratic mechanisms. [...] such double standards—and this is a vivid example of double standards—pose serious

³²³ “Russian daily TV roundup’, *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, March 11, 2014 & “Programme summary of Russian Channel One TV “Vremya” news,” *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, March 12, 2014.

³²⁴ “Address by President of the Russian Federation,” *The Kremlin*, March 18, 2014: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603> (accessed October 14, 2018).

³²⁵ “Interview to German newspaper Bild. Part 1,” *The Kremlin*, January 5, 2016: (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/51154> (accessed November 1, 2018)).

danger to the stable development of Europe and other continents [...] across the world.³²⁶

Similarly, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey V. Lavrov legitimizes the Russian intervention by drawing parallels to Kosovo during bilateral talks with his American counterpart, US Secretary of State John Kerry, on March 14, 2014:

If our Western partners say that Kosovo was a special case, we respond to that saying that Crimea is even more special. Crimea is a case that cannot be considered separately from history [...]. For Russia, Crimea means incommensurably more than [sic.] the Comoro Islands for France and the Falkland Islands for Britain.³²⁷

By referring to the Comoro and Falklands Islands, Lavrov tries to highlight the hypocrisy of the French and British condemnation of the interest among Crimeans for reunification with Russia. From April to June 1982, Britain fought off the Argentinian attempt at annexing the disputed islands.³²⁸ In June 2009, residents on Mayotte Island voted “yes” to become the 101st French department, which officially came about on March 31, 2011. In other words, Lavrov sought understanding for the special bond between Crimea and Russia and their mutual wish for what he denoted as a reunification, which was nothing different from the bonds between Britain, France and their respective former colonial dominions

Behind the double standards of the Western Other, the US puppet master was orchestrating events as they unfolded. The events in Ukraine represented yet another manifestation of the so-called “colored revolutions” across the Russian near abroad.³²⁹ According to State Duma Deputy and former Russian ambassador to the EU Vasily Likachov, the Western conspiracy was evident from how European deputies and politicians coordinated their actions within the Council of Europe, OSCE, and NATO. Here, the member states were taking

³²⁶ “Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club, 14th annual meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club: The World of the Future: Moving Through Conflict to Cooperation,” *The Kremlin*, October 19, 2017: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/55882> (accessed November 5, 2018)).

³²⁷ “‘Useful, but no breakthrough’: Russia, US stalled after Ukraine crisis talks,” *Russia Today*, March 14, 2014: <https://www.rt.com/news/lavrov-kerry-ukraine-talks-890/> (accessed November 6, 2018).

³²⁸ David M. McCourt has two highly recommendable analyzes of the role of the Falklands War for the construction of Britain’s role in world politics after the end of World War II (2011, 2014, Chapter 5).

³²⁹ “Russian pundits concerned about “pro-Western” developments in Ukraine,” *RIA Novosti*, February 24, 2014.

their instructions from Washington D.C. in plain sight.³³⁰ According to a contemporary Levada survey, Likachov's interpretation was backed by 45 percent of Russians, who were sure that the protests in Kiev were "influenced by the West [trying] to draw Ukraine into the orbit of its political interests."³³¹ As Russian LPDR-politician Leonid Slutsky concludes, the West was evidently trying to "amputate Ukraine from Russia."³³²

The events in Ukraine had more to do with Russia than Ukraine. Building on Zbigniew Brzezinski's *The Grand Chessboard* (1999), Ukraine was merely a piece in the greater Russo–Western chess match. Ukraine was not just any chess piece, however, and possibly one of the most important pieces to Russia; Ukraine leaving the orbit of privileged Russian interests would jeopardize Eurasian integration and the creation of a strong Eurasian Customs Union.

Suspicious regarding a Western conspiracy against Russia were further aggravated in early February 2014, when Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland's telephone conversation with US Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt was leaked. In the conversation, Nuland and Pyatt discussed the formation of a new Ukrainian government composed of various opposition figures. The leak of the conversation between Nuland and Pyatt supported those parts of Russian media, which at an early state established a narrative about the Western Other "Balkanizing" Russia's near abroad to contain its inevitable rise to greatness. Ukraine was merely the "latest shade" in a stream of color revolutions intended to destabilize Russia.³³³

Similar to the Russo–Western encounter in Kosovo, the encounter in Ukraine disclosed two markedly different lifeworlds facing each other. From an ontological perspective, the Russo–Western encounter posed the same fundamental dilemma: Disengage and lose the authentic Russian Self or engage and dare to potentially lose the Russian Self. According to Russian State Duma Speaker Sergey Naryshkin, at the core of the Ukraine crisis was a "serious split in world outlook, which will be a serious obstacle to settling the situation."³³⁴

³³⁰ "Russia can't work with the European parliament," *Moscow Times*, Vasily Likachov, February 24, 2014.

³³¹ "Майдан произвел плохое впечатление на граждан России [Maidan made a bad impression on the citizens of Russia]," *Kommersant*, Sergey Goryashko, February 27, 2014.

³³² "Russian MP says Tymoshenko may stabilize Ukraine if elected prime minister," *Interfax*, February 23, 2014.

³³³ "Russian pundits concerned about "pro-Western" developments in Ukraine," *RIA Novosti*, February 24, 2014.

³³⁴ "Russia advocates preserving Ukraine's territorial integrity—Duma speaker," *Interfax*, February 27, 2014.

Consequently and officially, Russia intervened in Ukraine on humanitarian grounds, referring to its “responsibility to protect” in accordance with international law.³³⁵ Less officially, I claim that Russia also intervened to defend its ontological security against another attempt by the Western Other to engulf the Russian Self, employing the renowned Balkanization strategy in Ukraine; hence, even geographically (and ontologically) closer to Russia than Kosovo. Again, Russia would not accept being swept into a corner, as Putin concluded in his March 18 speech:

In short, we have every reason to assume that the infamous policy of containment [...] continues today. They are constantly trying to sweep us into a corner because we have an independent position, because we maintain it and because we call things like they are and do not engage in hypocrisy. But there is a limit to everything. And with Ukraine, our western partners have crossed the line, playing the bear and acting irresponsibly and unprofessionally.³³⁶

Unlike the Russian intervention in Kosovo, however, the Russians were not alone in reckoning the ontological dimension of the escalating crisis. The Western Others’ existing senses of “National Selves” were also challenged by the “Russian Other.” The representatives of the Western Other were initially stunned by the situation. German Chancellor Angela Merkel allegedly told American President Barack Obama that Putin was living in “another world.”³³⁷ Former Danish Foreign Minister Lene Espersen explains that the Western astonishment was rooted in a whole other mindset. According to Espersen, Danish politicians simply

³³⁵ Vladimir Putin’s “Address by President of the Russian Federation” (March 18, 2014) “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly” (December, 4, 2014) manifest two key testimonies of official contemporary Russian use of “responsibility to protect” to legitimize the military intervention in Ukraine (*The Kremlin*: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603> & <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47173>, accessed November 23, 2018).

³³⁶ “Address by President of the Russian Federation,” *The Kremlin*, March 18, 2014: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603> (accessed November 20, 2018).

³³⁷ “Pressure Rising as Obama Works to Rein in Russia,” *The New York Times*, Peter Baker, March 2, 2014: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/03/world/europe/pressure-rising-as-obama-works-to-rein-in-russia.html?_r=0 (accessed September 28, 2018).

had another mindset. We thought that they [Russians] had other intentions [...]. We thought that the world had changed, but that has proven not to be true.³³⁸

Another key difference from the intervention in Kosovo is that the heightened sense of ontological insecurity rendering military intervention meaningful was not triggered by a public showdown between two senior public servants. In February 2014, the Russian custodianship was a more coherent group of individuals as regards their visions for the Russian Self, which—following the outcome in Kosovo—revolved around reconstructing Russian greatness in spite of the West. In other words, significant parts of the Russian elites agreed that the Ukraine crisis was yet another attack on the Russian “Sonderweg” to greatness (Cherepanova, 2010).

On the other hand, despite significant consensus concerning the reconstruction of Russian greatness in spite of the West, the Ukraine crisis discloses dissent among the Russian custodianship regarding questions pertaining to the Russian revival as a national or Eurasian project; in other words, revival from within or beyond the existing borders of the Russian Federation. As such, developments in Ukraine touched upon a prolonged “duel of faiths” between distinctively different visions for the Russian Self that were less clear in the case of Kosovo. Russia losing Ukraine to the Western Other would not merely influence Russian material security or recognition and status as a rising great power, but fundamentally challenge a persistently porous sense of post-Soviet Russian Self.

In the same month that Russia intervened in Ukraine, the Valdai Discussion Club³³⁹ published “National Identity and the Future of Russia,” edited by Sergey Karaganov.³⁴⁰ The timing of the publication alone suggests two things. First, foreign policy crises and fundamental questions about national identity

³³⁸ “Et hjerteligt forhold [A warm relationship],” *Berlingske Tidende*, Jette Aagaard & Carl E. Arnfred, March 21, 2014: <http://www.politiko.dk/nyheder/et-hjerteligt-forhold> (accessed September 5, 2018).

³³⁹ The Valdai Discussion Club was founded in 2004 by The Russian International Affairs Council, National Research University, Moscow State Institute of International Relations, and The Council on Foreign and Defense Policy to promote dialogue between Russian and international intellectual elites. Interestingly, the format changed from “telling the world about Russia” to practical work aimed at forming the global agenda and delivering a qualified and objective assessment of global political and economic issues” in 2014 (<http://valdaiclub.com/about/valdai/>, accessed September 25, 2018).

³⁴⁰ “National Identity and the Future of Russia,” *Valdai Discussion Club*, Sergey Karaganov et al., February 2014: http://vid-1.rian.ru/ig/valdai/Identity_eng.pdf (accessed November 26, 2018).

are mutually constitutive; foreign policy-related events provoke questions regarding national identity and vice versa. Second, the fundamental question of what constitutes an authentic post-Soviet Russian Self was indeed still high on the agenda of Russian custodianship, as it remained unanswered. According to Paul Goble, the Kremlin commissioned the report in the wake of survey data from 2013 showing that 45 percent of surveyed Russian citizens understood themselves as belonging to a Russian nation. Another survey showed that a mere 57 percent of participating Russians saw themselves as citizens of Russia (Goble, 2016, p. 39).

The report's point of departure is that Russia remains a fractured nation and lacks a coherent national identity. Russia had not fully recovered from the traumatic 1990s, which the report identifies as the most essential, critical, and unsettled time for post-Soviet Russia. According to the authors, the turmoil of the 1990s is comparable to the horrors of the Great Patriotic War. Reference to the traumatic 1990s appears frequently throughout the report, which testifies to the importance of this experience to the authors.

An interesting parallel to the argument about the special role played by the Kosovo and Ukraine crises in the reconstruction of the Russian Self, the report concludes that Russian national identity has conventionally been reconstructed by the horrors of war and trauma. War is a unifying factor that brings a sense of meaning and community to the imagined Russian community collectively trying to overcome these traumatic yet formative events. Recognizing the obvious losses and traumas entailed in war, the report concludes that post-Soviet Russia needs to reconstruct its sense of national identity around something grandiose, which does not entail war. The report suggests the internal development of Siberia and construction of a "Pantheon of Russian Heroes" as projects that are significantly grand enough to provide a sense of Russian Self strong enough to unify the fractures in the imagined Russian community.³⁴¹

Contrary to the Valdai report's suggestion, it once again became the grandiose and heroism associated with military action that defined the reconstruction of the Russian Self from February 27 onwards. As argued above, contemporary Russians did not interpret developments in Ukraine—whether caused by the Western Other or not—as an acute material threat to Russian security.

³⁴¹ A condition for the realization of national identity via grandness and heroism was—the report argues—a strong, rule-based Russian state. A central premise of the report is the mutually constitutive relation between Russian state and national identity. Without a strong state, no self-conscious Russian national identity can emerge, and vice versa. Russian-American scholar Andrey Tsygankov has written intensively on the historic role of the strong state in Russia in *The Strong State in Russia* (2014).

In the body of sources gathered for this case study, there are no elaborate arguments about how the US, NATO or other European great powers are about to launch a full-scale military attack on Russia over Ukraine.

However, as indicated by the contemporary statement made by the head of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the Federation Council, Mikhail Margelov, it was the “concern and anxiety” stemming from ongoing unrest in Ukraine—in addition to the underlying sense of being subject another Western engulfment attempt—which made Russian custodians concerned.³⁴² The increased sense of anxiety also manifested itself in Russian news broadcasting, where Russian radio *Ekho Moskvy*—among other Russian media—increased their coverage of developments in Ukraine to news bulletins every 15 minutes.³⁴³ Similarly, the Russian State Duma increased the number of closed-door hearings and sent delegations to Crimea and Southeastern Ukraine along with deputies from the Federation Council in the week leading up to the intervention.

Renowned Russian nationalist intellectual Yegor S. Kholmogorov offered a clear-cut description of the contemporary atmosphere of acute ontological insecurity in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* (February 24, 2014):

If the Banderovites [pro-Western opposition in Kiev] take Sevastopol before our very eyes and organize a slaughter there, and we stand by and watch, I am afraid that we ourselves will not be able to survive as a nation after such a betrayal. [...] there will be no forgiveness for us, neither from others, nor from ourselves.³⁴⁴

Essentially, Kholmogorov claims that failure by the Russian government to intervene in Ukraine would not only result in unbearable consequences for the authenticity of the Russian Self but also potentially cause the collapse of the Russian Self altogether. I argue that statements like Kholmogorov’s eventually rendered military intervention a meaningful reaction to events in Ukraine.

Like the Kosovo crisis, the Ukraine crisis imposed an existential dilemma of either/or on the Russian elites. With reference to the NATO air campaign in Yugoslavia, Russian TV-presenter Dmitry Kiselev notes that “a serious challenge” was imposed on Russia; a challenge “impossible not to accept,” because, unlike Syria, it is “simply about us;” hence, simply about the existence of the Russian Self.³⁴⁵

³⁴² “Russian politicians stick to official line on Ukraine: “coup”, “extremists”,” *Interfax*, February 20, 2014.

³⁴³ “Russian Ekho Moskvy radio: news every 15 minutes over Ukraine crisis,” *Ekho Moskvy*, February 20, 2014.

³⁴⁴ “Time to save our own people in Ukraine,” Yegor Kholmogorov, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, February 24, 2014.

³⁴⁵ “Russian TV and radio highlights for 24 February–2 March 2014,” *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, March 4, 2014.

The inner dialogue proceeded in a context marred by references to the traumatic turmoil of the 1990s. Despite the fact that, in terms of time, Kosovo was closer to the traumatic 1990s, the developments in Ukraine were much closer to the core of the Russian Self than Serbia. Historically, Serbia had been a long-standing Russian ally. However, Ukraine was by a majority of Russians perceived to be de-facto Russia—hence, not a real nation-state. Russians perceived Ukrainians (like Belarusians) as Russians; not “Great Russians,” but nonetheless as belonging to the Russian world. In July 2013, Putin himself declared that Russians and Ukrainians were not two fraternal, but one single, united people. The Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian people all share the same heritage of “common spiritual values.”³⁴⁶

According to Taras Kuzio, Russian identity was hard to isolate from the 14 remaining post-Soviet Russian identities, due to the legacy from the Soviet Union, where Russian and Soviet identity were identical (2017, pp. 211-212). An example of Ukraine depicted as a geographical space with a significant number of Russians living in it appears explicitly in *Izvestiya* from February 20, 2014. Here, Maxim Kononenko writes that Ukraine is “not a state. This is the area where there lives a huge number of Russians. We will defend these Russians.”³⁴⁷ In short, given the predominant, mirror-like identification with Ukrainians and the arbitrariness of the existing physical state borders, for the Russian elites, the events in Kiev might as well have been playing out in Moscow.

Besides the inability to demarcate threats against Russian and Ukrainian identity and the underlying trauma from the dreadful 1990s, two specific historical experiences are important to consider in order to understand the sense of ontological security rendering military intervention meaningful. As in the case of Russia’s intervention in Kosovo, the first significant historical experience is the trauma caused by the anxiety and despair following the economic and political chaos in the wake of the 1993 Constitutional Crisis. Russian political scientist Fedor Lukyanov compares the events in Moscow in 1993 with

³⁴⁶ “Orthodox-Slavic Values: The Foundation of Ukraine’s Civilisational Choice,” *The Kremlin*, July 27, 2013: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/18961> (accessed September 25, 2018).

³⁴⁷ “Чужая битва [The Other’s War],” *Izvestiya*, Maxim Kononenko, February 20, 2014.

those at Maidan Square in 2014; the only difference being that the constitutional crisis produced a clear winner, whereas the events unfolding in Ukraine would not end the struggle for power in Ukraine.³⁴⁸

Instead, the Constitutional Crisis manifested the tipping point where the general sense of euphoria—when Boris Yeltsin and his supporters prevented the August Coup of the Soviet Union orchestrated by Communist Party members and factions of the military in 1991—was gradually replaced by frustration and regret.³⁴⁹ The moment Yeltsin ordered tanks to shell the Russian White House on October 4, 1993, the imagined Russian community lost its innocence—a chaotic political and economic reality replacing the post-Soviet honeymoon. The shelling of the White House demonstrated that Russia’s political culture—the fundamentals of Russian politics—was not going to change from that reigning over the Soviet past; the Russian elite and masses alike began regretting having averted the August Coup.

The Constitutional Crisis demonstrates that democracy was not part of the solution but instead perceived to be the problem for Russia. Yeltsin, Gaidar, and Andrey Kozyrev had naively brought an alien way of life to Russia, which now materialized itself in a deteriorating standard of living, accelerating crime rates, and recurring humiliations at the hands of an international community treating Russia like a defeated giant. Left without a vision for a bright and prosperous future, Russians were left with their memories of their glorious past. The situation was intolerably meaningless.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the Kosovo crisis changes this and provides imagined Russian community with a tipping point to a new vision for the Russian Self to belong to. Unlike the discussions of what to do in June 1999, Russian custodianship has a more elaborate notion of the existential meaning that could potentially be lost in February 2014 together with previous experience with how to act during a Russo–Western foreign policy crisis. In other words, due to the reconstruction of national identity sparked by the Kosovo crisis, Russians actually had a Russian Self to lose in 2014, which raised the odds, but also previous experience with how to act under such circumstances.

³⁴⁸ “Fedor Lukyanov, political analyst: Is February 2014 in Kiev a copy of October 1993 in Russia?,” *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, Valeriya Chepurko et al., February 20, 2014.

³⁴⁹ Communist Party Leader Gennady A. Zyuganov denounced Yanukovich’s escape as a betrayal, referring to the failed August Coup in 1991 (“Russian politicians worried about Ukraine slipping away from Moscow,” *Interfax*, February 24, 2014).

The Ukraine crisis therefore became a test of the imagined Russian community's will and capacity to defend the Russian Self. Evidence of this interpretation is present in Putin's annexation speech from March 18, 2014:

It is at historic turning points such as these that a nation demonstrates its maturity and strength of spirit. [...] we need to continue and maintain this kind of consolidation so as to resolve the tasks our country faces on its road ahead. [...] we will encounter external opposition, but this is a decision that we need to make for ourselves. Are we ready to consistently defend our national interests, or will we forever give in, retreat to who knows where?³⁵⁰

Compared to the context in which the imagined Russian community found itself in June 1999, significantly more was at stake in 2014; something which could become an authentic Russian Self could be lost entirely.

The second historical experience frequently referred to in the inner dialogue about if and how to react in the Russo–Western encounter was the public mass protests in 2011–2013. The protesters were dissatisfied with Putin's run for reelection, which led to the biggest public protests since Putin's first inauguration in 2000.³⁵¹ In February 2014, the Bolotnaya Square trial was concluded by a Moscow court, resulting in the imprisonment of 27 individuals for attacking the police. The Bolotnaya Square protest took place on May 6, 2012, the day before Putin's third inauguration as president, and was the first of two "March of Millions" mass rallies. The two rallies attracted around 50,000 participants³⁵² in central Moscow and were the largest since the 1990s. Having the anti-Putin protests in fresh memory, both the Russian elite and the population more broadly were anxious about whether developments on Maidan Square in Kiev would spread to Moscow and Saint Petersburg. An example of this increasingly anxious atmosphere caused by the prospect of similar protests across Russia can be found in this Russian news coverage on February 24. Two articles in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* covered contemporary protests in Venezuela and Belarus with reference to ongoing developments in Ukraine. While President Aleksandr Lukashenko learned the lesson from Ukraine and

³⁵⁰ "Address by President of the Russian Federation," *The Kremlin*, March 18, 2014: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603> (accessed October 20, 2018).

³⁵¹ Western journalists also refer to the protests as the "Snow Revolution."

³⁵² 50,000 is the figure reported in the media. Russian police and opposition claim 16,000 and 100,000 protesters participated, respectively ("Russia: The March of Millions," *Human Rights Watch*, June 13, 2012: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/06/13/russia-march-millions>, accessed November 1, 2018).

had authorized the military to use all necessary force to stop the ongoing protests, escalating student protests in Venezuela foreshadow it heading in the same direction as Ukraine.^{353,354}

Mette Skak's strategic cultural analysis of the Russian decision-makers during the Ukraine crisis identifies the particular sense of sensitivity towards public unrest among members of Russia's strategic community (2016). Skak argues that the contemporary Russian elite was rather homogenous due to the professional upbringing in the Soviet security apparatus they have in common. Being socialized into the *siloviki* (i.e., the KGB) under the direction of Yuri V. Andropov, who was notoriously afraid of Western infiltration, surprise attacks, and had personally experienced the trauma of public protest while stationed in Budapest during the 1956 Hungarian Uprising, developments in Ukraine seemed increasingly threatening to the survival of the regime as well as its vision for the Russian Self.³⁵⁵

As pointed out by Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy, Putin himself endured the traumatic experience of being stationed in Dresden while East Germany disintegrated. The fear associated with the radio silence from Moscow while upset masses of East German protesters ransacked Stasi facilities and witnessing how quickly public protests dismantled the Soviet Union were two personal experiences mediating Putin's personal assessment of the dreadful potential of events in neighboring Ukraine (Hill & Gaddy, 2015, p. 363).

In a *Novaya Gazeta* article from February 19, Semen Novoprudsky argues that the Ukraine crisis manifests both a significant source of discomfort among members of Putin's elite as well as opportunity for the regime to create the external and internal enemies needed to excuse the absent economic and political recovery of Russia. Putin's regime was "deliberately initiating a new cold war with the West" as a smokescreen consisting of a mix of ideology and patriotism intended to convince the increasingly skeptical Russian population that the regime is not to blame for Russia's failed reforms. The same faction of external enemies who historically had been sweeping Russia into a corner—

³⁵³ "Лукашенко усвоил киевский урок [Lukashenko has learned the lesson from Kiev]," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, February 24, 2014.

³⁵⁴ "Венесуэла может стать второй Украиной [Venezuela can be the next Ukraine]," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, February 24, 2014.

³⁵⁵ Interestingly, Russian *TV Centre* features an item on February 22, 2014 counterfactually discussing if Yuri V. Andropov could have saved the Soviet Union had he lived longer, this item coinciding with the initial culmination of unrest in Ukraine surrounding the ousting of President Yanukovich ("Programme summary of Russian Centre TV "Postscript", *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, February 22, 2014).

in collaboration with internal enemies—was the true cause of Russia’s dissatisfactory slow rise to “inescapable grandeur.”³⁵⁶

Contrary to the inner dialogue before, during, and after the Russian intervention in Kosovo, the inner dialogue about what meaningfully constitutes the Russian Self is not so much a debate about the Russian Self between voices saying that Russian greatness builds on integration with versus stands in contrast to the Western Other (like the inner dialogue before, during, and after Kosovo) as it is within the otherwise uniform group of nationalist Russian custodians. According to Russian nationalist Pavel Svyatenko (and in keeping with what outsiders to Russian politics might think), the Russian nationalist movement was not homogenous, comprised instead of “a great multitude of mini identities” making it “in essence a union of subcultures” (Pavel Svyatenkov in Goble, 2016, p. 38).

Following Svyatenko’s observation, I differentiate between two idealized subgroups within the Russian nationalist movement: “Inward-looking” and “outward-looking” nationalists. Whereas idealized inward-looking nationalists envision the Russian Self developing into an ethnic or civic nation-state, the ideal outward-looking vision is of Russia as the heartland in a more or less formalized Eurasian Union.³⁵⁷

The Ukraine crisis discloses a new challenge regarding the reconstruction of the Russian Self to the Kremlin. On one hand, Putin has benefitted from an increasingly explicit alliance between Putin and Russia’s nationalist movements. Initially, Putin and the Kremlin could control these loyal movements. When the Ukraine crisis began, some remained loyal to Putin and praised his course of action, whereas others criticized it for being too harsh or—and this is most significant challenge to the Kremlin—not harsh enough.

An example of the Kremlin’s increasingly problematic alliance with the increasingly heterogeneous Russian nationalist movements is personified by self-proclaimed outward-looking Eurasianist Aleksandr Dugin. Dugin was initially promoted by Putin’s administration as a role model before the military intervention in Ukraine, but later disowned after he increasingly voiced criticism of Putin as not being ambitious enough regarding the realization of a Eurasian Union under Russian reign (e.g., Laruelle, 2017). Another notable example is the Kremlin’s initial endorsement of the concept of “New Russia”

³⁵⁶ “Кривичи против Рабиновичей: Зачем Россия начинает новую холодную войну [Kryvichi against Rabinovich: Why does Russia start a new cold war],” *Novaya Gazeta*, Semen Novoprudsky, February 19, 2014.

³⁵⁷ Multiple scholarly definitions exist of Russian Eurasianism and nationalism (e.g., Kolstø & Blakkisrud, 2017b; Laruelle, 2015a). That which seems to demarcate the two concepts is the question of Russia as a nation-state or not.

[Новоро́ссия]³⁵⁸ until the summer of 2014, when the official use of the term was gradually phased out (Laruelle, 2016b, pp. 55-74; O’Loughlin, Toal, & Kolosov, 2017).

The increasingly ambiguous relationship between Russian nationalist sub-groupings versus the Kremlin (and within the wider Russian nationalist movement) indicate that factions of Russian nationalist—initially used by the Kremlin as a lever against internal Russian opposition and foreign governments in the near abroad—may have figured out that the Kremlin can be turned into a lever to promote nationalist agendas.

Besides using the Kremlin as a lever to promote their own respective agendas, nationalist subgroupings could develop over time into future contenders to the Putin regime’s visions for Russian identity and politics or gain sufficient will and capacity to outright challenge the coherence of the Russian Federation pursuing their own separatist agendas. Besides in Chechenia and Dagestan, significant separatist sentiments flourish in Siberia and among the Russian Muslim minorities, where allegiance is tied to region and faith (Goble, 2016, pp. 39-42; Petersson, 2001).

In sum, the Russian decision to militarily intervene in Ukraine was more than a response to material and ideational concerns. Similar to the prelude to its intervention in Kosovo, a mix of contemporary Russian anxieties concerning a still-porous sense of Russian Self being gradually engulfed by a seemingly Self-confident Western Other pursuing Balkanization combined with historical traumas rooted in the 1993 constitutional crisis and the general turmoil surrounding the dissolution of the Soviet Union heightened the ontological insecurity among the members of the Russian custodianship. I would argue that it heightened it to a level where ontological insecurity rendered military intervention meaningful.

Having set the scene, I use the following section to probe further into whose senses of ontological insecurity rendered military intervention meaningful and how the reconstruction process of the Russian Self developed before, during, and after the intervention in Ukraine.

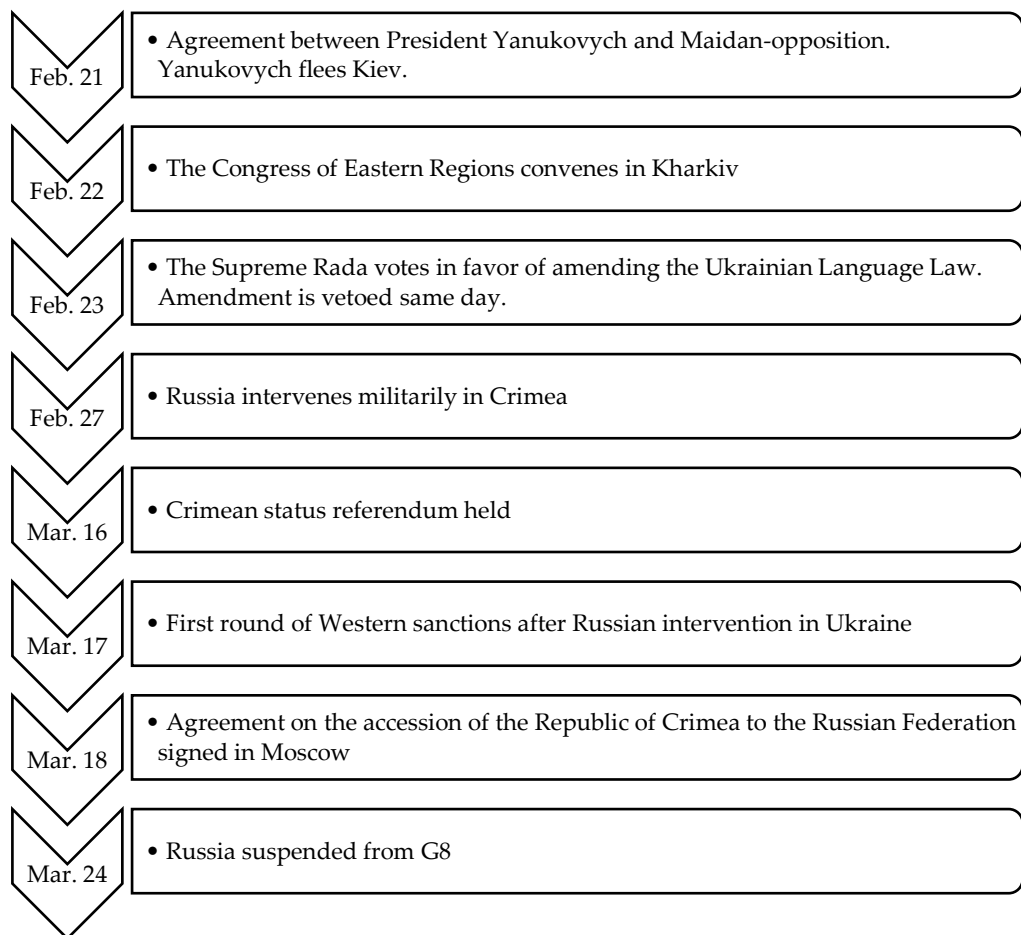
Reconstructing the “Russian Self” in Ukraine

This section examines the meaning-making processes among Russian custodians about if and how Official Russia should intervene in the political unrest

³⁵⁸ Новоро́ссия directly translates into “New Russia” and denotes a historical territory spanning from the northern shore of the Black Sea in the south to Dnepropetrovsk/Dnipro in the north, Donetsk in the east, and Odessa in the west.

in Ukraine and how such official actions would influence the competing visions for the post-Soviet Russian Self envisioned by the polyphony of Russian voices in inner dialogue.

Figure 7: Timeline for the Ukraine crisis



The analytical point of departure is the aforementioned Congress of the Eastern Regions of Ukraine, held in Kharkiv on February 22, 2014 (see Figure 7 below). The fundamental goal of this congress was reaching a consensus on whether the southeastern regions of Ukraine should break away. The result of the congress was as crucial to Moscow as it was to Kiev; if the pro-Russian regions decided to split, all eyes would rest on Moscow. The Russian decision would not only have certain political, military, and economic consequences for all of the states involved, but also influence the future trajectory for the development of the Russian Self. Like the Kosovo crisis, Russia again faced a fundamental dilemma: Do nothing when many are expecting you to do something and risk being deemed an irrelevant nobody or do something and risk jeopardizing hard-earned international status and material well-being by taking actions increasingly isolating Russia internationally. As with the Kosovo study, I pay special attention to who and how Russian custodians voice what

constitutes meaningful action for Official Russia to take in Ukraine and the vision for the Russian Self that such reaction aligns with.

Encountering “Self”: If and how to intervene (February 20–26, 2014)

On February 20, more than 100 Ukrainian protesters and members of law enforcement died during escalating protests in Kiev. The next day, Yanukovich and opposition leaders concluded an agreement brokered by the EU. Unlike Viktor Chernomyrdin’s controversial signature on the Bonn Agreement in 1999, Putin’s Special Envoy to Ukraine, Vladimir Lukin, refused to sign the EU-brokered truce.³⁵⁹ That same night, Yanukovich fled Kiev on the pretext of a roundtrip to southeastern Ukraine. While he had announced his participation in the Congress of the Eastern Regions of Ukraine, the ousted president never showed up in Kharkiv.

The congress convened in Kharkiv to discuss creating an autonomous southeastern region and host a referendum about unifying with the Russian Federation. Rather ambiguously, while the congress had proclaimed that it was “not preparing to break up the country” and wanted to preserve Ukraine, the deputies agreed that doing so depended on the Ukrainian government taking “responsibility for safeguarding the constitutional order, legality, citizens’ rights and their security on our territories.”³⁶⁰ In other words, the regional deputies wanted to remain part of a unified Ukraine as long as their understanding of constitutional order, law, and rights was respected. Now it was up to the new Ukrainian government in Kiev to decide whether the southeastern regions should separate or stay within the confines of a unified Ukraine. In other words, as I see it, the result of the Kharkiv Congress was an ultimatum to the government in Kiev.

The key purpose of the congress was reaching a consensus on whether or not to split Ukraine. The preliminary decision was “no.” However, when the newly convened Supreme Rada abolished “On the Principles of the State Language Policy” from 2012 on February 23, separatist sentiments flared up across Ukraine’s southeast. Abolishing the Language Law, which allowed Russian as the official second language in Ukrainian regions where ethnic Russians exceeded 10 percent of the population, further provoked the already vexed people across southeastern Ukraine.

³⁵⁹ “Russian envoy scornful of EU ministers’ part in Kiev peace deal,” *Rossiia 1*, February 22, 2014.

³⁶⁰ “Ukraine crisis: No talk of split in eastern city of Kharkiv,” Yuri Maloveryan, *BBC*, February 22, 2014: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26304129> (accessed September 26, 2018).

Though the abolishment was vetoed immediately, the intent signaled to abolish the right to speak and write Russian sparked pro-Russian protests in Sevastopol that eventually spread across Crimea. Protests culminated on February 27, when pro-Russian gunmen together with unmarked Russian troops seized control of the Supreme Council of Crimea in Simferopol. The joint separatist-Russian seizure of the Council of Crimea marked the point where Russia unquestionably violated Ukrainian sovereignty and intervened militarily.

Given the delicacy of contemporary context, the Kharkiv Congress was not only important to Ukrainians but also to the Russian elites discussing if and how to influence the escalating developments in Ukraine. Had the congress decided to divide Ukraine, Russia would find itself in a dilemma. As Rostovskiy explains in the *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*:

Russia found itself, through no fault of its own, in a situation in which a fateful strategic choice was forced and imposed on it.³⁶¹

Leaving Rostovskiy's assessment of Russian guilt aside, the dilemma facing Russian decision makers was among the most fateful; whether the outcome would be intervention or non-intervention, the consequences would be profound for Russia.

The importance of the Kharkiv Congress to the Russian elites was reflected in the participation of multiple Russian governors and senior members of the Russian State Duma and Federation Council.^{362,363} Federation Council Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Mikhail Margelov reassured that his presence in Kharkiv was solely intended to provide "moral support for those who feel responsible for the future of Ukraine."³⁶⁴ Russian State Duma Speaker Sergey Naryshkin meets with his Crimean counterpart Volodymyr Kon-

³⁶¹ "Do the Russians Want War? What Russia Is Really Seeking in Ukraine," *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, Mikhail Rostovskiy, March 3, 2014.

³⁶² According to Russian TASS, The guests included Federation Council Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Mikhail Margelov and governor Aleksey Gordeyev (Voronzh Region), governor Yevgeny Savchenko (Belgorod Region), governor Vassily Golubev (Rostov Region), and governor Nikolai Denin (Bryansk Region) ("Congress in Kharkov shows Ukrainian citizens' interest in preserving united," *ITAR-TASS*, February 22, 2014: <http://tass.com/world/720523>, accessed November 3, 2018)).

³⁶³ Before the Kharkiv Congress, members from Viktor Yanukovych's party and the Supreme Council of Crimea had also been in Moscow.

³⁶⁴ "Russia "will not leave brotherly Ukraine in trouble"—senator," *Ekho Moskvyy*, February 22, 2014.

stantynov on February 20 to discuss issues regarding the humanitarian situation of Crimean residents and preparations for the 70th Victory Day celebration in 2015.³⁶⁵

Margelov declared on February 20 that, as a matter of principle, Russia would not interfere in the international affairs of Ukraine.³⁶⁶ That same day, Press Secretary to the Russian President Dmitry Peskov stated that President Putin had not and would not give any “advice to his Ukrainian counterpart” on how to handle the escalating situation.³⁶⁷ Nevertheless, an anonymous source working in the Russian government told *Financial Times* that if Ukraine “breaks apart, it will trigger war. [Ukraine] will lose Crimea first.”³⁶⁸

The situation was by no means less tense when Russia recalled its ambassador to Ukraine for consultations on “the real threat to our interests and to our citizens’ life and health,” according to Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev on February 24.³⁶⁹ As late as the day before the Russian intervention, both Foreign Minister Sergey V. Lavrov and Prime Minister Medvedev denied speculation about intervention in Ukraine.³⁷⁰

In contrast to the resoluteness of unmarked Russian forces swiftly occupying Crimea, answering if and how Russia should intervene in Ukraine was not as straightforward. There were more commonplaces than contestations in rendering military intervention in Ukraine meaningful vis-a-vis Kosovo, but contestations existed about if and how Russia should intervene and how that would influence the visions for the Russian Self. In other words, the polyphony of different Russian voices was less characterized by dissonance in connection to Ukraine; however, significant contestations prevailed among Russian custodians. Existing studies have neglected this. In particular, the consequences of violating the principle of sovereignty and expected adverse impacts on the Russian economy and international standing dominated the inner dialogue.

Since the NATO air campaign against Serbia in 1999, Russian custodians had criticized the US for its contempt for international law by repeatedly violating the principle of sovereignty. The principle of sovereignty had served as

³⁶⁵ “Russian Duma speaker, Crimean parliament head discuss crisis in Ukraine,” *Interfax*, February 22, 2014.

³⁶⁶ “Russian politicians stick to official line on Ukraine: “coup”, “extremists”,” *Interfax*, February 20, 2014.

³⁶⁷ “Independence Square Protesters Pick Up Cobblestones,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Tatyana Ivzhenko, February 20, 2014.

³⁶⁸ “Will Putin seize Crimea?,” *Moscow Times*, Josh Cohen, February 23, 2014.

³⁶⁹ “Ambassador to Ukraine recalled due to “real threat” to Russia’s interests—PM,” *Interfax*, February 24, 2014.

³⁷⁰ “Третья оборона Севастополя [The third siege of Sevastopol],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Tatiana Ivzhenko, February 26, 2014.

the rhetorical spearhead of Official Russia against the Western Other, which first gained momentum and won widespread support after the American-led invasion of Iraq (2003) and NATO's later intervention in the Libyan Civil War (2011).

Until Ukraine, defending the principle of sovereignty had been a commonplace among Russian custodians. The heightened sense of ontological insecurity among members of Russian custodians caused an erosion of this commonplace. As Chairman of the State Duma's International Affairs Committee Aleksey Pushkov declared, the Russian-speaking population in southeast Ukrainian was the "bulwark of stability" protecting the East from the infectious chaos coming from Maidan Square in the West; hence, Russia had to actively support its compatriots in Ukraine.³⁷¹

From this perspective, the Kosovo crisis sowed the seeds to both commonplaces and contestations in the inner dialogue among Russian custodians in February 2014. Further evidence of this inner Russian tension is found in a thoughtful piece by Aleksandr A. Kalyagin, who was the chairman of the Union of Theatrical Figures of the Russian Federation. Kalyagin writes that since the "days of Kosovo," the imagined Russian community had been tormented by how to solve the imbedded tension between the principles of "people" and "state" sovereignty in international law.^{372,373}

Though it was hard to see Russia eschewing some sort of intervention in Ukraine, rendering military intervention meaningful was not as straightforward. Despite letters and public statements urging President Putin to protect Russian compatriots in the southeastern Ukrainian provinces and Crimea, there was an awareness that military intervention would clearly violate the

³⁷¹ "Russian MP denies talk of separatism at congress in southeast Ukraine," *Interfax*, February 22, 2014.

³⁷² "Хочу сказать о Крымском референдуме [I want to say something about the referendum in Crimea]," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Aleksandr A. Kaliagin, March 19, 2014.

³⁷³ Based on Anna Dolidze's article, "The Non-Native Speakers of International Law" (2016), Thomas Hodson argues that since its engagement in the Russo-Western encounter over Kosovo (1999), the Kremlin has developed a "legal-linguistic" strategy to manipulate the language of international law to legitimize its own unilateral military interventions in Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014) by simultaneously discrediting and legally as well as morally equating unilateral, US-led Western interventions to its own (Hodson, 2018). In short, Hodson shows how Russia is reviving a renowned Cold War-era practice of simultaneously "criticizing and coopting" the Western Other.

principle of sovereignty.³⁷⁴ The editor of *Gazeta.ru* wrote that it was important not to “succumb to jingo patriotism” and keep cool in such a delicate situation; Russian intervention would merely strengthen the already popular image of a Russia reviving its former Soviet Empire at the expense of surrounding neighbor states, as he saw it.³⁷⁵

Despite the fact that Russia persistently denied its neighbors the same right to unconditional state sovereignty that changing Russian governments have expected from anyone else, Russia had interwoven the narrative of a defender of the sovereignty principle with the narrative of great power greatness. Since the Kosovo crisis, Russia had narrated and performed the role as fierce critic of the US-led interventions in the Middle East and as guardian of international law: Russia respected international law, whereas the US did as it pleased. In situations where Russia could do nothing but protest US foreign policy actions in the “far abroad,” the principle of sovereignty had served as a fruitful legal and normative basis for mobilizing criticism of US unilateralism in world politics.

These accusations against the USA’s lack of respect for state sovereignty obviously stood in stark contrast to Russia’s own continued military presence and meddling in frozen conflicts across the post-Soviet space (e.g., Trans-Dniester in Moldova, Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia). In short, discussions within Russia suggest that upholding the principle of sovereignty was not in itself intrinsically important to the participants. The principle of sovereignty was important to uphold, because it manifested a key rhetorical device and demarcation line between the Russian Self and Western Other.

If deciding not to intervene, however, Official Russia risked appearing as weak and irrelevant as was the source of its ontological insecurity during the Kosovo crisis in 1999. Unlike Kosovo, and this is essential, Official Russia would not only be irrelevant in issues concerning a historical ally in the far abroad, but also in matters concerning its fraternal Ukrainian brothers in the nearest of the near abroad. If the Russian state was unable to exercise its influence in neighboring states, what was it actually capable of doing?

With the Russo–Georgian War (2008) in mind, a decision to launch a full-blown military intervention in Ukraine would risk transforming Russia into the hypocrite it had long accused the US of being. If deciding to intervene in Ukraine, Official Russia would itself be promoting a perception of assertive

³⁷⁴ “Critical Crimea. Various scenarios of Russian intervention in the Ukrainian conflict are permissible, aside from military,” *Gazeta.ru*, February 19, 2014.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Russian interventionism in the near abroad, which would stand in stark contrast to the enforcement of the principle of sovereignty it had preached for the far abroad.

Major interventions in both Georgia and Ukraine less than six years apart would establish a precedent that severely compromises Russia's cherished status as a protector of the principle of sovereignty nationally and internationally and make a repletion of the Russo–American reset in 2009 unlikely. On February 24, journalist Vladimir Fedorin wrote that Russian behavior towards Ukraine revealed that the so-called “Medvedev Doctrine,” establishing the near abroad as Russia's “privileged zone of influence”³⁷⁶ after the Russo–Georgian War (2008) was increasingly becoming a 1:1 “carbon copy of the Brezhnev doctrine” installed by Soviet aggression against Czechoslovakia in 1968.^{377,378}

Violating the principle of sovereignty would be particularly problematic for Russia for three specific reasons. First, Russia signed the Budapest Memorandum in 1994, where Russia—alongside the USA and Great Britain—guaranteed Ukrainian sovereignty (including Crimea) in exchange for the Soviet stockpile of nuclear warheads. *Channel 1* anchor Sergey Brilev tried to downplay the legitimacy of the Budapest Memorandum: “They [USA and UK] also committed not to encroach on Ukraine's sovereignty,” suggesting the West

³⁷⁶ On August 31, 2008, President Dmitry Medvedev, one of the five principles guiding Russian foreign policy after the Russo–Georgian War (2008), announced that “Russia, just like other countries in the world, has regions where it has its privileged interests. In these regions, there are countries with which we have traditionally had friendly cordial relations, historically special relations. We will work very attentively in these regions and develop these friendly relations with these states, with our close neighbours.” (“New Russian world order: the five principles,” *BBC*, Paul Reynolds, September 1, 2008: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7591610.stm>, accessed November 23, 2018).

³⁷⁷ “End of the Medvedev Doctrine,” *Vedomosti*, Vladimir Fedorin, February 24, 2014.

³⁷⁸ Interestingly, Russo–Czech and Russo–Slovak diplomatic relations deteriorated in June 2015 after the Russian state TV channel *Rossiya 1* aired a documentary entitled ‘Warsaw Pact—Pages Declassified’. The documentary claimed that the purpose of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia was to prevent a NATO-backed “armed coup” disguised as the “legend of peaceful civilian uprising with the romantic name of the Prague Spring” (“Russian TV doc on 1968 invasion angers Czechs and Slovaks,” *BBC*, June 1, 2015: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32959054>, accessed November 23, 2018).

had already intervened in Ukraine, rendering the agreement invalid.³⁷⁹ Despite Brilev downplaying the legality of the Budapest Memorandum, the consequences of dishonoring the agreement were a key concern.³⁸⁰

Second, considering the context of the ongoing Sochi Winter Olympics, intervention would jeopardize the increased international prestige and National Self-awareness gained from its grandness. The Valdai report referred to above on Russia's national identity mentioned the Winter Olympics as a grand project that—on a smaller scale than the development of Siberia and a Pantheon of Heroes—helped strengthen the imagined Russian community.³⁸¹

The editor of *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* writes that events such as the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics and 2018 Soccer World Cup (2018) are bids

for recognition from other countries, including those whose values and standards Russia's political elite seeks to distance itself.³⁸²

But the Olympics was about more than the recognition of Russian greatness from the outside—it was also about recognition from within Russia itself. Sergey Markov, the vice president of Plekhanov Moscow Institute of the National Economy, notes that the Winter Olympics is satisfying a fundamental need for Russians to feel proud of their home country. The Olympics should “instill a sense of Russia's greatness in [Russians]” in wake of the three “difficult decades starting with the 1980s perestroika.”³⁸³

That some foreign observers tried to undermine or discredit these efforts to instill national pride would only outrage Russians and reinforce their patriotism, Markov concludes; but the Russian military intervention in Ukraine could also undermine national pride and how the world perceived of Putin as an “acceptable global leader” in charge of an increasingly influential great power.³⁸⁴ Georgiy Bovt concludes that Russian military actions against Ukraine were turning Russia into a “rogue state” in the eyes of world opinion. In turn, such accusations would further intensify the Russian besieged fortress

³⁷⁹ “Programme summary of Rossiya TV “Vesti v Subbotu,”” *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, February 22, 2014.

³⁸⁰ “Semi-autonomous peninsula of Crimea. Keeping Crimea as a territory with a Russian presence within Ukraine is beneficial both to Kiev, and to Moscow,” *Vedomosti*, February 27, 2014.

³⁸¹ Bo Petersson and Karina Vamling have edited an insightful anthology on the role of the Sochi Winter Olympics for Russian great power identity (2013).

³⁸² “Olympics as a Bid for Recognition,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, February 18, 2014.

³⁸³ “Sochi Olympics are intended to boost Russians' patriotism, not impress foreigners,” Sergey Markov, *Moscow Times*, February 19, 2014.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

symptom, which would only “tighten the screws” internally, gradually turning Russia into a totalitarian state.³⁸⁵

Vasily Kashin, an expert at the Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, reckoned that the ongoing events in Ukraine could diffuse into Russia, but that Russian military intervention would most likely have an “even greater impact on Russia’s international standing.” Russian intervention could start the “most severe and protracted confrontation with the US and the EU in post-Soviet history,” where Russia risks placing itself in a “dangerous swamp [...] bogged down with unpredictable consequences.”³⁸⁶

Third, as Mikhail Rostovskiy (2008) writes in *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, unlike the Russian military intervention in Georgia, the consequences of taking Crimea back with force could lead to the complete collapse of the Russian economy and standard of living. Such a war would “irreversibly change the life of every Russian Federation citizen.” Admitting that Nikita S. Khrushchev surrendering Crimea to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1954 was “one of the most stupid and unjust whims of the then Soviet leader,” military intervention would lead to catastrophically adverse impacts. Paraphrasing Putin’s famous quote about reviving the Soviet Union, Rostovskiy concludes that “[a]nybody who does not regret Russia’s loss of Crimea has no heart. Anybody who wants it back has no head.”³⁸⁷

Having identified three contemporary reasons for why violating the principle of sovereignty by intervening militarily in Ukraine would be problematic, I now turn my attention to four reasons why non-intervention would have proven problematic.

First, the Kosovo precedent created by NATO to intervene on humanitarian grounds without a UN mandate not only legitimized but directly suggested that Russia had to intervene. According to Igor Korotchenko, Russia had “to carry out a humanitarian peacekeeping military operation [...] to prevent mass casualties among the civilian population of southeast Ukraine and Crimea.”³⁸⁸

³⁸⁵ “Crimea Is Turning Russia Into a Rogue State,” *Moscow Times*, Georgiy Bovt, March 12, 2014.

³⁸⁶ “Sister Republics,” *Vedomosti*, Vasily Kashin, February 20, 2014.

³⁸⁷ “Crimea is not worth a war. Anybody who does not regret Russia’s loss of Crimea has no heart. Anybody who wants it back has no head,” *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, Mikhail Rostovskiy, February 26, 2014.

³⁸⁸ “Russia will be required to carry out a peacekeeping operation in southeast Ukraine,” *Regnum news agency*, Igor Korotchenko, February 26, 2014.

During a public meeting at the Crimean office of Rossotrudnichestvo³⁸⁹ on February 25, Chairman of the State Duma Committee on CIS Affairs, Eurasian Integration, and Relations with Compatriots Leonid Slutsky said that the Russian Duma was working out an “effective set of measures that will enable not only Crimeans but also all Russians in Ukraine” to stay within the “Russian world.”^{390,391} More directly, Slutsky said that Russia, in the event of “any provocation against residents of Ukraine’s east, south-east and the Republic of Crimea, [would] take appropriate measures,” including intervention, if necessary.³⁹²

Besides the activities in the State Duma, Slutsky allegedly said that a delegation from the Russian Federation Council would arrive in Crimea on February 28.³⁹³ Slutsky expects that the stunt would result in Kiev using force to suppress “separatist sentiments” triggering Russian intervention to save “our compatriots.”³⁹⁴ In short, Slutsky allegedly claimed that a group of Federation Council members tried to provoke a reaction from Kiev in order to trigger an intervention.

³⁸⁹ The Russian foreign ministry established Rossotrudnichestvo in 2008 to facilitate humanitarian cooperation between Russia and host countries and promote the Russian language as well as an “objective image of contemporary Russia” abroad (<http://rs.gov.ru/en/about>, accessed September 26, 2018).

³⁹⁰ “Russia will find ways to protect compatriots in Ukraine—senior MP,” *Interfax*, February 25, 2014.

³⁹¹ “Russian World” refers to a cultural area as well as being shorthand for the Russkiy Mir Foundation established in 2007 by Vladimir V. Putin. The purpose of the Russian World is “promoting the Russian language, as Russia’s national heritage and a significant aspect of Russian and world culture, and supporting Russian language teaching programs abroad.” (<https://ruskiymir.ru/en/fund/index.php>, accessed September 26, 2018). For a recent comprehensive conceptual analysis of the different articulations of the Russian World in the last 20 years, see ““Russian World” Concept” (Suslov, 2018).

³⁹² “Russia will find ways to protect compatriots in Ukraine—senior MP,” *Interfax*, February 25, 2014.

³⁹³ On February 25, State Duma Member Aleksey Zhuravlev tweeted that he would fly to Crimea that same evening as the situation escalated in Crimea and “Russian patriots, of course cannot, cannot stand aside.” So did Igor Morozov, a member of the Federation Council’s International Affairs Committee, who stated on February 25 that a delegation from Russia’s Federation Council would visit southern Ukraine the following day to show the Russian “state’s serious intentions to protect its compatriots” (“More Russian senators to visit south Ukraine, Crimea,” *RIA Novosti*, February 25, 2014).

³⁹⁴ “Russia will find ways to protect compatriots in Ukraine—senior MP,” *Interfax*, February 25, 2014.

The delegation from the Federation Council never materialized. However, on February 26, the day after Slutsky's appearance in Rossotrudnichestvo on Crimea, a majority of State Duma deputies proposed amending the law on Russian citizenship to expedite the issuance of Russian passports to all Russian-speaking people in Ukraine or—in a radical version suggested by the Leader of Just Russia Sergey Mironov—all Ukrainians desiring such passports.³⁹⁵ That same evening, *Rossiia 1* brought an interview with Slutsky legitimizing the fast-track issuance of Russian passports, claiming that Poland, Hungary, and Romania had already issued passports to Ukrainians. Additionally, the matter was a matter of fighting for the “future of the Russian world;” and, hence, ought to be raised above political disagreement. According to Slutsky, Romania issued 200,000 passports in Odessa Oblast alone.³⁹⁶

In response to the State Duma's proposal to amend the law on citizenship, Federation Council Speaker Valentina Matviyenko declares that Russia has “no right to—we cannot—interfere in the internal affairs of a sovereign state.” The LDPR's idea to introduce fast-track procedures for Ukrainians to gain Russian citizenship was “untimely” and caused “separatist moods”³⁹⁷ there “should be no basis for” in Ukraine.³⁹⁸

Interestingly, when the dilemma of if and how to intervene in Ukraine emerges, Valentina Matviyenko persistently insists that “Russia is not undertaking any instigating action” in Ukraine and considers Crimea a “constituent part” of Ukraine.³⁹⁹ Even after the status referendum was held on Crimea, Matviyenko insists:

Ukraine is a sovereign state that can and must independently determine its interests and its domestic and foreign policy.⁴⁰⁰

While Matviyenko's moderate statements might sound like cheap talk, it has never been a given that Russian politicians and commentators recognize

³⁹⁵ “Duma MPs propose measures to support Russian-speakers in Ukraine,” *Rossiia 1*, February 26, 2014.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁷ “Russian upper house speaker rules out military intervention in Ukraine,” *RIA Novosti*, February 26, 2014.

³⁹⁸ “Госдума выписывает себе киевскую повестку [The State Duma prepares the Kiev agenda],” *Kommersant*, Maxim Ivanov, Natalia Gorodetskaya & Sofya Samokhina, February 27, 2014.

³⁹⁹ “Russian politicians worried about Ukraine slipping away from Moscow,” *RIA Novosti*, February 24, 2014.

⁴⁰⁰ “I Have Upheld and Will Uphold Russia's National Interests,” *Izvestiya*, March 18, 2014.

Ukraine statehood at all. Matviyenko's insistence on Ukrainian sovereignty testifies to her commitment to upholding the principle of sovereignty.

Second, many Russian politicians and commentators did not interpret the developments in Ukraine as an isolated event. For instance, Russian scholar Timofey Bordachev writes that Russians must understand that "Minsk could be the next" and had to start mimicking what the US had done in Britain and Europe to create the "spiritual unity" it profited on in Ukraine and to begin educating more of the students "who create the world of ideas and images" in neighboring states like Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, as well as advancing Eurasian integration and the creation of the Customs Union.⁴⁰¹ Similarly, television anchor Vladimir Solovyev concluded on Twitter that developments in Ukraine demonstrated that Russia was losing its fight over Ukraine to the US, whose policies "turned out far more effective, more accurate and smarter than ours."⁴⁰²

Third, Russian hardliners frequently drew comparisons to the rise of Nazi Germany and Stepan Bandera⁴⁰³ to stress the urgency of the developments in Kiev. Aleksandr Prokhanov, editor in chief of the Russian newspaper *Zavtra*, paradoxically compared the ongoing events in Ukraine with the Nazi German Anschluss of Austria in 1934.⁴⁰⁴ On February 22, multiple Russian commentators and political figures appeared on the evening news analysis program "Vesti v Subbotu" on Russian state television *Channel 1*. Here, Deputy Chairman of the Russian State Duma Sergey Zheleznyak denotes the opposition in Kiev as "Fascist banditry" and nationalist writer and commentator Aleksandr Prokhanov rhetorically asks whether divided Ukraine would unify under the banners of a "Bandera faction [or] the control of the swastika?"⁴⁰⁵ First Deputy

⁴⁰¹ "Извлечь уроки, стать сильнее [Drawing lessons, becoming stronger]," *Izvestiya*, Timofey Bordachev, February 24, 2014.

⁴⁰² "Russian pundits concerned about "pro-Western" developments in Ukraine," *RIA Novosti*, February 24, 2014.

⁴⁰³ Stepan Bandera is a controversial figure in Ukrainian history. Initially collaborating with Nazi Germany after its invasion of the Soviet Union (1941), Bandera was imprisoned by the Nazis for proclaiming an independent Ukraine. As the Red Army pushed Nazi Germany back, the Nazis released Bandera in 1944 to delay advancing Soviet troops. After World War II, Bandera engaged in anti-communist activities until he was assassinated by the KGB in 1959. Among some Ukrainians, Bandera is seen as a liberation fighter who fought the Soviets and Nazis to create an independent Ukraine, while most Russians view him as a fascist war criminal.

⁴⁰⁴ "Russian state TV talk show includes calls for dialogue with Ukraine opposition," *Rossiia 1*, February 21, 2014.

⁴⁰⁵ "Russian figures alarmed by "Nazis" and "Fascists" now running Ukraine," *Rossiia 1*, February 22, 2014.

Chairman of the Duma Committee for CIS Affairs Vladimir Nikitin goes even further, noting that on the 70th anniversary of the Soviet Union's liberation of Ukraine from Nazi occupation, "Nazis have again taken power" in a more fundamental war "waged against Russia civilization," manifesting the sole alternative to "globalization—the American way."⁴⁰⁶ On February 27, 2014, Russian State Duma member Irina Yarovaya sponsored a law envisaging criminal liability for rehabilitating Nazism publicly, to be punished with fines up to 500,000 Russian rubles or five years imprisonment. Similarly, the "dissemination of knowingly false information about the activities of the USSR during World War II" could result in fines of up to 300,000 Russian rubles or three years imprisonment.⁴⁰⁷ On March 14, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Genady Gatilov complained that the new rulers in Kiev were not only rehabilitating but actually praising the "names of criminals who smeared their names with mass atrocities in World War II."⁴⁰⁸ Obviously, the new and illegitimate (from the Russian perspective) Ukrainian government had chosen to base their independence on the memory of "Bandera, Shukhevic, and other Nazi punishers," who were now proclaimed as heroes.⁴⁰⁹

Compared to the Russian discussions during the Kosovo crisis, there were frequent comparisons to the Great Patriotic War after Russia's intervention in Ukraine, which played an essential role in legitimizing the ongoing operation. The relation between the Russian Self and the Great Patriotic War was a key component in contemporary Russian debate during intervention. Despite traditionally being a strong commonplace, the traumatic wartime experience manifested in the collective memories of Russians and Ukrainians—because the two nations had experienced the horrors of war as Soviet citizens—the former unifying recollection of the Great Patriotic War now became an object of contestation between Russians and Ukrainians and within the imagined Russian community. In other words, where the Great Patriotic War had previously been a unifying concept not only within but between the majorities of post-

⁴⁰⁶ "Что у Юлии Тимошенко получится? [What has Yulia Tymoshenko accomplished?]," *Kommersant*, February 24, 2014.

⁴⁰⁷ "Russian MP to introduce bill criminalizing "rehabilitation of Nazism"," *Interfax*, February 27, 2014.

⁴⁰⁸ "Russia concerned about the West's negligence over human rights violations in Ukraine," *RIA Novosti*, March 14, 2014.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

Soviet imagined communities, the Ukraine crisis turned it into a contested concept.^{410,411}

Andrey Zubov, a history professor at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), published an opinion piece entitled, “This has happened before,” brought by *Vedomosti* on March 1. Zubov’s piece is one of the few examples of public contestations of the narration of contemporary Russia fighting on “the right side” of the Great Patriotic War. Zubov argues that if Russia intervenes on Crimea, the Russian government places Russia on the “wrong side” of the Great Patriotic War. Zubov compares Russia’s intervention to Nazi Germany’s Anschluss of Austria (1938) and juxtaposes Putin with Adolf Hitler, not Josef Stalin. Zubov argues that the Russian intervention was not comparable to the onset of the Soviet Union’s heroic and legitimate fight against Fascist conquerors, but rather the Nazi German Anschluss foreshadowing its defeat to the Soviet Union. Zubov reminds his readers that in the intermediate period between the Anschluss and defeat, more territories were occupied and annexed because the human rights of ethnic Germans had allegedly been violated. All of this happened, Zubov notes, “without a single shot, without a single drop of blood,” obviously referring to the green men

⁴¹⁰ Here, it is important to mention that in the wake of their independence from the Soviet Union, the remembrance of the Great Patriotic War in Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia departed significantly from the official Soviet remembrance, which the remaining post-Soviet states acquired completely. The discrepancy between how the Great Patriotic War is remembered remains an emotive issue between Russia and the Baltic, which culminated on April 27, 2007, when Russia initiated a series of cyber attacks on Estonia after the decision to relocate a Soviet war memorial from central Tallinn.

⁴¹¹ Traditionally, the Eastern Orthodox Church was also played a unifying role between the Russian and Ukrainian nations. On February 27, 2014, however, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (the largest of the three Ukrainian Orthodox churches) signaled willingness to part with Moscow and join the Kiev Patriarchate (“Революция увлекла за собой Церковь [The revolution dragged the Church in],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, February 27, 2014). The deepening of the relationship between President Putin and Patriarch Kirill—particularly after Putin’s reelection in 2012—fostered distrust among the Ukrainian clergy about whether Kirill’s loyalty was to the Eastern Orthodox Church as a whole or to the Russian president. On March 2, Vsevolod Chaplin, Patriarch Kirill’s spokesperson, called the intervention a “peacekeeping mission” designated to secure Crimeans’ “right to the expression of their own identity and [...] right to be reunited” with Russia (“Russian Patriarch Kirill asks Ukraine’s interim head to end “discrimination”,” *Interfax*, March 2, 2014). The statement inflamed the already tense relations between Kiev and the Patriarchy in Moscow.

having seized Crimea.⁴¹² Now, Zubov warns, “history is repeating itself.” If not stopped in time, Putin’s “incredible adventurism” would wreck the Russian economy and attract the wrath of Turkey—possibly even intervention similar to Cypress (1974)—because of the issue with the Crimean Tatars, in addition to losing the fraternal bond between Russians and Ukrainians. Following Andrey Solzhenitsyn, Russians must insist on a Russian president who favors the “safekeeping of the people [, not] gathering of lands.” If not addressed in time, the unique chance of the “real rebirth” of post-Soviet Russian Self would be wasted due to “completely unnecessary aggression.”⁴¹³

Zubov’s explicit contestation of the narrative of Russia facing the threat of Fascism proliferated by the Russian media, pundits, and politicians is one of very few direct objections to the use of comparisons to the Great Patriotic War to reconstruct a Russian Self increasingly aligned with the past Soviet Russian Self. Zubov was dismissed from MGIMO on the grounds of having violated the university’s code of conduct on March 3. His dismissal is one of several examples of increased Russian media censorship; particularly censorship on the (mis-)uses of Soviet and Russian history. On March 4, Natalya Sindeyeva, the director-general of Russian *Dozhd*, which is renowned for its Kremlin-critical line, states that *Dozhd* only has financing for 1–2 months, after which it will have to dramatically downscale its operations. The downfall of the independent television channel started after conducting a survey in January 2014 about whether Leningrad should have been surrendered to Nazi Germany in order to have saved the lives of its besieged population. Several Russian television operators immediately took the channel off the air.⁴¹⁴

Despite the urgency of the matter—that is, if protesters in Kiev were indeed Fascists and Nazis—few of the participants explicitly recommend military intervention. Sergey Zheleznyak declared that Russia should help the remaining Ukrainian elected authorities. Another example is Astrakhan Governor Aleksandr Zhilkin informing the Russian Foreign Ministry of his willingness to offer political asylum to Ukrainian police officers; not least to the controversial Berkut riot police force, which had been dissolved on February 25 and hated by protesters in Kiev.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹² “This has happened before. We are on the brink of the total destruction of the system of international treaties, economic chaos, and political dictatorship,” *Vedomosti*, Andrey Zubov, March 1, 2014.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁴ “Dozhd TV may stop existing soon, says director-general,” *Interfax*, March 4, 2014.

⁴¹⁵ “Russian governor says he is ready to provide shelter to Ukrainian riot police,” *RIA Novosti*, February 24, 2014.

Still among the most vocal and hawkish Russian voices since (and also before) the military intervention in Kosovo, Communist Party Leader Gennady A. Zyuganov and the leader of LDPR, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, represent two radical exceptions. Zyuganov compared the events in Ukraine with a “slap in the face,” recalling that the eastern Ukraine was not to be considered “foreign territory” and argued that Russia should actively support those who oppose the “followers of Bandera” at a party meeting.⁴¹⁶ Zhirinovskiy said that President Yanukovich should feel free to invite the Russian army to reestablish order since the Ukrainian had proved unable to do so.⁴¹⁷ The following day, the CPRF published a statement declaring that the new government in Kiev could not be recognized and that Russia should actively support the “popular resistance and self-organization of the masses in defence [of] the south-eastern regions” and placed the responsibility of the “coup d’état in Ukraine” among the Western politicians and intelligence services who organized it.⁴¹⁸

Fourth—and following that which Korotchenko and Slutskiy interpreted as Russia’s responsibility to protect and what the hardliners saw as containing the diffusion of the values of the Western Other—if Russian Armed Forces would not be given orders to carry out a humanitarian intervention in Ukraine, different Russian agents voiced their commitment to volunteer to fight in Ukraine, with or without the blessing of the Russian state. According to Russian political scientist Kirill Benediktov, experiences from the Balkan conflicts demonstrate that a state’s approval at “the highest level” was not necessary to support a “liberation movement.” Benediktov quotes a poll showing that 84 percent of Russians were willing to defend Crimeans against “Bandera gangs” from Kiev.⁴¹⁹

On February 26, *Novaya Gazeta*, *Izvestiya*, and *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* published articles about the creation of actual Russian volunteer corps intending to aid their Ukrainian brothers in the southeast against Kiev.⁴²⁰ In Rostov,

⁴¹⁶ “Russian politicians worried about Ukraine slipping away from Moscow,” *Interfax*, February 24, 2014.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁸ “Russian Communists urge Moscow not to recognize Ukrainian government,” *Interfax*, February 25, 2014.

⁴¹⁹ “Добровольцы далекой войны [The volunteers of the distant war],” *Izvestiya*, Kirill Benediktov, February 26, 2014.

⁴²⁰ E.g., “Тяжелая контузия [A severe concussion],” *Novaya Gazeta*, Victoria Makarenko, February 26, 2014; “Добровольцы далекой войны [The volunteers of the distant war],” *Izvestiya*, Kirill Benediktov, February 26, 2014; “Сибирский полк поможет Крыму [Siberian Regiment helps Crimea],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Aleksandr Chernyavskiy, February 26, 2014.

Moscow, and Belgorod, the “Eurasian Union of Youth” was signing up volunteers to participate in “peaceful protests” in Odessa, Donetsk, Kharkiv, and Lugansk.⁴²¹ In Siberian Krasnoyarsk, a volunteer regiment was being formed by the regional branch of the Rodina Party to help compatriots living in Crimea. Thus, Vyacheslav Aleksandrov, chairman of the Krasnoyarsk Council, reminded that Siberians had “turned the tide in the Battle of Moscow” in 1941 and that they were ready to do so again in Crimea and Sevastopol.⁴²²

The prospect of Russian volunteers fighting in Ukraine not only triggered debates about the capacity of the Russian state to uphold its monopoly on project military power abroad, but also a domestic debate about national unity. Regardless of Russian servicemen or volunteers who would participate in what was escalating into a Ukrainian civil war along ethnic—not civil—cleavages, such intervention could spark similar reactions and separatist sentiments within multiethnic Russia. The concern in 2014 paralleled the one in 1999, where Ingush President Ruslan Aushev—besides voicing economic concerns regarding the Russian intervention in Kosovo—was anxious about how Russia’s own religious and ethnic minorities would react to military intervention.⁴²³

Other politicians and pundits expressed doubt that these volunteer corps would actually materialize and independently go to Ukraine or push the Russian government into officially intervening in Ukraine. Political analyst Dmitry Zolotukhin noted that the support of “national-patriotic youth and retired military officers” was not likely to influence the Russian President’s decision.⁴²⁴ However, the nationalist Rodina party could win some of the terrain it had lost to other Russian parties over time by taking a firm position on Ukraine in contrast to the other parties, which were awaiting a “clear signal” from the Russian government. All of the major Russian parties need to take a political stance on Ukraine, as Andrey Kopitov concluded.⁴²⁵ In short, sitting on the fence was not an option for the Russian political parties.

Up until the evening before the Russian use of military force, if and how Russia should intervene remained contested. An evening show on Russian

⁴²¹ “Тяжелая контузия [A severe concussion],” *Novaya Gazeta*, Victoria Makarenko, February 26, 2014.

⁴²² “Сибирский полк поможет Крыму [Siberian Regiment helps Crimea],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Aleksandr Chernyavsky, February 26, 2014.

⁴²³ “Большинство граждан России считают Крым нашей территорией [The majority of Russian citizens consider Crimea our territory],” *Izvestiya*, Sergey Podosenov, February 21, 2014.

⁴²⁴ “Сибирский полк поможет Крыму [Siberian Regiment helps Crimea],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Aleksandr Chernyavsky, February 26, 2014.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*

Channel 1 testifies to the prevailing controversy. For instance, Veronika Krasheninnikova, a member of the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation, calls for the Russian government to provide “all required assistance” to the pro-Russian people in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine who did not “view Banderas as their hero.” After what Krasheninnikova interprets as an “armed coup d’état” initiated by an unholy alliance of “Western agents, [...] fascists and ultra-right elements,” Ukrainian approval of the EU Association Agreement foreshadows Ukrainian NATO membership.⁴²⁶

In opposition to Krasheninnikova, President of the Liberal Union of Right Forces Movement Leonid Gozman voices hope that no war breaks out and stresses the Russian government should stop interfering in Ukraine and air non-stop “anti-Ukrainian propaganda on our [TV] channels.” The events in Ukraine had nothing to do with the West or Russia; rather, they were about Ukrainians fed up with the “thieves and bandits in power.” Boris Nadezhdin, a professor at Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology State University, similarly emphasizes the dangers of the biased Russian television coverage of the events in Ukraine being influenced by an “imprecise interpretation of what is happening in Ukraine.” Instead of Russian media outlets, commentators, and politicians supporting “Yanukovich's thieving gang,” author Mikhail Veller identifies the need to find “common tongue with the Ukrainian people [not] demagogues and thieves.”⁴²⁷

In sum, the inner dialogue among Russian voices about if and how to intervene in Ukraine spans a continuum from military intervention to non-intervention. The most central finding is that the dialogue is not about whether Russian intervention will be costly in material and ideational terms, but rather how important it is for Russia to express its commitment to defend compatriots abroad—and ultimately the Russian state and nation—despite these costs. The ontological perspective contributes with an understanding of why Russia could not afford not intervening in Ukraine. Aleksandr Golts nicely summarizes this in *Yezhednevnyy Zhurnal*, where he speculates whether Putin is ready to “renounce a second Sochi triumph” for the “the sake of Crimea.” Golts concludes that

⁴²⁶ “Russian TV political talk show concerned with ethnic Russians in Ukraine,” *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, February 26, 2014.

⁴²⁷ “Russian TV political talk show concerned with ethnic Russians in Ukraine,” *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, February 26, 2014.

all rational arguments convince us that Russia will not risk annexing Crimea [or] even recognizing the peninsula's "independence." [However,] some of the Kremlin's actions do not lend themselves to rational analysis.⁴²⁸

Whereas I appeal to ontological security concerns, Golts points to the "hysteria of the television channels" as his source of doubting the rational arguments forming the base of the decision to intervene or not.

Intervening "Self": Ride of the green men (February 27–March 17, 2014)

Russian armed forces intervene militarily in Ukraine on February 27, 2014. Unlike the intervention in Kosovo, this was undertaken by unmarked green men—which they were coined by local residents in Crimea—and Official Russia took no responsibility for their sudden appearance.⁴²⁹

Indeed, the parallel to green men arriving from outer space was striking.⁴³⁰ The context surrounding the intervention was tragicomic, because the unmarked green men were equipped with brand new Russian military uniforms and small arms.⁴³¹ Even though the Russian government officially denied any use of its armed forces in Ukraine, number plates, uniforms, and weaponry quickly gave away the true identity of the Crimean self-defense groups.

Two days *after* the intervention, the Russian State Duma and Federation Council authorized the use of military force in Ukraine on March 1—but only *if* needed. The situation resembled that of Muhammad Saeed al-Sahhaf—nicknamed Comical Ali—who famously denied the presence of American tanks in

⁴²⁸ "Is Moscow's Military Interference in Ukraine Possible?," *Yezhednevnyy Zhurnal*, Aleksandr Golts, February 25, 2014.

⁴²⁹ Personally, I have both given and received various kinds of green men merchandise from Russia (e.g., mugs and figures). In particular, the "Russian Army" store [Армия России] has provided national and international customers with various army merchandise since April 2015, when stores opened in Saint Petersburg and Moscow. Several stores have since opened throughout Russia, in Tula, Rostov-on-Don, Krasnodar, Sochi, and Sevastopol.

⁴³⁰ "'Little green men' or 'Russian invaders'?" *BBC*, Vitaly Shevchenko, March 11, 2014: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26532154> (accessed October 20, 2018).

⁴³¹ Military analysts quickly inferred that the green men were members of the 45th Guards Independent Spetsnaz Brigade based near Moscow ("Crimea Invaded By High Readiness Forces of The Russian Federation," *Suomen Sotilas*, Arto Pulkki, March 3, 2014: <https://web.archive.org/web/20150330124704/http://www.suomensotilas.fi/en/artikkelit/crimea-invaded-high-readiness-forces-russian-federation>, accessed October 20, 2018).

Bagdad while sounds from the ongoing combat between American and Iraqi forces could be heard in the background during the live press briefing.

The obvious difference between Iraq and Ukraine in this regard is that in the latter, it was the occupier who denied the obvious military presence. Russian government officials kept denying the intervention, and Putin personally reassured that the situation in Ukraine was not critical enough to legitimize military interference—even though such had been approved, Putin added. President Putin did not reveal the identity of the green men suddenly appearing at strategic key points across Crimea until April 17 in connection with the 2014 Direct Line show. Here, Putin replied “Of course, the Russian servicemen did back the Crimean self-defense forces.”⁴³² Publicly, Official Russia has admitted to neither the presence nor its direct military involvement in the ongoing battle between the Ukrainian government and pro-Russian forces in the Donbass region of Eastern Ukraine.

As I have demonstrated in this section, however, from February 27 until the annexation of Crimea on March 18, nothing was as obvious as Putin’s reply from April 17 indicates. Reconstructing the commonplaces and contestations in the polyphony of Russian voices in inner dialogue, Russian pundits, politicians, journalists, and scholars were at sea about the exact origin and consequences of the green men’s occupation. The same could be said about Western and non-Western counterparts.

A puzzling game of playing tricks unfolds across the inner Russian dialogue after intervention. First, who are these green men? Self-defense forces, a mixture of self-defense forces and Russian servicemen from the Black Sea Fleet, or solely Russian forces? Second, what will the outcome of this armed revolt and occupation of Crimea be? Increased political autonomy to Crimea, independence from Ukraine, or the Russian annexation of Crimea? On March 12, the editor of *Vedomosti* notes that the contemporary Russian atmosphere is marred by various and conflicting signals among Russian elites and members of the imagined Russian community. The central task of Russian custodians and wider society is guessing “who the recipient of a particular signal is and to make sense of it.”⁴³³

Evidence of the sense-making among Russian custodians trying to answer the questions above include important insights about if and how meaningful Russian custodians found military intervention; in short, evidence about if and the extent to which military intervention represented the Russian Self au-

⁴³² “Direct Line with Vladimir Putin,” *The Kremlin*, April 17, 2014: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20796> (accessed September 24, 2018).

⁴³³ “Ghost of legitimacy,” *Vedomosti*, editorial, March 12, 2014.

thetically. Assessments of the meaningfulness of intervention are tied to material, ideational, and ontological concerns about, respectively, Russian economic well-being, status and role in world politics, and courage to be an authentic vision of the Russian Self.

From the ontological perspective, it is puzzling how Russia officially kept denying the military intervention. If intervention was perceived as a meaningful way to stand up and define an authentic Russian Self against engulfment by the Western Other, why did Russian officials keep playing tricks on the surrounding world until mid-April?

A year after the intervention, *Novaya Gazeta* publishes an article allegedly documenting plans for a covert Russian intervention of Crimea.⁴³⁴ According to this information, plans had circulated at least two weeks prior to the Russian intervention among Kremlin Presidential Staff. If genuine, the existence of a pre-planned intervention indicates that the developments in Ukraine were simply an advantageous window of opportunity to bring the Ukraine's southeastern regions closer to Russia, which significant parts of the custodianship in Russia and Russian compatriots in Ukraine had called for since 1991 (Kolstø, 1995, pp. 190-199, 280-281; Melvin, 1995, pp. 10-18).

The politics editor at *Novaya Gazeta*, Andrey Lipsky, adds that the content of the plans is stripped of any “spiritual-historical’ justification for Russian interference in Ukraine,” suggesting that the plans had nothing to do with ideational or ontological concerns regarding the status or authenticity of Official Russia and the Russian Self.⁴³⁵ All of this suggests that the intervention had nothing to do with ontological security concerns, but rather a culmination of a cost-benefit analysis of the consequences. According to the article, the plan makers feared that President Yanukovich announcing to undertake snap presidential and parliamentary elections on February 4 might give rise to a new round of public protests.⁴³⁶ However, if the tipping point in favor of intervention was Yanukovich’s February 4 announcement—and no spiritual-historical justification was needed—why did the intervention then take place as late as February 27, *after* Yanukovich was ousted?

⁴³⁴ “Представляется правильным инициировать присоединение восточных областей Украины к России [It seems right to initiate the accession of the eastern regions of Ukraine to Russia],” *Novaya Gazeta*, Andrey Lipsky, February 24, 2015.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy partially support this cost-benefit interpretation, whereby Russian contingency plans of “[a]nnexing Crimea and setting the rest of Ukraine on fire” had been planned in advance and executed the moment that President Yanukovich was ousted from Kiev on February 21 (2015, p. 390).

An initial—and quite apparent—alternative material and ideational interpretation of Russian secrecy is that the Russian government simply tried to minimize the expected adverse material and ideational impacts. The fog of confusion surrounding the intervention bought Russian decision-makers time free from Western sanctions. The ambiguity and confusion surrounding the appearance of the green men and the denial of Russian interference hindered responsibility and sanctions from being placed on Russia. In short, the first interpretation of the Russian denial of the troop presence suggests an interest in intervening “as cheaply as possible.”

An alternative—not mutually exclusive—ontological interpretation of the secrecy is that the Russian decision-makers were undecided about the Russian Self emerging out of the intervention in Ukraine. Decision-makers were in doubt about whether intervention authentically reflected their vision for the Russian Self or the vision of a Russian Self as aggressively imposed by Foreign and Russian Others. That the date of the Crimean status referendum was twice rescheduled indicates that the intervention and annexation were probably not as well-planned as the *Novaya Gazeta* article assumes. Originally, the date for the referendum on the future of Crimea was set for May 25.⁴³⁷ Then, on March 5, the referendum was moved forward to March 30.⁴³⁸ On March 6, the date for the referendum was moved even further forward, to March 16. An additional reason for rescheduling the status referendum—pundit Fedor Lukayonov notes—was the rising international pressure on Russia.⁴³⁹

Similar to Kosovo, I argue, the reason for not disclosing the identity of the green men reflects the doubt in Official Russia as to whether to fully embrace “Intervening Russia” as a vision for the future Russian Self. In other words, Russian officials leave the door open to dismiss or distance the Russian Self from its “Intervening Self” in case of regret. From an ontological security perspective, eschewing responsibility for one’s actions is tantamount to testifying to a wish to avoid one’s authenticity being questioned while simultaneously also reflecting a lack of clarity about being willing and able to embrace the visions of Self with which one’s actions align.

Instead of framing the existence of the interpretations as an analytical problem to be settled via some gladiator-like testing of the relative explanatory power of a material, ideational, and ontological perspective, I argue that these

⁴³⁷ “Crimea urges Russia to correct Khrushchev’s mistake,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Tatyana Ivzhenko, March 7, 2014.

⁴³⁸ “Sevastopol seeks to end direct subordination to Kiev—Russian agency,” *RIA Novosti*, March 5, 2014.

⁴³⁹ “Programme summary of Russian Ekho Moskvyy radio news,” *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, March 6, 2014.

interpretations demonstrate how the material, ideational, and ontological dimension of security are highly intertwined. Contemporary Russian voices ooze of both anxiety related to adverse impacts on the economy and international status as well as ontological insecurities caused by anxieties related to the loss of the existing visions for an authentic post-Soviet Russian Self.

In the following, I present the reader with three key topics—international law, the Russian economy, and the post-Soviet revival of Russia—in the inner dialogue about the extent to which “Intervening Russian Self” aligned with visions for the authentic Russian Self.

“Russian Self” and international law

The first contemporary topic related to how intervention in Ukraine influences the Russian Self is international law. As demonstrated above, the Kosovo precedence rendered military intervention a problematic response, because Russia had harshly criticized the Western Others’ violations of the principle of state sovereignty since Kosovo. In short, military intervention would not only make Official Russia look like a hypocrite in the Foreign Others’ eyes (the ideational aspect) but more importantly from an ontological perspective, potentially undermining what had become an important and integral part of the post-Soviet Russian Self.

On the other hand, the Kosovo precedent opens up a range of arguments rendering military intervention in Ukraine and even support for Crimean independence meaningful.⁴⁴⁰ That the Western Other was unwilling to recognize the Crimean wish for independence elucidates the double standards guiding Western interactions with Russia. In *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Konstantin Simonov asks if:

Kosovo was given an opportunity to choose its future, why should the people of the Crime be denied the same opportunity? The Crimea is as much a special case as Kosovo if not more so.⁴⁴¹

Viktor M. Zavarzin, the former Russian commander of the contingent of troops who undertook the infamous dash to Slatina and who is now first deputy chairman of the Duma Defense Committee, urges the Western Other to

⁴⁴⁰ Russian political scientists suggested that Crimea’s unification with Russia was not only legitimized by the precedent of Kosovo’s independence but that Crimea’s unification also demonstrated that “Kosovo can be returned” to Serbia in the future (“Крым как национальная идея [Crimea as a national idea],” *Izvestiya*, Oleg Bondarenko, March 13, 2014).

⁴⁴¹ “Talk of blockade merely mind games,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Konstantin Simonov, March 12, 2014.

abandon its “bloc ambitions [and] double standards” and engage in a dialogue with Russia on equal terms in the wake of the occupation.⁴⁴²

By intervening despite the perpetual Western double standards denying Russia the right to be an equal among the world’s great powers,⁴⁴³ ‘Official Russia’ reaffirmed its great power role with the unilateral use of military force. With intervention, Official Russia sent an important message: that it insists on being treated like an equal great power. By unilaterally intervening, Official Russia demonstrates to the imagined Russian community that Russia is able to exercise a “privilege” that is exclusive to great powers; a privilege primarily exercised by the “American Other” prior to the intervention in Ukraine.⁴⁴⁴

More fundamentally, Russian pundit Oleg Bondarenko argues that the intervention demonstrates how *the* authentic “national idea” that the imagined Russian community and its custodians have searched for since the Soviet Union collapsed seems located beyond the formal borders of Russia. Bondarenko writes of how the Sochi Winter Olympics was a “pleasant prelude” to the

national idea sought for the last 20 years, as it turned out, lay beyond the formal borders of Russia. Today’s support by the majority of Russian residents for the return of Crimea and Sevastopol to our country is the spiritual clasp that really united the nation.⁴⁴⁵

The intervention gave birth to a new “ideology” in post-Soviet Russia: “the return of Russian lands.” With intervention, Russia reaffirms its sovereignty and role in world politics. Intervention, however, also demonstrates that the imagined Russian community cannot save itself by focusing inward and concentrating on domestic problems. According to Bondarenko, “only by saving the world can we save ourselves.”⁴⁴⁶ In short, the onward Russian quest for ontological security was not running along an inward-going but rather an outward-going path beyond Russia’s formal borders.

Russian writer Aleksandr Prokhanov follows a similar way of reasoning about the implications of intervention for the Russian Self. The “terrible blow” Russians suffered with the collapse of the Soviet Union is gradually “healed”

⁴⁴² “Russian MPs see US possible sanctions as attempt at blackmail,” *RIA Novosti*, March 4, 2014.

⁴⁴³ E.g., “Русские горки [Russian Rollercoaster],” *Izvestiya*, Boris Mezhujev, March 4, 2014.

⁴⁴⁴ “Военные операции за рубежом как державная привилегия [Military operations abroad as a state privilege],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Editorial, March 3, 2014.

⁴⁴⁵ “Крым как национальная идея [Crimea as a national idea],” *Izvestiya*, Oleg Bondarenko, March 13, 2014.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

by military intervention. Finally, the imagined Russian community has awakened and will

rebel from decay and shake off the ashes [...]. The Russian state acquired its lost meanings, felt its place in history [, and] entering a new era, is preparing for a profound transformation.⁴⁴⁷

From this perspective, unmarked Russian forces were not occupying but rather *liberating* Crimea. According to high-profile, pro-Kremlin pundit Mikhail Leontyev, giving away Crimea “without a single shot and [returning] it without a single shot” marks the “first Russian victory in nearly 70 years.” If giving up Crimea again, it would not only jeopardize the revival of a united post-Soviet Russia, it would be Russia’s last victory.⁴⁴⁸ In a similar vein, Head of the CIS Institute Konstantin Zatulin warns that any step back from Crimea

will cost too much and will be fraught with far worse consequences, including humiliation and betrayal of not only Crimea and Sevastopol, but also ourselves in Russia [...]. This test is retribution for our past, [...]for the country which we allowed to collapse, for people who suddenly unwilling became compatriots abroad. Today, we have shown our force in order not to use it. If we show weakness, sooner or later we will have to use force in an immeasurably more difficult situation.⁴⁴⁹

Intervening in Ukraine, the Russian Self finally stands up and takes upon itself the responsibility to prohibit Russia to collapse once again. Had Russia not militarily intervened in Ukraine, Russia would find itself in an “immeasurably more difficult situation,” one where the use of force on a grand scale would have been inevitable. In short, not intervening in Ukraine would be betraying the Russian Self.

In contrast to Prokhanov, Zatulin, and Bondarenko’s interpretations of intervention as the start of a grand national revival of a more authentic Russian Self, several Russian pundits and journalists speculate—from different stances in the inner dialogue—whether the USA and Great Britain would honor the

⁴⁴⁷ “Путину — орден Нахимова [Putin awarded the Order of Nakhimov,” *Izvestiya*, Aleksandr Prokhanov, March 10, 2014.

⁴⁴⁸ “Russian TV pundit says Crimea is being liberated, ridicules ex-US envoy,” *Channel One*, March 12, 2014.

⁴⁴⁹ “Special edition of Russian TV talk show focuses on situation in Crimea,” *TV Centre*, March 13, 2014.

guarantees they extended to Ukraine in exchange for handing over the remaining stockpile of Soviet nuclear weapons to Russia.⁴⁵⁰ Russia's status as a guarantor of Ukrainian sovereignty (including Crimea) in the Budapest Memorandum (1994) includes the potential for the onset of a "serious conflict."⁴⁵¹ The anxiety associated with the consequences of dishonoring the Budapest Memorandum intensifies on March 12, when Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseny Yatsenyuk urges the guarantor states to honor their commitments and protect Ukraine's territorial sovereignty militarily against the unmarked invaders.⁴⁵²

Russian pundit Gleb Pavlovsky warns that introducing Russian troops in Ukraine potentially leads to a "disastrous drop in Russia's authority in the world" and sparks anxiety among the CIS member states, who are placing themselves in the shoes of the Ukrainian government.⁴⁵³ Intervention alienates Russian neighbors in the near abroad and undermines future visions of establishing a credible and strong Eurasian Union. The Kazakh government was particularly anxious due to the significant Russian diaspora living there.⁴⁵⁴

Other than Moldova condemning Russian actions in Crimea, the Russian neighbor states remained mum.⁴⁵⁵ On March 12, based on anonymous sources at the NATO headquarters and US State Department, *Kommersant* reports that Crimean unification with Russia would result in the extension of a MAP to Georgia.⁴⁵⁶ Already on February 28, Nadezhda Arbatova warns in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* that former Georgian President Mikhail Saakshvili is using the situation in Ukraine—and the heightened nationalist sentiments in the

⁴⁵⁰ In "Putin's Ultimatum" (*Yezhednevnyy Zhurnal*, March 5, 2014) Liliya Shevtsova speculates whether the West would appease Russia like France and Great Britain did with Nazi Germany over Czechoslovakia in 1938, or if they would honor the Budapest Memorandum and guarantee Ukrainian sovereignty. See also "Ukraine tests military forces," *Kommersant*, Vladimir Orlov, March 14, 2014.

⁴⁵¹ "Semi-autonomous peninsula of Crimea: Keeping Crimea as a territory with a Russian presence within Ukraine is beneficial both to Kiev, and to Moscow," *Vedomosti*, Editorial, February 27, 2014.

⁴⁵² "Kiev will fight for the Crimea," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Tatyana Ivzhenko, March 12, 2014.

⁴⁵³ "Pundits ponder results of possible deployment of Russian troops in Crimea," *Gazeta.ru*, March 2, 2014.

⁴⁵⁴ E.g., "For the ordinary Ukrainian," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Aleksandra Samarina, March 5, 2014.

⁴⁵⁵ "Moscow's fraternal embrace spooks more than just Kiev," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, editorial, March 6, 2014.

⁴⁵⁶ "Georgian plan with an eye to the Crimea," *Kommersant*, Yelena Chernenko, March 12, 2014.

Russian press—to convince the surrounding world that Russia was repeating the “Georgian scenario.”⁴⁵⁷

Other voices are not as concerned about the precedents that Russian intervention could potentially establish regionally and globally. Supporting the understanding of an intervening Russian Self aligned with military intervention, General Director of the Center for Political Information Aleksey Muxin argues in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* that the interim Ukrainian government “fundamentally contradicts international law.”⁴⁵⁸ Consequently, Official Russian guarantees previously given to uphold Ukrainian sovereignty in the Budapest Memorandum are invalid.

Aleksey Chesnakov, the director of the Russian institution Centre for Political Conditions, concludes that the rise of “national values and interests” outweighs the adverse impacts of “subjective interpretations of the principle of state sovereignty” by the Western Other.⁴⁵⁹ In other words, the principle of sovereignty had always been interpreted in favor of the interests of the Western Other. Official Russia should therefore not abstain from intervening militarily to maintain a principle of international law, which had always been applied subjectively to suit the interests of the Western Other.

More enthusiastically, Russian political scientist Oleg Bondarenko did not fear the alienation of the state in the near abroad but rather the coming of a “Russian Spring” in which Transnistria, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia would join Russia in the wake of the Crimean status referendum. Widespread international recognition of Kosovo’s declaration of independence from Serbia in February 2008 established a “precedent in world politics” to redraw borders according to the sovereignty of the people inhabiting the territory in question. Consequently, Russia was on the forefront of the development of international law; and, hence, the gradual replacement of the principle of state sovereignty with popular sovereignty. Bondarenko predicts that the independence of Crimea would be followed by Scotland and Catalonia.⁴⁶⁰

As the inner dialogue about the authenticity of the alignment between the Russian Self and intervention in Ukraine evolves from February 27 to March 17, a commonplace emerged around the narrative that Russia’s intervention

⁴⁵⁷ “Securing the peace,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Nadezhda Arbatova, February 28, 2014.

⁴⁵⁸ “Kremlin waits it out,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Aleksandra Samarina, February 28, 2014.

⁴⁵⁹ “Pundits ponder results of possible deployment of Russian troops in Crimea,” *Gazeta.ru*, March 2, 2014.

⁴⁶⁰ “Крым как национальная идея [Crimea as a national idea],” *Izvestiya*, Oleg Bondarenko, March 13, 2014.

in Ukraine did not jeopardize its role as protector of a world order founded on a legal basis.

The overly legal discussion was supported by an increasing number of reports in the Russian press and statements by Russian officials about the skyrocketing number of Ukrainians seeking refuge and citizenship in Russia to avoid the alleged genocide and purges undertaken by Fascists and Nazis in the Maidan movement. On March 3, intelligence about a planned “assault train” departing from Kiev and targeting Crimea triggered widespread anxiety.⁴⁶¹ On March 7, Russian Foreign Ministry Human Rights Envoy Konstantin Dolgov states that the Russian state began collecting evidence of crimes and violations of human rights committed by the Maidan movement. Evidence would be handed over to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and other relevant international organizations.⁴⁶² On March 14, two days before the status referendum, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov expresses concern about the Western Other deliberately “ignoring the mass violations of human rights in Ukraine.”⁴⁶³ In short, the legal discussion about the extent to which Russia violated the principle of state sovereignty and the likely consequences thereof was accompanied by the proliferation of stories stressing the chaos, trauma, and indiscriminate violence against ethnic Russians and pro-Russian compatriots in Ukraine. Anxieties tied to the likely fatal human consequences of an Official Russia failing to dare to stand up and defend ethnic Russians and other compatriots against what seemed to have been initiated by a Western Other once again—however covertly—violated the principle of state sovereignty, gradually crafting commonplaces around intervention as an action mostly aligning with the predominant vision of the Russian Self.

“Russian Self” and the economy

Similar to the inner dialogue about the alignment between the intervening Russian Self and international law, the second key topic about the Russian Self and the economy also followed in continuation of the dialogue before intervention in Ukraine; and further back a similar dialogue tied to the intervention in Kosovo 15 years earlier.

⁴⁶¹ “Migration situation in Ukraine close to humanitarian disaster: Russian official,” *Interfax*, March 3, 2014 & “Russian migration service encourages Ukrainians to apply,” *RIA Novosti*, March 3, 2014.

⁴⁶² “Russia collects reports about human rights violations in Ukraine: official,” *Interfax*, March 7, 2014.

⁴⁶³ “Russia concerned about West’s negligence over human rights violations in Ukraine,” *RIA Novosti*, March 14, 2014.

Two competing narratives about the relation between the Russian Self and its economy emerge in the wake of the Russian intervention in Ukraine. A central point of contention between the two narratives is whether Russia's intervention foreshadows the start of the end for the Russian economy—cutting away Western foreign direct investments to modernize the Russian economy—or the beginning of a more economically independent and prosperous Russia. Whereas the first pessimistic outlook is based on a premise for Russian economic growth through exports to the global capitalist economy, the premise of the latter narrative resonates with the notion of import substitution. The import substitution concept was by no means completely alien to the many Russians who had experienced living in the planned economy of the Soviet Union.⁴⁶⁴

The first position, predicting the start of the end for the Russian economy, was predominately represented by voices in the columns of *Vedomosti*, *Novaya Gazeta*, *Yezhednevnyy Zhurnal*, and *Kommersant*. On February 28, the editorial in *Vedomosti* cautiously warns pro-separatist sentiments abroad and domestically that the Russian track record of initiating half-hearted interventions in its near abroad and leaving behind a trail of “non-states” in a diplomatic and economic grey zone is desirable neither for Russia nor non-states like Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transnistria. According to the editor, the slightest form of intervention would result in Russia's total “international political isolation.”⁴⁶⁵

The first sign of such isolation came on March 12, when the OECD suspends Russia's accession process and confirms that it would “respond positively to Ukraine's request to further strengthen existing OECD–Ukraine cooperation.”⁴⁶⁶ The intervention prevents Russia from undertaking “economic reforms [enabling it] to become a civilized European country.”⁴⁶⁷ Aleksandr Ivaknik speculates at *Politkom.ru* as to for how long the Russian population would be willing to pay for “Russia's return to its imperial role” when realizing

⁴⁶⁴ For an elaborate study of discussions between proponents of the two competing narratives in relation to the wider inner Russian dialogue about the role of economics in revival of a meaningful post-Soviet Russian Self, see “The place of economics in Russian national identity debates” (Rutland, 2017).

⁴⁶⁵ “Poverty-stricken empire,” *Vedomosti*, editorial, February 28, 2014.

⁴⁶⁶ “Russian government source regrets “political” suspension of OECD accession talks,” *Interfax*, March 13, 2014.

⁴⁶⁷ “Stock Market as Antiwar Factor,” *Yezhednevnyy Zhurnal*, Maksim Blant, March 4, 2014.

the full consequences of intervention in Ukraine.⁴⁶⁸ On March 7, an anonymous State Duma Deputy admits to *Kommersant* that Russian officials stayed silent about the actual financial costs of providing financial assistance to and integrating Crimea into Russia, because “the public is very sensitive to any proposals on the subject, and any specifics may create a backlash.”⁴⁶⁹ In addition to the economic costs associated with expected international isolation, the financial burdens of bringing Crimea up to speed with Russia’s industrial and financial standards made a grim perspective worse and places a significant burden on the Russian taxpayer.⁴⁷⁰ The estimated cost of bringing Crimea up to Russian financial, social, and infrastructural standards was estimated at being between 2.5 and 3 billion US dollars.⁴⁷¹

Similar to the Russian governors’ reservations about relinquishing federal funds allocated for the regions to finance Russia’s peacekeeping mission in the previous chapter about Kosovo, former Russian Minister of Finance and member of the Board of the Presidential Economic Council Aleksey Kudrin expresses concerns about the economic consequences of Russian foreign policy. According to Kudrin, the introduction of Western sanctions could inflict costs of an estimated extra 50 billion US dollars every quarter. He estimates that such an impact on the Russian economy would lead to a “zero GDP growth this year,” whereas the expectations had been 2.5–3.5 percent GDP growth.⁴⁷² The risk of the introduction of Western sanctions against Russia was accompanied by a sudden drop in the value of the Russian Ruble in early March, exacerbating the economic outlook significantly.⁴⁷³

The second narrative envisioning a more economically independent and prosperous Russia emerging out of import substitution strategies rendered meaningful by sanctions following intervention was primarily represented by official voices in the State Duma, Federation Council, and presidential spokespeople. Besides expressions of optimism about transforming the Russian economy along import substitution lines, the official voices spread a narrative toning down the will and capacity of the West to sanction and isolate Russia.

⁴⁶⁸ “Price of Imperial Self-Assertiveness,” *Politkom.ru*, Aleksandr Ivakhnik, March 5, 2014.

⁴⁶⁹ “Expensive peninsula,” *Kommersant*, Dmitry Butrin et al., March 7, 2014.

⁴⁷⁰ “Incorporating the “Black Swan”,” *Novaya Gazeta*, Aleksey Polukhin & Diana Khachatryan, March 14, 2014.

⁴⁷¹ “Expensive peninsula,” *Kommersant*, Dmitry Butrin, Stanislav Kuvaldin, Tatyana Grishina & Pyotr Netroba, March 7, 2014.

⁴⁷² “Former Russian finance minister worried about West’s sanctions,” *Interfax*, March 13, 2014.

⁴⁷³ “Russian currency nosedives upon news from Ukraine,” *NTV*, March 3, 2014.

On March 4, for instance, First Deputy Chairman of the Duma Committee on International Affairs Leonid Kalashnikov argues that the Western sanctions would necessitate the development of Russia's own industries.⁴⁷⁴ Kalashnikov's assessment was supported by numerous Russian politicians. For instance, Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich interprets the crisis as opportunity to develop the Russian economy to "minimize its dependence on political risks" while stressing that sanctions are generally "a double-edged thing and negatively impact both sides."⁴⁷⁵ The day before the Crimean status referendum, Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, who is responsible for supervising the Russian defense industry, is asked to comment on Russian military expert Pavel Felgenhauer's critical assessment of the consequences of the intervention for Russian defense industry. Similar to Kalashnikov, Rogozin reassures journalists that the Russian defense industry is not only ready to face Western sanctions but might even "benefit from them" and make Russian industry "perform better."⁴⁷⁶

By making public declarations about how Western sanctions would prove ineffective and counterproductive, Russian officials argue that the Western Other—particularly EU member states—are too fragmented to muster the necessary political will to impose credible sanctions against Russia.⁴⁷⁷ The German hesitance regarding the imposition of EU sanctions on Russia was a particular source of reserved optimism among Russian officials.⁴⁷⁸ The EU was undergoing its "deepest crisis," meaning that European sanctions against Russia would be short-lived.⁴⁷⁹ With reference to the lack of Western sanctions following the Russo–Georgian War (2008), that "practical experience shows

⁴⁷⁴ "Russian MPs see US possible sanctions as attempt at blackmail," *RIA Novosti*, March 4, 2014.

⁴⁷⁵ "Russian economy can withstand possible sanctions—deputy premier," *Interfax*, March 11, 2014.

⁴⁷⁶ "Pundits say US sanctions can ruin Russian defence industry, deputy PM disagrees," *Ekho Moskvyy*, March 17, 2014.

⁴⁷⁷ "Attempts to isolate Russia doomed, says senior MP", *Interfax*, March 2, 2014; 'Russian pundits, official dismiss US, EU sanctions over Ukraine as ineffective', *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, March 6, 2014.

⁴⁷⁸ "The Germans don't want to bite Russia," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Yevgeny Grigoryev, March 6, 2014.

⁴⁷⁹ "Russian MP slams Euro parliament resolution on Russia as "Russophobic", " *Interfax*, March 14, 2014.

that sanctions are not forever.”⁴⁸⁰ Konstantin Simonov predicted that a blockade of Russia would only cause “short-term inconveniences.”⁴⁸¹

Having outlined the two core narratives about the Russian economy, a central finding—or rather zero-finding—is that unlike the inner dialogue about the alignment between visions for the Russian Self and the actions of “Intervening Russia” in terms of international law, I see remarkably little dialogue between the two idealized narratives about the relation between visions for the Russian Self and Intervening Russia in terms of the outlook for the Russian economy.

Consequently, no commonplace is constructed around visions for the authentic Russian Self in alignment with either of the two narratives. On the one hand, this finding is surprising because the meanings and values underpinning the national and global economy are central structural elements in defining everyday life. On the other hand, the structural importance of the economy and long-term consequences associated with its configuration—on one side—are rather abstract, but—on the other side—also questions about costs of Official Russia’s foreign policy actions, which—from the ontological perspective—are secondary material concerns in contrast to more acute primary ontological ones related to maintaining and augmenting an authentic Russian Self by daring to stand up to the Western Other to avoid losing Self here and now. In short, one interpretation of the lack of interaction between two idealized narratives is that the long-term economic consequences of foreign policy action are secondary for the custodians embedded in a context of immediate ontological insecurity.

“Russian Self” and visions for post-Soviet revival

The explicit link between the revival of the Russian Self and the act of military intervention is the most significant innovation in the inner Russian dialogue during the intervention in Ukraine in contrast to Kosovo.

On the date of the Russian intervention in Ukraine, February 27, Yegor Kholmogorov notes that the Ukraine crisis is dividing the ranks of the Russian nationalist movement. Until the Ukraine crisis, the movements had been fairly united (e.g., by their common stance against Russian migration policies).⁴⁸²

⁴⁸⁰ “What Russia will be like when Crimea joins it,” *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, Mikhail Zubov, March 11, 2014.

⁴⁸¹ “Talk of blockade merely mind games,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Konstantin Simonov, March 12, 2014.

⁴⁸² “Аватары русского национализма [Avatars of Russian nationalism],” *Izvestiya*, Yegor Kholmogorov, February 27, 2014.

The Ukraine crisis elucidates a fundamental split between Russian nationalists: While some nationalists find inspiration in the Ukrainian national revival and desire what the Ukrainian Right Sector achieved with Maidan, others interpret the escalating crisis as the beginning of a Eurasian empire. Those who find inspiration in Ukrainian events desire a Russian revival from within that concentrates on developing a strong Russian ethno-state, whereas the Eurasianists want to restore Russia as the center of a Eurasian revolution from Vladivostok to Lisbon.

I will return to how this split between Russia's national movements disclosed by intervention developed in detail in Chapter 5. On top of the issues tied to the split between Russian nationalists, the Crimean Tatars living in Crimea became a delicate issue in the inner dialogue following Russian intervention. The Crimean Tatar resistance to Russian occupation is particularly delicate due to their troublesome past. The Crimean Tatars were subject to mass deportations from Crimea in 1944 and interned in Soviet camps in Siberia.⁴⁸³ The timing of the conflict was made even more delicate by the Crimean Tatar 70-year commemoration of the deportations, which was to be held two months later.⁴⁸⁴

Before, during, and after the Russian intervention, the Crimean Tatars organized resistance against Russian interference in Crimea together with local pro-Maidan protesters. The Crimean Tatars organized protests against what they perceived as an "open but undeclared act of aggression, aggression by Russia against Ukraine," which became increasingly outspoken and irreconcilable as the status referendum moved closer.⁴⁸⁵ After seizing the Crimean Parliament, the Tatars demanded the removal of the Russian flag from the parliament building and publicly declared their support for the new authorities in Kiev.⁴⁸⁶

The Crimean Tatars' outspoken opposition against Crimean independence and the coming referendum was a thorn in the side of the new pro-Russian

⁴⁸³ "Programme summary of Russian NTV "Segodnya" news," *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, March 11, 2014.

⁴⁸⁴ "Crimean Tatars have dissenting opinion," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Tatyana Ivzhenko, March 13, 2014.

⁴⁸⁵ "Полуостров антимайдана. Крым стоит на своем [The anti-Maidan peninsula. Crimea asserts its opinion]," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Tatyana Ivzhenko, February 27, 2014; "Russian radio airs eyewitness describing seizure of Crimea parliament," *Ekho Moskvy*, February 27, 2014; "'Open but undeclared aggression' by Russia in Crimea: Crimean Tatar leader," *Ekho Moskvy*, March 2, 2014.

⁴⁸⁶ "New defence of Sevastopol," *Vedomosti*, Polina Khimshiashvili & Svetlana Bocharova, February 27, 2014.

government in Crimea as well as the Kremlin. A minority expressing open dissatisfaction with the developments in Crimea effectively undermined the narrative of green men coming to save Crimea from Ukrainian radicals in Kiev.

Crimean Tatar opposition undermines the legitimacy of what was framed as a humanitarian intervention to save Crimeans and Ukrainians from purges and genocide. On March 2, Chairman of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis⁴⁸⁷ and deputy of the Crimean Supreme Council Refat Chubarov call out the Russian government and on *Ekho Moskvu*, stating that while the official reason for intervening in Crimea was to “prevent attacks by civilians on Ukrainian military garrisons,” the real reason was to restore Russian control over Crimea.⁴⁸⁸ Chubarov also predicts that the Crimean Tatars will boycott the coming status referendum.

The Crimean Tatars’ dissent not only threatens to undermine the legitimacy of the Russian intervention but can potentially develop the occupation of Crimea into a “Black Sea Kosovo,” as Russian political scientist Stanislav Khatuntsev warns. Given the Crimean Tatars’ ethnic and religious ties with a regional great power like Turkey and their general appeal to fellow Muslims, the Russian occupation can exacerbate significant domestic and regional problems.⁴⁸⁹ Khatuntsev’s warning resonates with similar concerns about the domestic consequences of the Russian intervention in Kosovo raised by the Head of the Ingush Republic. On March 13, former Chairman of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People, Mustafa Dzhemilev announces that he has been in contact with Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, who promises that if “Crimean Tatars face danger, Turkey would be the first country to come to the rescue.”⁴⁹⁰ As a consequence of the adverse implications of an escalating Russo–Tatar conflict, Khatuntsev concludes that as opposed to annexing Crimea, Russia needs to facilitate the creation of an independent Republic of Crimea.⁴⁹¹

External mitigation was needed between Russia and the Crimean Tatars to avoid a conflict potentially undermining Russian–Turkish relations and diffuse into dissent among the score of religious and ethnic minorities living

⁴⁸⁷ The Mejlis is the highest legislative body of the Crimean Tatars.

⁴⁸⁸ ““Open but undeclared aggression” by Russia in Crimea—Crimean Tatar leader,” *Ekho Moskvu*, March 2, 2014.

⁴⁸⁹ “Незалежный Крым [Autonomous Crimea],” *Izvestiya*, Stanislav Khatuntsev, February 27, 2014.

⁴⁹⁰ “Crimean Tatars have dissenting opinion,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Tatyana Ivzhenko, March 13, 2014.

⁴⁹¹ “Незалежный Крым [Autonomous Crimea],” *Izvestiya*, Stanislav Khatuntsev, February 27, 2014.

within Russia's own borders or attract Islamist terrorism from the North Caucasus.⁴⁹² An initial way to mitigate the Crimean Tatar dissent was to send Ramzan Kadyrov, the head of the Chechen Republic and representing a Muslim-Russian minority, to Crimea as bridge-builder.⁴⁹³ Kazan delegations from Tatarstan in Russia later began making frequent visits to Crimea to mediate.⁴⁹⁴

A shift in the rhetoric on Crimean Tatar occurred on March 10. Chubarov declares he is not against the status referendum per se, but undertaking a referendum while Russian servicemen—for which Russia had officially still not claimed responsibility—are present in Crimea is unacceptable.⁴⁹⁵ The day after Chubarov's declaration, the Supreme Council of Crimea responds by passing "On guarantees for the restoration of the rights of the Crimean Tatar people and its integration into Crimean society," along its declaration of independence from Ukraine. By adopting the two resolutions on the same day, the new Crimean authorities strive to signal that the independence of Crimea also benefits the Crimean Tatars. Besides the Supreme Council of Crimea's adoption of the resolution, members of the Ukrainian Supreme Council and Mustafa Dzhemilev are invited to Moscow, which President Putin's spokesperson Dmitry Peshkov confirms publicly.⁴⁹⁶

As Russian expert on Crimean issues Andrey Demartyno explains in an interview to *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Crimean Tatars hold the "golden share" in relation to maintaining Crimean stability. Whether Crimea develops into "a second Kosovo" depended largely on the 10 pct. of the Crimean population constituted by Crimean Tatars. That Crimea would become a functioning and "developing member of the Russian Federation is becoming less feasible with each passing day," and this is why the Kremlin offers "political and economic bribes of sorts."⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹² Ibid.

⁴⁹³ "Кадыров оценил ситуацию на Украине как госпереворот [Kadyrov deems the situation in Ukraine a coup d'état]," *Izvestiya*, Anastasia Kashevarova, February 27, 2014.

⁴⁹⁴ "Russian region's head urges Crimean Tatars not to boycott Ukraine secession vote," *Interfax*, March 11, 2014; "Kazan plays its own card in Crimea," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Gleb Postnov, March 7, 2014.

⁴⁹⁵ "Ukraine's Tatars advised not to take part in referendum—Russian radio," *Ekho Moskvу*, March 10, 2014.

⁴⁹⁶ "Crimean Tatar member of Ukrainian parliament invited to Moscow for talks," *Interfax*, March 11, 2014.

⁴⁹⁷ "Crimean Tatars have dissenting opinion," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Tatyana Ivzhenko, March 13, 2014.

On March 14, Russian politicians significantly raise the costs of Crimean Tatars maintaining their active opposition to the occupation and the increasingly realistic scenario of annexation. State Duma Deputy Sergey Mironov proposes introducing a bill restoring Crimea Tatars' property rights.⁴⁹⁸ Despite persistent efforts to mitigate Crimean Tatar opposition, the Tatar Majilis asks Ukraine's Supreme Rada to grant them the status of an indigenous people and the right to establish ethno-cultural autonomy, effectively turning down Official Russia one day before the status referendum.⁴⁹⁹

Turning down Official Russia mars the happiness characterizing the days ahead of the status referendum, which is expected to result in a vote for Crimea to unify with Russia, and contested the narrative about military intervention in Ukraine as an act in alignment with a Russian responsibility to protect ethnic minorities against alleged Ukrainian purges. In September 2014, Russian authorities seized the building housing Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People in Simferopol, and the Mejlis was listed in late-April 2016 as an extremist organization by the Crimean Supreme Court for "propaganda of aggression and hatred towards Russia, inciting ethnic nationalism and extremism in society," as Regional Prosecutor General Natalia Poklonskaya explained.⁵⁰⁰ On September 29, 2016, the Russian Supreme Court upheld the previous court decisions to ban the Mejlis.⁵⁰¹ On March 18, 2014, Valentina Matviyenko had otherwise publicly reassured that, on the basis of Russian law, Crimean Tatars could gain increased autonomy in Crimea.⁵⁰²

Closing "Self": Annexing Crimea (March 18–25)

This section focuses on the reconstruction of the Russian Self in the week following the Russian annexation of Crimea. I pay special attention to how the Russian custodians interpret the authenticity of the Russian Self in light of the

⁴⁹⁸ "Senior Russian MP proposes bill to restore Crimean Tatars' property rights," *Rossiia 1*, March 14, 2014.

⁴⁹⁹ "Kiev lays claim to Soviet Property," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Tatyana Ivzhenko, March 18, 2014.

⁵⁰⁰ "Crimean court bans Tatar ruling body in blow to minority," *The Star Online*, April 26, 2016: <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/world/2016/04/26/crimean-court-bans-tatar-ruling-body-in-blow-to-minority/#1CaIiqh3mlZLBl2c.99> (accessed October 21, 2018).

⁵⁰¹ "Crimean Tatar Elected Body Banned in Russia," *Human Rights Watch*, September 29, 2016: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/09/29/crimean-tatar-elected-body-banned-russia> (accessed October 14, 2018).

⁵⁰² "Crimean Tatars allowed to create autonomy in Crimea—Russian speaker," *Interfax*, March 18, 2014.

first round of Western sanctions introduced (March 17), the formal process of annexing Crimea (March 18–21), and finally the suspension of Russia’s G8 membership on March 24, 2014.

“Triumphant euphoria” is the best way to describe the overall mood throughout the Russian source material from March 18–25, 2014,⁵⁰³ as best evidenced by the proposal from State Duma Deputy Aleksandr Starovoitov that President Putin and Prime Minister Medvedev declare March 18 a national holiday: Reunification Day.⁵⁰⁴

The contemporary euphoria is further reflected in the reaction of State Duma Deputy Vyacheslav Nikonov to a March 24 *New York Times* article by former American ambassador to Russia Michal McFaul. Comparing McFaul’s article to Georg F. Kennan’s “Long Telegram,” Nikonov writes that despite Russia’s relative weakness compared to the Soviet Union, Russia once and for all has shown the West, particularly the USA, that Russia will determine its own fate. Russia has demonstrated its capacity to defend itself. The comparative strength of post-Soviet Russia is that compared to Soviet Russia, it is far more “monolithic in its understanding of its own nature.” To make a long telegram short, Nikonov warns his Western counterparts that Russia has already “won” what the Western Other wants to provoke: a new Cold War. Taking back Crimea, Russia has finally overcome its

paralysis of will [and] political apathy. [...] overcome the sense of humiliation. It has seen clearly who friends are and where its foes are. [Russia] will not allow itself to be drawn into the confrontation that the former ambassador is calling for. You want to contain us.⁵⁰⁵

Following Nikonov, Official Russia will neither engage in a new Cold War nor conduct other military operations against its neighbors in the near abroad. Instead, as argued by Chairman of the Presidium of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy Fyodor Lukyanov, the “divorce from the West is accelerating Moscow’s turn” towards the East.⁵⁰⁶ Despite Lukyanov’s reassurances, the underlying contemporary key question inside and outside Russia was whether the momentary euphoria was translating into further Russian occupations and

⁵⁰³ “First deputy prime minister of the Crimea Rustam Temirgaliyev,” *Novaya Gazeta*, Pavel Kanygin, March 19, 2014.

⁵⁰⁴ “Депутаты предлагают объявить 18 марта национальным праздником [Deputies propose to declare March 18 a national holiday],” *Izvestiya*, Elena Teslova & Svetlana Subbotina, March 19, 2014.

⁵⁰⁵ “Short telegram: ‘Don’t overstrain yourselves’,” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, Vyacheslav Nikonov, March 26, 2014.

⁵⁰⁶ “Why do we need America?,” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, Fyodor Lukyanov, March 26, 2014.

annexations. For instance, the strategically important shoreline connecting Russia with Crimea and the Ukrainian provinces Lugansk and Donetsk in the east was frequently mentioned.⁵⁰⁷

A series of domestic incidents within Russia did little to tone down the anxieties tied to further expansions. For instance, during a special edition of *Sunday Night with Vladimir Solovyev*, the leader of the LDPR, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, praises President Putin's resoluteness with regard to Crimea and jokingly suggests renaming him Vladimir Krymskiy [English: Vladimir Crimean]. Solovyev jokingly replies that if the current trend of Russian interventions continues, Zhirinovskiy could maybe soon change his own last name to "Belorusskiy" and "Kazakhstanskiy" or "Donetskiy" and "Odesskiy," Zhirinovskiy adds laughing.⁵⁰⁸

On March 18, the possibility of Transnistria joining Russia flared up when Chairman of the Supreme Council of Transnistria Mikhail Burla sent an appeal to include Transnistria in the bill reunifying Russia and Crimea addressed to State Duma Chairman Sergey Naryshkin. *Vedomosti* journalists Svetlana Bocharova and Liliya Biryukova interpret Transnistria's appeal as a response to a draft law sponsored by the Just Russia party suggesting the simplification of the accession of the new territories to Russia.⁵⁰⁹ That same day, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, a longtime proponent of Transnistrian independence, announced that the Russian government would consider supporting the Moldavian breakaway region further. The initiative followed in the wake of a number of accusations against Ukraine for de-facto isolating Transnistria.⁵¹⁰ Anxiety caused by the possibility for the Russian escalation of the situation in Transnistria grew significantly on March 25, when Russian troops in Transnistria conduct anti-terrorism drills aimed at training to rebuff attacks on local Russian military facilities.⁵¹¹ Would Official Russia use a false flag operation against a local Russian military facility as pretext for military intervention in Moldova, effectively supporting the independence of Transnistria?

⁵⁰⁷ "Карт-бланш. У России нет планов завоевать Украину [Carte blanche. Russia has no plans to invade Ukraine]," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Vladimir Mukhin, March 24, 2014.

⁵⁰⁸ "Russian TV discussion programme hails Crimean "independence"," *Rossiya 1*, March 17, 2014.

⁵⁰⁹ "Dniester region wants to join Russia," *Vedomosti*, Svetlana Bocharova & Liliya Biryukova, March 18, 2014.

⁵¹⁰ "Russian deputy PM: Government to discuss Moldova's Dniester region on 20 March," *Interfax*, March 18, 2014.

⁵¹¹ "Russian troops hold drill in Moldova's Dniester region', *Interfax*, March 25, 2014.

On March 25, it was revealed that Zhirinovskiy had sent letters to the Polish government suggesting the division of Ukraine between Romania, Poland, and Hungary by hosting status referendums similar to the one in Crimea. Officials from the Polish Foreign Ministry confirmed Zhirinovskiy's inquiry. In an exclusive *RBK* interview, Zhirinovskiy initially did not dismiss having made such inquiry.⁵¹² Quite to the contrary, Zhirinovskiy declares Poland and Hungary should either accept his offer or

shut up there in Poland and better not aggravate the anti-Ukrainian moods by saying Ukrainians pulled the Poles out of Volyn, Lviv, etc. [And] Romania: they shouldn't dream of Great Romania.⁵¹³

Later the same day, Zhirinovskiy denies having approached the Polish, Romanian, and Hungarian governments. There "was no division proposal," Zhirinovskiy told *Komsomolskaya Pravda*.⁵¹⁴ So was the division proposal credible or not? And if so, was it representative of the considerations being entertained by the Russian custodians and foreign political decision-makers?

The now infamous television debate between Russian president candidates during the 2018 Russian Presidential Election, where Zhirinovskiy and Xenia Zabchak's heated discussion culminated in the latter throwing a glass of water in the face of the former, demonstrates how Zhirinovskiy is a notorious hothead and his statements should be taken with a pinch of salt. As the *RBK* interviewer notes, however, the tragicomical aspect of Zhirinovskiy's controversial statements is "what he says then turns into reality."⁵¹⁵ In short, while Zhirinovskiy's statements regarding further Russian expansion and the joint participation of Ukraine may not have been credible, they did not ease the already anxious atmosphere in capitals in the near abroad and the West.

Despite the overall euphoria following the annexation of Crimea, it also casts light on small cracks in the façade, suggesting that not everyone was delighted about the correction of a "historical injustice." On the day of the signing of the documents reunifying Russia and Crimea, *Ekho Moskvy* reports that a local journalist in the Vologda Region was fired and charged for extremism after suggesting that the Russian government should save Russians living in Russia before beginning to save those living beyond the formal Russian borders. Additionally, along with representatives of utility companies, law enforcement, and local "initiative groups," Moscow city officials have asked the

⁵¹² "Russian party leader confirms offering Poland, Romania to divide Ukraine," *RBK TV*, March 25, 2014.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*

general public to display Russian flags and state symbols.⁵¹⁶ At the more official level, however, the annexation revealed the dissent among the members of the Russian Human Rights Council. Within the council, discussion culminates after several instances where “personal positions [were confused] with the official opinion of the council” regarding the presence of Russian troops in Crimea and the potential exaggeration of Russian media reports about the events unfolding in Ukraine.⁵¹⁷

Besides pointing out the hypocrisy in only selectively aiding Russian compatriots abroad (e.g., in Tajikistan and Azerbaijan), member of the Scientific Council of the Carnegie Moscow Center Aleksey Malashenko argues that Crimea will eventually turn into a “mini-Afghanistan,” thereby only further alienating Russia in world politics. Even members of the Eurasian Union are turning their backs on Russia’s “Crimean ‘surprise,’” Malashenko notes.⁵¹⁸ Similarly, Aleksandr Golts argues that Russia has “managed to restore an “Iron Curtain” [...] reminiscent of the worst years of the Cold War,”⁵¹⁹ while Director of the Center for Postindustrial Studies Vladislav Inozemtsev notes that Russia has embarked on a “slippery path” toward messianic civilizationism without any legal basis in international law. Putin’s decision to annex Crimea demonstrated that Russia is not lagging “30 to 40 years behind Europe,” but “at least 365 years.” The foreign policy representing the Russian Self belongs to an era before the Peace of Westphalia (1648) established the principle of state sovereignty.⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁶ “Russian journalist suspected of extremism over Crimea-related post,” *Ekho Moskvyy*, March 18, 2014 & “Authorities urge Muscovites to display Russian flag over Crimea vote,” *Ekho Moskvyy*, March 18, 2014. Another Russian journalist Vladimir Semago was fired on March 19 from radio station *Stolitsa FM* after criticizing the hastiness and methods used to reunify Crimea and Russia (“Moscow radio presenter says he was fired over Crimea stance,” *Ekho Moskvyy*, March 23, 2014). For additional and earlier contemporary stories about increasing control of Russian media, see “The truth behind *Ekho Moskvyy*’s troubles,” *Moscow Times*, Yuliya Latynina, February 25, 2014 & “Newspaper editor complains about “financial pressure” from Russian authorities,” *Ekho Moskvyy*, February 26, 2014.

⁵¹⁷ “СПЧ урезали в правах [Clampdown on the rights of the Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Aleksey Gorbachev & Aleksandra Samarina, March 19, 2014.

⁵¹⁸ “Post-Crimea,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Aleksey Malashenko, March 18, 2014.

⁵¹⁹ “How the West Encouraged Putin’s Aggression,” *The Moscow Times*, Aleksandr Golts, March 18, 2014: <https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/how-the-west-encouraged-putins-aggression-33062> (accessed October 2, 2018).

⁵²⁰ “Moscow’s self-determination,” *Vedomosti*, Vladislav Inozemtsev, March 27, 2014.

Introducing Western sanctions on Russia

The first round of U.S. sanctions against Russia was announced on March 17, 2014, which were followed by sanctions from the EU and NATO member states. Initially, the sanctions target high-profile Russian politicians and businessmen associated with the Kremlin. Their assets and accounts in Western banks were frozen and access to the sanctioning states denied. Additional members of the Russian political and economic elite were later blacklisted.⁵²¹

Several of the sanctioned individuals on the Western “blacklist” were taking pride in expressing their commitment and willingness to carry the personal costs associated with correcting the “historical injustice” of the reunification of Crimea and Russia. The blacklist became an order (on par with other Russian decorations, like the For Merit to the Fatherland) that recipients would wear proudly. Head of the Russian Railways Vladimir Yakunin writes on his personal blog how honored he was to find his name on the list of sanctioned individuals:

I treat it as the confirmation of my modest contribution to ensuring the interests of our country and our society, to supporting President Putin's position, which is similar to that of the majority of our people.⁵²²

More sarcastically, Presidential aide Vladislav Surkov compared his name on the list of sanctioned individuals with a nomination for a “political Oscar.” Surkov thanked for the “nomination,” which he interprets as an “indirect acknowledgement of the correctness of [his] actions.”⁵²³

On March 18, deputies from the Russian State Duma produced “On sanctions of the USA and the EU,” suggesting that they ban themselves from entering the sanctioning Western countries as an expression of solidarity with their sanctioned colleagues.⁵²⁴ On March 21, the Federation Council adopted a similar statement condemning the Western sanctions as testimony to the cynical logic guiding Western views on international law.

The general Russian reaction to the blacklisting was to ridicule the sanctions. If anything, the sanctions demonstrate Western “weakness” and a lack

⁵²¹ “Meeting with permanent members of the Security Council in the Kremlin, Moscow, on 21 March 2014,” *The Kremlin*, April 30, 2014: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20623> (accessed October 3, 2018).

⁵²² “Russian political elite split over interpretation of US sanctions,” *Interfax*, March 21, 2014.

⁵²³ “Историческая подпись [Historical signature],” *Izvestiya*, Egor Sozaev Guryev, March 18, 2014.

⁵²⁴ “Russian deputies to urge USA, EU to impose sanctions against them,” *RIA Novosti*, March 18, 2014.

of common ground towards Russia. In an opinion piece published in the *Moscow Times*, former Russian Foreign Minister Igor S. Ivanov urges Russia's Western partners to establish a "contact group" to settle the crisis in Ukraine—like they had previously stopped the war in Bosnia through joint efforts—instead of sanctioning Russians. Imposing sanctions only reaffirms the "trivial observation" among Western Others incapable of settling international problems with peaceful means.⁵²⁵ In continuation of the former Foreign Minister, contemporary Russian Foreign Minister Sergey V. Lavrov repeats that Russia has a special responsibility to help its "Western partners [...] step away from an irrational position" and aid them in moving onto the path toward a respectful way out of the crisis; a crisis started by the "unilateral and prejudiced position," that the Western Other has assumed since the very beginning of the unrest at Maidan Square.⁵²⁶

The narrative about the lack of Western consensus on Russian sanctions—not least the argument that imposing more effective sanctions against Russia would incur significant costs on individual Western economies that they are not willing to tolerate for long—dominates the inner Russian dialogue. A testimony supporting this narrative is provided by the president of the American University in Moscow, Eduard Lozansky, who points out that Russia and Iran are not comparable. While the Western sanctions potentially could damage the Russian economy significantly, sanctions are not one-sided in a global economy in which Russia ranks among the top-10.⁵²⁷ Another example comes from one of the sanctioned individuals. Rosneft CEO Igor Sechin reassures that Russian firms could easily eschew Western sanctions thanks to the global economy.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁵ "Western sanctions are a sign of weakness," *The Moscow Times*, Igor Ivanov, March 27, 2014.

⁵²⁶ "Speech by the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, and his answers to questions from deputies during the 349th extraordinary session of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, Moscow, 21 March 2014," *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, March 21 2014: http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/69394 (accessed November 23, 2018).

⁵²⁷ "Take note: Russia is back as a global power," *The Moscow Times*, Eduard Lozansky, March 25, 2014.

⁵²⁸ "Russia's largest oil company chief not afraid of sanctions," *RIA Novosti*, March 18, 2014.

Within the sphere of military industry, similar narratives followed in the wake of the suspension of Russo–NATO,⁵²⁹ Russo–British,⁵³⁰ Russo–German,⁵³¹ and Russo–Franco military collaboration. Most prominent was the termination of the 1.2 billion Euro defense contract between Russia and France. In 2011, French DCNS and STX France were contracted to build two Mistral-class helicopter carriers for the Russian Navy. One of the two carriers, *Vladivostok* was close to delivery, whereas the second, ironically named *Sevastopol*, was at an earlier stage of construction.⁵³² The contract was terminated in early August 2015 after the French government settled to reimburse Moscow’s costs.⁵³³

Unlike the polyphony characterizing the debates about likely adverse impacts of Western sanctions on the Russian economy prior to the annexation of Crimea, the inner dialogue about the consequences of sanctions became increasingly monotone in the first week after the annexation. Besides the voices ridiculing or expressing pride in being targeted by Western sanctions, narratives similar to those parts of Russian elites arguing that the economic consequences of the Russo–Western encounter would make Russia increasingly independent proliferated.

For instance, Russian Business Rights Ombudsman Boris Titov and Head of the Civil Society Development Foundation Konstantin Kostin argue that sanctions will be ineffective and merely stimulate the development of the Russian domestic economy.⁵³⁴ More fundamentally, co-Chairmen of The Moscow Economic Forum Konstantin Babkin and Ruslan Grinberg argue that Western sanctions manifest the key cue to finally rollback the neoliberal paradigm, which had guided Russia’s economic policy since the end of the Cold War and revived an independent domestic political economy aligned with the interests

⁵²⁹ “NATO Loses Faith. Russia–NATO Council Will Cease to Exist,” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, Yevgeniy Shestakov, March 19, 2014; “NATO takes aim at old target,” *Kommersant*, Elena Chernenko, March 25, 2014.

⁵³⁰ “Russia regrets UK suspending military cooperation,” *Interfax*, March 19, 2014.

⁵³¹ “Eastern Delights: The West’s Economic Sanctions Will Force Russia To Turn to Asia,” *Trud*, Aleksandr Protsenko, March 21, 2014.

⁵³² “Annulment of the Contract for the Delivery of Mistrals Would Rid Our Sailors of a Headache,” *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, Olga Bozhyeva, March 19, 2014 & “Eastern Delights. The West’s Economic Sanctions Will Force Russia To Turn to Asia,” *Trud*, Aleksandr Protsenko, March 21, 2014.

⁵³³ “France looking for warship buyers after cancelling Mistral deal with Russia,” *The Guardian*, August 6, 2015: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/06/france-russia-mistral-warships-deal-cancelled> (accessed May 17, 2018).

⁵³⁴ “Russian TV talk show discusses expanding “self-determination” to east Ukraine,” *Channel One*, March 16, 2014.

of a truly economically independent Russia. The dominance of neoliberalism manifests the “main impediment to [Russia’s] development,” Babkin and Grinberg argue.⁵³⁵ Though the flow of foreign direct investments to Russia will be harmed by sanctions, Director-General of the Strategic Initiatives Agency Andrey Nikitin predicts that

strategically, we [Russians] will only benefit from having a stance, from not letting some individuals from across the ocean dictate to us what to do.⁵³⁶

The Russian Central Bank presented a concrete example of Russia’s new domestic political economy, revealing the revival of the “Universal Electronic Card Project,” after VISA and MasterCard announced that they were suspending their services in banks controlled by Yuri Kovalchuk who figures on the blacklist.⁵³⁷

More optimistically, Deputy Head of the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade Aleksey Likhachev describes how the Russian economy is already undergoing rapid transformation, and the 2013 figures for Russian exports show that while the export of raw-material goods is declining, the export of manufactured goods is growing by more than 4 percent, high-technology products more than 14 percent, and innovation products by more than 4.2 percent. In short, Likhachev argues that Russia is far from the raw material-dependent economy that foreign observers assume it to be.⁵³⁸ Western sanctions merely provide stronger incentives to develop Russia even further in the direction it was already going before sanctions were introduced.

President Putin’s annexation speech

On March 18, Putin addresses deputies from the Russian State Duma, Federation Council, regions, and civil society in the Hall of the Order of St. George at the Kremlin Palace.⁵³⁹ To understand the reason behind the Crimean and Russian decisions to reunify—and recent events preceding the annexation—Putin stresses the necessity of knowing “the history of Crimea and what Russia

⁵³⁵ “Eastern Delights: The West’s Economic Sanctions Will Force Russia To Turn to Asia,” *Trud*, Aleksandr Protsenko, March 21, 2014.

⁵³⁶ “Official says annexation of Crimea will benefit Russian economy, in the long run,” *RIA Novosti*, March 19, 2014.

⁵³⁷ “Карт-реванш [Card-revanche],” *Kommersant*, Ksenia Dementieva & Olga Shestopal, March 22, 2014.

⁵³⁸ “Eastern Delights: The West’s Economic Sanctions Will Force Russia To Turn to Asia,” *Trud*, Aleksandr Protsenko, March 21, 2014.

⁵³⁹ “Address by President of the Russian Federation,” *The Kremlin*, March 18, 2014: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603> (accessed October 3, 2018).

and Crimea have always meant to each other;” and more generally, what Crimea has always meant to “the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus,” who it unites. The consequence of Russia not reunifying with Crimea would have meant Ukrainians, Belarussians, and Russians losing Crimea altogether. In the larger historical perspective, the Russian annexation saves “Ancient Rus”—and, hence, the “common source” tying the Rus people together.

According to Putin, the imagined Russian community simply found itself in a position “from which it could not retreat.” On behalf of the entire Rus nation, Official Russia decided to intervene in the best interest of the Rus nation; hence, not on behalf of the Russian nation or state alone. At the same time, the Russian Federation was left with no other option than to help Crimeans who begged Russia to save them. Not helping the Crimeans, particularly after the Language Law was proposed by the “heirs of Bandera, Hitler’s accomplice during World War II,” would have been an unbearable betrayal.

Putin’s speech offers interesting testimony to the lack of demarcation between the Ukrainian, Russian, and Belarusian nation and states that Taras Kuzio notes in his studies of Russian perceptions of the fraternal peoples constituting the Rus nation, including the internal hierarchy between the three peoples (e.g., Kuzio, 2017, Chapter 3). Rhetorically, Putin walks a fine line between what is done by and for the Russian Federation and Rus nation in his speech; moreover, walking a fine line between extending an olive branch to Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars, and “Western colleagues” and at the same time reminding them that there is a limit to everything.

Addressing the Western Other, who sponsored the instigation of the illegitimate coup in Kiev, the accusations pertaining to a Russian breach of international law were not only a manifestation of the “double standards,” but the “primitive, blunt cynicism” characterizing the Western Other. First, “Russia never entered Crimea; they were there already.” Second, the reunification of Russia and Crimea is in full accordance with international law and within the “well-known Kosovo precedent,” Putin proclaims.

With the NATO air campaign in Yugoslavia fresh in memory thanks to unilateral, US-led interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, the installation of a missile defense system, NATO expansion, and multiple colored revolutions in Russia’s near abroad, Putin reveals that the real underlying intention of the Western actions against Russia before and after annexation are a continuation of its “infamous policy of containment [...] constantly trying to sweep us into a corner because we have an independent position.” Essentially, the Western Other wants—and historically wanted—a divided and dependent Russia.

This time, however, the Western Other “crossed the line, playing the bear” to such a degree that Russia was forced to “snap back hard” in this Russo–

Western encounter over Ukraine. Snapping back at the Western Other was only possible because the Russian people demonstrates its

maturity and strength through their united support for their compatriots. Russia's foreign policy position on this matter drew its firmness from the will of millions of our people, our national unity and the support of our country's main political and public forces. [Now,] we need to continue and maintain this kind of consolidation so as to resolve the tasks our country faces on its road ahead.⁵⁴⁰

Without a united Russian Self, Russia could not have saved Crimea. To maintain this firm and independent foreign policy of Official Russia representing the imagined Russian community, the Russian Self must be consolidated further. If the imagined Russian community is not ready to consolidate and persistently encounter those who try to undermine an authentic and independent Russia, there is only one option left: giving up and to "retreat to who knows where?" in Putin's words.

Future consolidation along the existing vision for the Russian Self, that is. Putin thus notices that besides opposition against Russian independence beyond Russia, the Russian actions in Ukraine disclose the presence of a "fifth column" of "national traitors" within Russia; a fifth column desperately trying to undermine the consolidation of post-Soviet Russia, which is the foundation for Russian foreign policy, by forging dissent on the domestic front by pointing to an alleged worsening of the "social and economic situation" within Russia.

The overall reception of President Putin's speech is overwhelmingly positive. To several Russian journalists, pundits, and politicians, Putin's performance was his most authentic. Putin expressed frustration over the double standards of the West, which had thrived among a broad majority of the Russian population and elite since the 1999 NATO bombings of Serbia.

Coincidentally, March 24 marked the 15-year anniversary of the start of NATO's Operation Allied Freedom (1999). Russian TV marked the anniversary by airing documentaries about the NATO campaign against Serbia.⁵⁴¹ Standing up to the Western Other seemed equally relieving as reaffirming of the long way Russia had moved along its quest for ontological security since 1999.⁵⁴²

⁵⁴⁰ "Address by President of the Russian Federation," *The Kremlin*, March 18, 2014: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603> (accessed October 3, 2018).

⁵⁴¹ "Russian state TV marks 15th anniversary of NATO bombings of Yugoslavia," *Ros-siya 1*, March 24, 2014.

⁵⁴² For an example of Russian relief and the tie between Kosovo and Ukraine, see "Все дороги вели в Крым [All roads led to the Crimea]," *Kommersant*, Andrey Kolesnikov, March 19, 2014.

The roles seemed to have changed; now it was the Western Other who seemed in the dark about what to do with a truly independent authentic Russian Self. According to a reaction in *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, the annexation speech was the best one Putin had ever delivered. Best, “because it is sincere,” as journalist Mikhail Rostovskiy argues. With the speech, Putin finally

freed himself—both inwardly and outwardly [...]. A Putin who spoke from his heart and finally said everything that had been seething in his heart for the past 15 years. [Putin] crossed the “point of no return” in his relation to the West. [Now] the “age of ceremonies” is finally closed. Now the only guarantee of our territorial integrity is ourselves.⁵⁴³

In short, the Russian Self had finally achieved a level of ontological security where it was able to independently maintain its integrity in a territorial and existential sense. Only by standing up and risking the loss of both territorial and existential integrity in the encounter with the Western Other could a breakthrough for an authentic vision for the Russian Self take place.

However, three observations stand out from the overall positive assessments and praise of Putin in the Russian source material. First are the multitude of references to the Cold War and the Great Patriotic War. For instance, an article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* compares Putin’s speech to Winston Churchill’s Fulton Speech (1946), where Churchill used the term “Iron Curtain” to describe the emerging political contours of Europe, which eventually developed into the Cold War. The reference to the Fulton Speech was also accompanied by an appeal for each Russian citizen to mobilize “as if it were 1941,” an explicit reference to the Nazi-German invasion of the Soviet Union.⁵⁴⁴

A second observation is the introduction of the notion of a fifth column of national traitors trying to weaken Russia’s domestic front. On the basis of statements from those parts of the Russian elites frequently using terms like “traitors” and referring to a “fifth column,” allegedly subversive individual and collective actors mainly consist of unidentified groups of liberal-oriented intellectuals. Andrey Zubov, who I mentioned in the previous section about the reconstruction between intervention and annexation is a concrete example.⁵⁴⁵ Three other concrete examples of “subversive activities” are often highlighted.

⁵⁴³ “The Russian Spring Has Uncoiled,” *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, Mikhail Rostovskiy, March 19, 2014.

⁵⁴⁴ “Putin’s Fulton Speech,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Aleksandra Samarina & Ivan Rodnin, March 19, 2014.

⁵⁴⁵ “Российская интеллигенция вступилась за Украину [The Russian intelligentsia stood up for Ukraine],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Aleksey Gorbachev, March 20, 2014.

First, Aleksey Navalny—who at the time was under house arrest that was extended until March 24, 2014⁵⁴⁶—was identified as a leading figure in the Russian fifth column. The day after Putin’s speech, *NTV* reports Navalny had been collaborating with the CIA.⁵⁴⁷ Similar to Navalny, Ilya Ponomaryov, who was the only State Duma Deputy to vote against reunification, was singled out as a traitor and—figuratively—taking a beating from fellow State Duma deputies.

Trying to avoid being tarred with the same brush as the individuals above who were labeled national traitors and fifth column members, the non-nationalist Russian opposition was silent. Besides statements from prominent Russian opposition figures such as Aleksey Navalny, Boris Nemtsov, and Grigory Yavlinsky, the remaining part of the political opposition remains quiet.⁵⁴⁸ Aleksandra Samarina and Aleksey Gorbachev speculate that the fear of losing votes in the coming Moscow City Duma Election—to be held in September 2014—may explain the absence of critical voices in the inner dialogue about intervention and annexation.⁵⁴⁹ Given the delicacy and sentimentality surrounding Crimea, Russian voters could interpret critique of Russian foreign policy as anti-patriotic.

Second, the independent Russian television station *Dozhd* was identified as an epicenter of information that is injurious to the Russian Self. As mentioned earlier, *Dozhd* had been sanctioned by public Russian authorities and private firms. In the wake of Putin’s speech, Red October—the rental company from which *Dozhd* rented its premises—announced that it would not renew

⁵⁴⁶ “Moscow court upholds opposition leader’s house arrest,” *Interfax*, March 24, 2014.

⁵⁴⁷ “Russian TV accuses Navalny of links with CIA—text,” *NTV*, March 19, 2014; ‘Russian TV presenter defends controversial outbursts’, *Rossiya 1*, March 21, 2014.

⁵⁴⁸ For instance, the day before the referendum on Crimea, Grigory A. Yavlinsky writes “Мир и Война. Как достичь первого и не допустить второго [Peace and War. How to reach the first without getting the second], *Novaya Gazeta*, March 16, 2014. On behalf of Yabloko, Yavlinsky strongly condemns “the question of the use of Russian troops on the territory of Ukraine” and denotes “annexation as a mistake” that transforms Russia into an internationally isolated state with disputed state borders and severe economic problems. Yavlinsky argues that a war against Ukraine would basically be a “civil war;” a civil war declared without evidence of any “threats to the life of citizens of Russia.” Thus, Russia should neither intervene in nor annex Ukraine (“War With Ukraine Is Inadmissible and Criminal,” *Novaya Gazeta*, Grigory Yavlinsky, March 14, 2014).

⁵⁴⁹ “Crimea swallows up Russian opposition,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Aleksandra Samarina & Aleksey Gorbachev, March 13, 2014.

their lease.⁵⁵⁰ On March 24, *Dozhd* launches “Days of Independence,” a six-day TV-marathon to raise the funds necessary to continue operations.⁵⁵¹

As a critical editorial from *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* notes on March 18, *Dozhd* is merely one of several Russian media outlets to suffer from the return to the “logic of the ‘old regime’,” where the Soviet state apparatus claimed legitimacy as the sole political actor as well as the source and interpreter of all information.⁵⁵² Spreading rumors about the presence of omnipotent domestic traitors and fifth columns was nothing new in Russian history. On March 13, *Ekho Moskvy* reports sharply increased pressure on the independent Russian media outlets.⁵⁵³ For instance, The Federal Service for Supervision in Telecommunications, Information Technology and Mass Communications (Roskomnadzor) censures access to several Russian internet resources. The blacklist of censored Russian media includes *kasparov.ru*, Aleksey Navalnyy’s blog, and the *Yezhednevnyy Zhurnal* website.

Besides censoring media, Deputy Director of the Russian Institute of Strategic research Mikhail Smolin suggests extending the controversial “Law on Foreign Agents” to include research centers. Smolin comments on the number of research centers that are de-facto broadcasting a “Western viewpoint.”⁵⁵⁴ Additionally, A Just Russia State Duma Deputy suggests passing a law criminalizing “propaganda of Russophobia,” effectively allowing the sanction of certain senses of Russian Self containing “a negative attitude towards Russia or Russians, or the Russian language, culture, statehood.” The law should also include utterances made in the conduct of doing “science, literature and art.”⁵⁵⁵

Besides censoring the voices of so-called traitors and fifth column members, contemporary Russian TV-outlets broadcasted documentaries and other programming about treason against the nation. On February 28, *Rossiya 1* features a documentary entitled “Biochemistry of betrayal.” According to its

⁵⁵⁰ “Russian embattled TV broadcaster at risk of losing office,” *Ekho Moskvy*, March 20, 2014.

⁵⁵¹ “Embattled Russian channel launches fund-raising campaign to stay afloat,” *Interfax*, March 24, 2014.

⁵⁵² “Путин ставит себя в зависимость от политических радикалов [Putin puts himself in dependence of political radicals],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Editorial, March 18, 2014.

⁵⁵³ “Russian journalists complain about clampdown on liberal websites,” *Ekho Moskvy*, March 13, 2014.

⁵⁵⁴ “Russian expert speaks for expanding list of NGOs as ‘foreign agents’,” *REN TV*, March 7, 2014.

⁵⁵⁵ “Russian MP suggests 15-day arrest for ‘propaganda of Russophobia’,” *Interfax*, March 14, 2014.

creators, the documentary aims to study “the nature of betrayal and identified links that unite traitors of different eras.”⁵⁵⁶

Putin’s references to national treason and fifth columns rubberstamps the use of such exclusionary rhetoric. In the contemporary context of “patriotic euphoria,” Putin’s speech makes it acceptable to

steamroll anti-corruption activists, as well as those who oppose high-rise developments, stubborn municipal deputies, principled judges and independent journalists [...] this would be followed by persecuting those of the “wrong” ethnicity and orientation.⁵⁵⁷

Drawing on German philologist Viktor Klemperer’s concept of totalitarian speech, Mikhail Yampolsky argues that Putin’s use of “national traitors” and “fifth columns” to denote an unidentified—yet omnipotent—internal resistance to what an alleged majority of Russian elites and population envision as a truly independent and authentic Russian Self is key evidence of the steady growth of a totalitarian discourse in Russia.⁵⁵⁸ In a similar vein, *The New Yorker’s* correspondent in Moscow, Joshua Yaffa, interprets military intervention, annexation, and annexation speech as rites of passage marking the transition from one political culture to Putinism.⁵⁵⁹

Third—and in continuation of the increasing Russian censorship and shift in political culture—an editorial in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* asks if President Putin is on his way to becoming a hostage to “revenge-seekers who dream of reviving the USSR at any cost.”⁵⁶⁰ In short, is Putin gradually growing entangled in the webs of political radicals? On one hand, Putin’s inclusion of nationalist and civilizational rhetoric in his speech sends clear signals to the inward-looking and outward-looking Russian nationalist political opposition that the ruling United Russia party agrees about the course of action regarding Ukraine. *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* journalist Natalya Rozhkova notes that

⁵⁵⁶ “Biochemistry of betrayal (2014).” *Radio SyrLIVE*: <http://en.cyplive.com/no-comments/8203.html> (accessed May 18, 2018).

⁵⁵⁷ “Putin’s Fulton Speech,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Aleksandra Samarina & Ivan Rodnin, March 19, 2014.

⁵⁵⁸ “New this season: ‘National traitors’,” *The New Times*, Mikhail Yampolsky, March 24, 2014.

⁵⁵⁹ “Putin’s New War on ‘Traitors’,” *The New Yorker*, Joshua Yaffa, March 28, 2014: <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/putins-new-war-on-traitors> (accessed October 3, 2018).

⁵⁶⁰ “Путин ставит себя в зависимость от политических радикалов [Putin puts himself in dependence of political radicals],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Editorial, March 18, 2014.

the inward-looking and outward-looking nationalist Russian opposition parties in many respects outdo the ruling United Russia regarding Ukraine. Whereas United Russia devotes a couple of news reports about the events in Ukraine, the official website of the Communist Party features numerous photo reports from Ukraine and slogans like “Defend Sevastopol! Fascism Shall Not Pass;” Just Russia’s website features a “Let’s Support Sevastopol” banner and a collection for Crimeans; and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia website is completely devoted to the ongoing events in Ukraine.

Conversely, Putin’s rhetorical intensification breathes life into the above-mentioned split among inward-looking and outward-looking Russian nationalists.⁵⁶¹ The ambiguous and unclear demarcation between the motives for intervention and annexation rooted in visions for the revival of a Russian Self aligned with the Rus and Russian nation in Putin’s speech. As such, Putin places himself in-between, on the one hand, the inward-looking nationalists who believe that Russian politicians should primarily defend the rights and well-being of their own citizens before defending the rights of compatriots abroad and on the other hand those outward-looking nationalists who interpret the intervention and annexation as the starting signal for a more fundamental Eurasian revolution, placing Russia at the center of a multiethnic Rus nation.⁵⁶² I address the question of who is holding whom hostage more elaborately in the Epilogue.

Suspension of G8 membership

Whereas the outcome of Russia’s intervention in Kosovo—from a Russian point of view in 1999—was a more equal position for Russia among the other seven great powers in world politics, the outcome of Russia’s intervention in Ukraine was a suspension of Russia’s membership in G8. In short, a central outcome of the Russian intervention in Ukraine was Russia losing what it had won from its intervention in Kosovo.

Surprisingly, there are few contemporary Russian reactions, and they suggest that losing the G8 seat is a reasonable price to pay for intervening in

⁵⁶¹ For a similar distinction between Russian nationalists and the analytical issues tied to the use of umbrella concepts like “nationalism,” see “Introduction” (Kolstø & Blakkisrud, 2017a). For detailed studies on the composition of inward-looking and outward-looking nationalist movements in Russia, I recommend reading Marlene Laruelle’s comprehensive work on Russian nationalism (e.g., 2014, 2015b). Particularly, Laruelle’s work on the developments within the group of Russian nationalists (those I denote as outward-looking nationalists) is praiseworthy (e.g., 2016a, 2016b).

⁵⁶² “Crimea Plows Through Opposition,” *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, Natalya Rozhkova, March 20, 2014.

Ukraine. Like the relation between the Russian Self, international law, and the economy, some Russian voices narrate the dissociation, intervention, and annexation resulting from the core principles in a world order primarily defined and sanctioned by the Western Other as much-needed encouragement to develop alternatives increasingly aligned with newly discovered more independent and authentic sense of Russian Self. The fundamental principles that international law, the world economy, and great power diplomacy are based on are “Western” and therefore alien to a distinctively “Russian” set of core values. Western condemnation of Russian actions in Ukraine are not ominous, but reaffirm that the quest for an ontologically secure Russian Self—a more authentic and independent Russia compared to the vision of the Self emerging out of the collapsed Soviet Union—is on track and proceeding well; hence, away from the Western Other. Indeed, the Western sanctions acknowledge Russia’s return to world politics as a significant great power. Russia is on its way

back into the mainstream of the global politics. [...] not only by verbal declarations but also in real actions. All major global powers have to acknowledge this and they did. [...] EU’s and the USA’s sanctions are nothing else but such an acknowledgement (Belyaev & Starikov, 2015, p. 4).

A general commonplace across the Russian media outlets is that the now reinstated G7 constitutes a group of great powers who share in common that they are gradually losing their political and economic relevance to the BRICS and G20-states.⁵⁶³ If anything, Russia’s suspension from the G8 merely “deprived the organization of the remnants of its relevance,” State Duma Deputy Vyacheslav Nikonov concludes in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*.⁵⁶⁴

Already on March 3, the Russian government was notified about the suspension of the upcoming Sochi G8 summit. The Russian government’s dismissal of the Western threats to boycott the Russian-hosted summit indicates that the Russian government was not indifferent about losing its seat at the G8 table.⁵⁶⁵ Consequently, G8 membership was still valued higher than non-membership. However, in the broader picture combining ideational desire for the reaffirmation of great power status and ontological concerns about the au-

⁵⁶³ “Russia no longer member of privileged club,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Editorial, March 27, 2014.

⁵⁶⁴ “Short telegram: ‘Don’t overstrain yourselves,’” *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, Vyacheslav Nikonov, March 26, 2014.

⁵⁶⁵ “Russian senator dismisses G8 boycott threat, likens Kiev to Boko Haram,” *Interfax*, March 3, 2014.

thenticity of the Russian Self, unilaterally intervening and annexing a neighboring territory manifests even greater externalization of an independent Russian Self. By intervening in and annexing Crimea, Russia lost its cherished G8 membership but simultaneously gained membership to an even more exclusive club of states that uses military force against other sovereign states; a privilege reserved for truly independent and authentic great powers.

In 1999, the exclusivity of the US–Russia summit in Helsinki and US President Bill Clinton personally reassuring the equal status of Russia in the G8 were unprecedented. For the 21st century post-Soviet Russian Self, however, participating in bilateral and multilateral summits is no longer the most exclusive hallmark of an authentic great power. The hallmark of a truly authentically independent great power is the will and capacity to unilaterally intervene in sovereign states. In short, G8 membership was testimony to the privileged position 2014-Russia held in world politics, but intervening in and annexing a neighboring state are actions signifying Russian membership of an even more exclusive club that only few states are able to and—more importantly—dare to be a member of.⁵⁶⁶ In March 2014, a majority of the official Russian decision-makers, broader group of custodians, and population seemingly found a commonplace around maintaining the membership of this exclusive club despite the ideational and material costs in the form of international status and economic well-being.

In a recent *Levada Center* survey from April 2018, 70 percent of Russians asked think reunification with Crimea has mostly helped Russia, and 74 percent think that reunification with Crimea did not violate international law.⁵⁶⁷ Despite the ideational and material costs following intervention and annexation, a clear majority of not only Russian custodianship, but also imagined Russian community is willing to maintain this exclusive membership of states unilaterally intervening and using military force in world politics.

Translating the “Russian Self” after Ukraine

Having addressed the first and second key research questions about, respectively, whose and how ontological security concerns rendered military intervention meaningful and how the reconstruction of the Russian Self proceeded before, during, and after intervention in Ukraine above, I now address the

⁵⁶⁶ “Военные операции за рубежом как державная привилегия [Military operations abroad as a state privilege],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Editorial, March 3, 2014.

⁵⁶⁷ “Press release: Crimea,” *Levada Center*, April 17, 2018:

<https://www.levada.ru/en/2018/04/17/crimea-2/> (accessed October 4, 2018).

third key research question about how different Russian visions for the authentic Russian Self translated into Official Russian foreign policy after the annexation of Crimea.

As was the case with the Russian military intervention in Kosovo, the intervention in Ukraine did not merely initiate a reconstruction process of the Russian Self but also a process of translating different senses of belonging into an official foreign policy of belonging. Similar to Kosovo, such translation of the Russian Self into Official Russian foreign policy was not solely expressed in words but also deeds. In terms of diplomatic and military collaboration, military drill and patrol activities, as well as the release and demonstration of newly developed weaponry, Official Russia exhibits a foreign political conduct similar to the performance of Official Russia after intervention in Kosovo 15 years earlier. For instance, on March 5, 2014, the Russian Strategic Rocket Forces test-fires a RT-2PM Topol intercontinental ballistic missile with the ability to carry a warhead up to an operational range of 11,000 KM.⁵⁶⁸ Later the same year, the newly developed, next-generation T-14 Armata tank was displayed during the annual May 9 parade at the Red Square celebrating the victory over Nazi-Germany in the Great Patriotic War. Besides Russian artillery supporting and actual troops fighting on the ground with separatists in Donbass from April 2014, Russia initiated numerous large-scale war games and increased its military activities in the Baltic Sea region throughout 2014. An example of increased military activity occurs in mid-June 2014, when the Danish Defence Intelligence Service alleged that Russian fighter aircraft simulated a missile attack on Bornholm, a Danish island in the Baltic Sea, which was hosting Folkemødet [The People's Political Festival] at the time.⁵⁶⁹ That which made the incident particularly controversial is that the People's Political Festival is an annual festival where Danish local, regional, and national politicians convene together with business people, lobbyists, and ordinary citizens to debate current political issues.

The day before the Russian military intervened in Ukraine, 150,000 Russian troops in the Western Military District were put on full alert.⁵⁷⁰ In March

⁵⁶⁸ "Russia plans another two ICBM test launches in March—Kazakh Defence Ministry," *Interfax*, March 5, 2014.

⁵⁶⁹ "Rusland simulerede missilangreb på Danmark [Russia simulated a missile attack against Denmark]," *Jyllands-Posten*, Kaare Sørensen, October 30, 2014: <https://jyllands-posten.dk/indland/ECE7155888/rusland-simulerede-missilangreb-paa-danmark/> (accessed October 16, 2018).

⁵⁷⁰ "Putin puts troops in western Russia on alert in drill," *Reuters*, Steve Gutterman, February 26 2014: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-russia-military/putin-puts-troops-in-western-russia-on-alert-in-drill-idUSBREA1PoRW20140226> (accessed October 10, 2018).

and August 2014—before and after the Crimean Status Referendum, respectively—Russia launched major war games near the Ukrainian border.⁵⁷¹ In September 2014, Russia initiated “Vostok 2014,” which, according to the Russian authorities, was the biggest of all war games held since the end of the Cold War.⁵⁷² The extensive military drill involved around 100,000 troops, 1,500 tanks, 120 aircraft, 70 ships, and more than 5,000 pieces of weaponry and special hardware. Military observers from 30 countries participated.

Since 2013, the Zapad and Vostok military drills have become quite an attraction and display window for the Russian Armed Forces. Recently, the scale of Vostok 2018 drew global media attention to Russia. According to Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu, Vostok 2018 surpassed Vostok 2014 and was the largest military drill since the Soviet Union held Zapad-81, one of the most extensive Soviet war games. According to official Russian reports, Vostok 2018 was double the size of the previously held Vostok 2014, involving 300,000 troops, 36,000 military vehicles, 80 ships, and 1,000 aircraft. In addition to almost 100 foreign observers, armed forces from China and Mongolia also participated.⁵⁷³

In sum, similar to Kosovo, a significant increase in Official Russian military activity followed in the wake of the intervention in Ukraine. The remainder of the chapter delves into the translation of the Russian Self into Official Russian foreign policy based on revisions made to central Russian foreign policy documents as well as the actual implementation of these key doctrines and concepts in terms of changes to military acquisitions and defense budgets.

⁵⁷¹ “Ukraine crisis: Russia begins new military exercises,” *BBC*, March 13, 2014 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26564846> (accessed October 8, 2018); “Russia holds huge military exercises near Ukraine border,” *The Guardian*, Alec Luhn, August 4, 2014: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/04/russia-military-exercises-ukraine-border> (accessed October 8, 2018).

⁵⁷² “Russia tests 100,000 troops in ‘Vostok 2014’, biggest-ever post-Soviet drills,” *Russia Today*, September 23, 2014: <https://www.rt.com/news/189900-kamchatka-military-drills-shoigu/> (accessed October 8, 2018).

⁵⁷³ “Шойгу: в сентябре в РФ пройдут самые масштабные маневры с 1981 года [Shoigu: In September, the most massive large-scale maneuvers will be held in the Russian Federation since 1981,” *ITAR-TASS*, August 28, 2018: <https://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/5497114> (accessed October 8, 2018); “Russia war games: Biggest since Cold War ‘justified’,” *BBC*, August 28, 2018: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45330161> (accessed October 8, 2018); “Russia just put its military on high alert ahead of massive war games that’ll be ‘unprecedented in scale’,” *Business Insider Nordic*, Daniel Brown, August 20, 2018: <https://nordic.businessinsider.com/russian-military-on-high-alert-prepares-biggest-war-games-in-40-years-2018-8?r=US&IR=T> (accessed October 8, 2018).

Russian foreign policy after Ukraine

Following the application of a relationist understanding in this dissertation, foreign policy formulations and actions are like any other sort of human action: one of several possible outcomes of complex meaning-making processes by and for people situated in a specific spatiotemporal context. Consequently, I do not investigate if and to what extent there is a 1:1 relationship between Russian “senses of national belonging” and official “foreign policy of belonging.” I am not trying to erase or ignore ambiguities to produce monocausal knowledge-claims about the translation of national identity into foreign policy, but rather to enhance our understanding of the potential sources of these ambiguities.

In the following, I contrast revised Russian foreign policy, military, and national security concepts with the previously adopted ones. In December 2014, President Putin approved an updated version of Russian military doctrine. In December 2015, a new national security strategy was approved. And on November 30, 2016, the revised foreign policy concept was adopted. Unlike Kosovo—where revised versions of the military, national security, and foreign policy documents were all approved throughout 2000—the foreign policy concept and national security strategy were belated in the case of Ukraine. The delay could offer evidence of a lack of responsiveness among the Russian strategic community or reflect the fact that the most belated foreign policy concept had previously been revised as early as February 2013. I return to the central similarities and particularities between the two foreign policy concepts below.

Military doctrine

The overall threat assessments in both MD-2010 and MD-2014 follow in the same vein as MD-2000. The build-up of foreign troops in close proximity to Russian borders, general disregard for international law, unequal representation and influence in central international organizations, and subversive attempts to destabilize neighboring states in the near abroad and to provoke domestic dissent are key threats. Unlike MD-2000, MD-2010 is explicitly singling out NATO as one of the “main external military dangers”,⁵⁷⁴ which is retained in MD-2014.⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷⁴ “The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation,” *Carnegie Endowment*, February 5, 2010: https://carnegieendowment.org/files/2010russia_militaryDoctrine.pdf (accessed November 23, 2018), p. 3.

⁵⁷⁵ “The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation,” *Embassy of the Russian Federation to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*, December 25, 2014: <https://rusemb.org.uk/press/2029> (accessed November 23, 2018), p. 2.

In MD-2010, shows of military force with provocative objectives in the course of exercises in states contiguous with Russia and its allies is introduced as a potential threat to Russian security.⁵⁷⁶ The potential and role of third-party provocations are expanded in MD-2014, where the “extensive use of the protest potential of the population, and special operation forces” along “military actions of irregular armed groups and private companies [in addition to externally-funded and controlled] social movements.”⁵⁷⁷ In short, MD-2010 and more explicitly MD-2014 ascribe significantly more importance to the role played by asymmetrical and non-conventional threats in the assessment of Russian national security. The trend toward modern warfare, where the use of non-military economic, political, and informational means erases the traditional demarcation between the war and peace use of military force has traditionally played. In other words, the distinction between a Russia at war and at peace would appear to be becoming increasingly blurred when contrasting MD-1993 and MD-2014.

In sum, the increased emphasis of asymmetry and the blurred distinction between war and peace are symptomatic for altered conceptions of threat assessments becoming increasingly explicit with regard to singling out the Western Other as a source of insecurity rather than security in material, ideational, and ontological terms. Conversely, the means and resources the Western Other are capable and willing to use in order to contain the revival of the Russian Self are becoming increasingly implicit, if not diffuse. In short, changing the template from conventional to modern warfare manifests a paradoxical clarity about the Western Other as an adversary, but ambiguity about the means and resources used against Official Russia in a state of conflict characterized by unclear rules of engagement. More concretely, uncertainty about what constitutes a hostile action and whether response on such actions should be asymmetrical or symmetrical. Foreshadowing a central finding in FPC-2016, Official Russia seems to be leaning toward the concept of asymmetrical response from MD-2014, which was adopted in December 2014, to FPC-2016 being adopted almost two years later in November 2016. I elaborate on the concept of asymmetric response below.

⁵⁷⁶ “The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation,” Carnegie Endowment, February 5, 2010: https://carnegieendowment.org/files/2010russia_militaryDoctrine.pdf (accessed November 23, 2018), p. 5.

⁵⁷⁷ “The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation,” *Embassy of the Russian Federation to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*, December 25, 2014: <https://rusemb.org.uk/press/2029> (accessed November 23, 2018), p. 3.

National security strategy

The Russian National Security Strategy (NSS) was adopted on December 31, 2015, replacing the previous national security strategy adopted on May 12, 2009. Compared to the NSC-2000, the ideational and ontological dimensions of Russian security are highlighted significantly. Characterizing the societal context informing the analysis and threat assessments made in NSS-2009, the authors conclude that Russia has overcome its “systemic political and socio-economic crisis” following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. By preserving its “sovereignty,” the imagined Russian community has “restored the country’s potential” to “defend its national interests as a key player within evolving multipolar international relations.”⁵⁷⁸ The preservation of sovereignty and reaffirmation of Russia’s role as a key player have secured the birth of “[a]uthentically Russian ideals and spirituality [, alongside] a dignified attitude to historical memory.”⁵⁷⁹

However, these newborn authentic characteristics are under general pressure from “global competition” and “current global and regional architecture, oriented [...] towards NATO.”⁵⁸⁰ A central innovation in NSS-2009 is the suggestion of how to defend Russia from these challenges—besides conventional strategic deterrence and economic development: “a system of military-patriotic education of Russian citizens.”⁵⁸¹ Besides military-patriotic education, a new chapter was added about ensuring national security in the cultural sphere in NSS-2009. The main threats against Russian national security in the cultural sphere constitute the “dominance of production of mass culture oriented towards the spiritual needs of marginalised groups” and “attempts to revise perspectives on Russia’s history, its role and place in world history.”⁵⁸²

The cultural aspects of Russian national security are developed further in the adopted 2015 National Security Strategy (NSS-2015). Unlike previous editions of Russian national security documents, the need for and further revival

⁵⁷⁸ “Russia’s National Security Strategy to 2020,” *Rustrans*, May 12, 2009: <http://rustrans.wikidot.com/russia-s-national-security-strategy-to-2020> (accessed November 23, 2018), p. 1.

⁵⁷⁹ “Russia’s National Security Strategy to 2020,” *Rustrans*, May 12, 2009: <http://rustrans.wikidot.com/russia-s-national-security-strategy-to-2020> (accessed November 23, 2018), p. 1.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 1-2.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.* p. 3.

⁵⁸² “Russia’s National Security Strategy to 2020,” *Rustrans*, May 12, 2009: <http://rustrans.wikidot.com/russia-s-national-security-strategy-to-2020> (accessed November 23, 2018), p. 6.

of traditional “Russian spiritual and moral values” and a “proper attitude toward Russia’s history” are highlighted. NSS-2015 notes that the revival and implementation of an increasingly independent and authentic Russia is causing “opposition from the United States and its allies, who are seeking to retain their dominance in world affairs.”⁵⁸³ The concrete consequence of the Russian revival for the envisioned greatness in terms of distinct and traditional Russian ontology is the reintroduction of the “policy of containing Russia” by exerting “political economic, military, and informational” pressures on it. Concrete examples of subversive actions by the Western Other are “countering integration processes and creating seats of tensions in the Eurasian region,” supporting the

coup d’état in Ukraine [Western Other turned Ukraine] into a chronic seat of instability in Europe and in the immediate vicinity of Russia’s borders.⁵⁸⁴

Despite these different types of Western pressure, Russia has proven capable of withstanding and maintaining its sovereignty and independence authentically. Preserving and augmenting traditional Russian values is placed at the “foundation of Russian society” and the “basis of the development of integration processes in the post-Soviet area.”⁵⁸⁵ In contrast to NSS-2009, traditional Russian values are further specified in revised NSS-2015, where the “priority of the spiritual over the material,” “service to the homeland,” “collectivism,” “historical unity of the peoples of Russia,” and “continuity of our motherland’s history” constitute some of the core values.⁵⁸⁶

To ensure future the “cultural sovereignty” of Russia, measures like the “creation of a system of spiritual-moral and patriotic education of citizens,” “strengthening of state control over the condition of cultural heritage facilities,” and “implementation of control in the information sphere” are to be realized to remedy the moral and psychological impact from the expected “external expansion of ideologies and values and destructive information.”⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸³ “Russia’s National Security Strategy,” *Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies*, December 31, 2015: <http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Russian-National-Security-Strategy-31Dec2015.pdf> (accessed November 23, 2018), p. 3.

⁵⁸⁴ “Russia’s National Security Strategy,” *Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies*, December 31, 2015: <http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Russian-National-Security-Strategy-31Dec2015.pdf> (accessed November 23, 2018), p. 4.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 21-22.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p. 21.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.* p. 22.

Besides the space devoted to the preservation and augmentation of traditional Russian values, another concrete example of a translation finding its way from inner dialogue about the reconstruction of the Russian Self to the foreign policy of Official Russia is the suggestion to implement “rational import substitution.”⁵⁸⁸

In sum, novel revisions of Russian national security strategy from 2009 to 2015 are mainly regarding the maintenance and augmentation of authentically Russian culture and values central to the existing ontology of the meaningful Russian Self. Importantly, the Russian Self has successfully repelled the Western Other’s subversive engulfment attempts (e.g., containment) but needs to further strengthen national unity and “cultural resilience” through a mix of patriotic and spiritual education of the Russian imagined community and increased control over the information produced within and beyond Russia’s formal borders. Indeed, the revision of the national security strategy testifies to the influence and acceptance of the fact that subversive elements are also operating within the confines of Russian territory and have become a threat to its national security; conversely, an increased sense of ontological security resulting from having successfully—from an official Russian inside-perspective—stood up and dared to encounter what is perceived as an engulfing Western Other. In short, NSS-2015 testifies to the paradoxical sense of heightened ontological security contingent upon the prior experience of ontological insecurity also observed above in the process of reconstructing the Russian Self following intervention.

Foreign policy concept

Since the revision of the Russian foreign policy concept in June 2000, it has subsequently been revised in July 2008, February 2013, and finally in November 2016. Subsequent revisions follow in the same basic vein laid out by FPC-2000: The world is undergoing transformation, which presents Russia with a number of opportunities and challenges.

One recurring challenge is the architecture of the international system, where the USA and its allies are prohibiting Russia—alongside other rising great powers—equal representation and influence in various aspects of world politics. Despite the US-led resistance, which is enforced by unilaterally violating the principle of state sovereignty militarily and covertly, international relations are changing, and the decentralization of economic, political, and military power is underway. This provides Russia with opportunities to improve its international status and the well-being of its citizens. The central premise is that global competition increases concurrently with the number of

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 15.

rising powers following in the wake of decentralization. Thus, across subsequent foreign policy concepts, a central pre-condition for exploiting potential opportunities is the onwards modernization of the Russian economy, the preservation of international law and fundamental institutions, and the strengthening of integration efforts within the post-Soviet space. This core narrative dominates all of the subsequent foreign policy concepts.

However, when scrutinizing the content of each of the three adopted concepts following the revision from FPC-1993 to FPC-2000, interesting findings emerge. For this inquiry, the introduction of the “civilizational dimension [of the global competition trend suggestion] competition between different value systems” in FPC-2008 is central. The civilizational dimension manifests concretely in two accompanying 2008 innovations gaining importance in subsequent concepts: harmful revisions of Soviet and Russian history and preserving and augmenting the rights of Russian compatriots and strong diaspora communities in the respective host countries.

As regards the former, revising the outcome of World War II and undermining the importance of Soviet contributions and sacrifices in defeating Nazi-Germany are considered particularly harmful.⁵⁸⁹ Revisions are problematic to the extent that a past vision of the Russian Self is brought into question or criticized, as in the case of the *Dozhd* survey, which questioned the decision to keep fighting instead of surrounding besieged Leningrad. Here, the survey had a negative impact on the foundation that the present and future Russian Self are based upon. A central concern regarding such revisions is that by undermining otherwise authoritative interpretations of Russian history, revanchism and national dissent follow. In light of the frequent use of references to the Soviet and Russian past, the Russian intervention in Ukraine has given way to a mutual weaponization of history between Kiev and Moscow as well as the West and Russia. Consequently, Russian historian Aleksey Miller notes:

In both Russia and Ukraine, the idea that the war is spreading into the study and interpretation of the past has acquired a fully official and “legitimate” character.

⁵⁸⁹ “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation,” *The Kremlin*, January 12, 2008: <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/4116>, p. 7; “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation,” *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, February 12, 2013: http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICk6B6BZ29/content/id/122186, p. 11; “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation,” *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, November 30, 2016: http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICk6B6BZ29/content/id/2542248, p. 10 (accessed November 23, 2018).

The space for dialogue within both Ukraine and Russia is shrinking, as it is for dialogue between scholars of the two countries (Miller, 2015, p. 148).

Regarding the role of Russian compatriots and diaspora communities, the foreign policy concepts maintain an obligation to protect the “legitimate interests” of compatriots abroad and “diaspora identity” *within* the confines of international law.⁵⁹⁰ As the inner dialogue concerning if and how Russia should intervene in Ukraine demonstrates, Russian elites were particularly polyphonus regarding the question about whether Russian intervention was a violation of international law or not. The ambiguous tie between Russia, its compatriots and the Russian diaspora, on the one side, and the conventional strong defense for the principle of state sovereignty on the other manifests a persistent paradox in Russian foreign policy and the definition of the Russian Self.

In FPC-2016, the paradox remains unresolved by focusing on intensifying international bilateral and multilateral cooperation with government and non-government agents with the aim of “eradicating the double standards” existing in the intersection between ensuring universal human rights and the distinct national interests of states.⁵⁹¹

The paradox remains unresolved, because it touches on a more fundamental inner ontological discussion about the territorial and ideational confines demarcating the post-Soviet Russian Self from Foreign Others. As identified above, the Ukraine Crisis discloses a split between inward-looking and outward-looking factions of formerly united Russian nationalist movements.

I will elaborate on the development of this fractionalization of Russian national movements and how the Russian government tackles this division in terms of defining its official foreign policy and the continued quest for ontological security in Chapter 5 and the Epilogue. For now, it is interesting to note

⁵⁹⁰ “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation,” *The Kremlin*, January 12, 2008: <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/4116>, p. 7; “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation,” *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, February 12, 2013: http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/122186, p. 11; “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation,” *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, November 30, 2016: http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/2542248, p. 10 (accessed November 23, 2018).

⁵⁹¹ “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation,” *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, November 30, 2016: http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/2542248 (accessed November 23, 2018), p. 10.

that the importance of combatting the revision of Russian history as well as defending Russian compatriots and maintaining strong diaspora communities remain key parts of FPC-2016 but that the overall civilizational narrative—introduced in FPC-2008 and gaining significant importance in FPC-2013—is not strengthened in FPC-2016. Whereas FPC-2013 notes that for the first time in “modern history, global competition takes place on a civilizational level” accompanied with crisis management employing “unilateral sanctions and other coercive measures, including armed aggression” to impose “one’s own hierarchy of values” on Foreign Others,⁵⁹² FPC-2016 notes that global competition is increasingly gaining a “civilizational dimension in the form of dueling values” and repeats the chaos and adverse impacts of imposing foreign values on others.⁵⁹³

Finishing this section about the translation of the Russian Self into the foreign policy of Official Russia, one pivotal innovation in FPC-2016 remains unsaid: Unlike the previous central Russian foreign policy documents, FPC-2016 not only stresses Russia’s role in world politics is equally important to that of the US by remarking that the

two States bear special responsibility for global strategic stability and international security in general [...] and non-interference in each other’s domestic affairs.⁵⁹⁴

But Russia explicitly reserves the right to take “asymmetrical measures” against any hostile US action.⁵⁹⁵ As foreshadowed above, the introduction of “asymmetrical measures” represents a significant escalation in contrast to earlier statements, where Official Russia reserves the right to take “adequate” retaliatory measures.

Contextualizing the introduction of explicit Russian readiness to take asymmetric measures in research about Soviet and Russian strategic cultures,

⁵⁹² “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation,” *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, February 12, 2013: http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/122186 (accessed November 23, 2018), p. 3.

⁵⁹³ “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation,” *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, November 30, 2016: http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/2542248 (accessed November 23, 2018), p. 2.

⁵⁹⁴ “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation,” *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, November 30, 2016: http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/2542248 (accessed November 23, 2018), p. 13.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

the introduction of such a line of asymmetrical thinking calls forth Cold War era issues concerning conventional and nuclear arms strategies (e.g., Arnett, 1990a, 1990b; Gray, 1986; Heikka, 2000; Jones, 1990; J. L. Snyder, 1977). Is the introduction of “asymmetrical measures” symptomatic of a more fundamental post-Soviet reorientation away from a limited war and nuclear option (LNO) toward massive destruction or even mutual assured destruction (MAD)?

Disregarding the real intention underlying the introduction of the right to retaliate asymmetrically, the Official Russian introduction of this right aligns well with the earlier mentioned praise of unpredictability as a foreign political virtue evident in the inner dialogue among Russian elites after intervention in both Kosovo and Ukraine. Russian foreign policy performance—in this case, revising a foreign policy concept—reaffirms and augments what is perceived to be an authentic trait of the envisioned post-Soviet Russian Self.

Unlike American foreign policy—at least until recently⁵⁹⁶—where unpredictability is historically considered a key vice, testimony to the embrace of unpredictability (in addition to the testimony offered above in my case studies of Kosovo and Ukraine) is evident throughout classical Russian literature. An illustrative example of embracing unpredictability is Dostoyevsky’s *The Gambler* (2008). Dostoyevsky’s polyphonic novel masterly paints a complex portrait of the vices and virtues constituting the intrinsically unpredictable practice of gambling. Indeed, gambling is addictive and encompasses the chance for breakdown, but simultaneously seductive because it denotes the vigor to challenge fate and enabling the chance of breakthrough.

In sum, I interpret the decision to introduce “asymmetrical measures” as testimony of an expression of the willingness to dare to potentially lose the Russian Self in order to avoid the loss of an authentic, meaningful Russian Self in the long run. In short, an important expression of the willingness to compromise materially and ideationally for the benefit of ontological security vis-à-vis the “US Other” leading the pack of Western Others trying—from a Russian ontological perspective—to engulf the Russian Self via its strategy of Balkanization, as displayed at Maidan Square in Kiev.

⁵⁹⁶ Contrary to US foreign policy tradition, President Donald Trump seems to embrace unpredictability as a central foreign policy virtue; see “Donald Trump’s doctrine of unpredictability has the world on edge,” *The Guardian*, Michael H. Fuchs, February 13, 2017: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/feb/13/donald-trumps-doctrine-unpredictability-world-edge> (accessed October 11, 2018).

Continuation of disruptive foreign policy

The translation of the reconstructed Russian Self following Russia's military intervention in Ukraine generally follows the script of disruptive foreign policy emerging in the wake of the Russian intervention in Kosovo fifteen years earlier. The key foreign policy goal remains disruption in the absence of clearly defined alternative foreign policy goals. However, the means and resources available for disruption have become, respectively, more diverse and increased significantly since the intervention in Ukraine. The increase and diversification of, respectively, the resources and means for disruptive Russian foreign policy align with the shifting threat assessment introduced in MD-2014. Thus, I interpret the alterations to foreign policy means and resources in the foreign political toolbox of Official Russia in response to Russian threat assessments regarding the transition from conventional to modern warfare, which in the wake of the intervention in Ukraine emphasizes the blurred lines between states of war and peace as well as uncertainty about the use and appropriateness of asymmetrical responses.

Briefly recapping, then, Russia's disruptive foreign policy was introduced in the wake of the Russian intervention in Kosovo. Disruption is a strategy based on a zero-sum conception of world politics; realizing that one has no alternative goals or the means and resources necessary to achieve such goals, the second best becomes blocking others from realizing theirs.

In terms of the assessment of the main threats toward the material well-being, international status, and authenticity of Russia as state and home to an imagined community, global competition from the decentralization of the international system toward multipolarity still manifests the same basic challenges and opportunities. Regarding the challenges, prevention of unequal treatment and influence of great powers, unilateral interventions using non-military and military and indirect and direct power to influence sovereign third-party states, and regional destabilization following the transformation of world politics are key challenges. However, the transformation of the international system provides a window of opportunity to not merely preserving but actually increasing the contemporary security, economic well-being, and status of Russia in world politics by occupying the space left by the global and regional vacuum created by the gradual waning of US-unipolarity.

These opportunities and challenges inform the articulation of Official Russia's foreign policy goals. Contrasting the subsequent translation of the reconstructed Russian Self after Kosovo and Ukraine, the key goals remain more or less identical: first, facilitate the transformation from a uni- to multipolar

world order; second, preserve and augment the role of the UN Security Council; and finally (and more novelly), preserve and augment the rights of Russian compatriots and the strength of Russian diaspora identity.

In contrast to the translation of Russian Self following Kosovo, the types of means and resources available have grown. Attending to resources later, the common denominator for the development of new foreign policy means is soft power. Soft power was formally introduced in FPC-2013 as an “indispensable component of modern international relations.”⁵⁹⁷ Soft power is defined as a

comprehensive toolkit for achieving foreign policy objectives building on civil society potential, information, cultural and other methods and technologies alternative to traditional diplomacy.⁵⁹⁸

FPC-2016 formally adds use of communication and humanitarian organizations to specific foreign policy means integral to achieving Russian foreign policy objectives.⁵⁹⁹

As regards humanitarian soft power capacities, the possibility of using non-governmental agents to influence domestic and international opinion formation is given a prominent position in the assessment of foreign political challenges and opportunities in the central foreign policy documents published and legislation adopted since the intervention in Ukraine. On June 4, 2014, the infamous Russian “Foreign Agent Law”⁶⁰⁰ was amended, which authorizes the Russian Ministry of Justice to register NGOs as foreign agents without consent. NGOs had previously registered themselves as foreign agents if engaged in political activities and receiving funding or donations from abroad. In May 2016, the law was once again amended to include “any attempt

⁵⁹⁷ “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation,” *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, February 12, 2013: http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/122186 (accessed November 23, 2018), p. 4.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁹ “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation,” *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, November 30, 2016: http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/2542248 (accessed November 23, 2018), p. 3.

⁶⁰⁰ Shorthand for “On Amendments to Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation regarding the Regulation of the Activities of Non-profit Organisations Performing the Functions of a Foreign Agent” signed by Vladimir Putin July 20, 2012: <http://asozd2.duma.gov.ru/main.nsf/%28SpravkaNew%29?OpenAgent&RN=102766-6&O2> (accessed October 10, 2018).

by an independent group to influence public policy.” Currently, some 76 organizations are included on the list of foreign agents operating within Russia, two of which voluntarily registered themselves.⁶⁰¹

Despite the official Russian suspiciousness and hurdles targeting privately and publicly sponsored foreign actors operating within Russian borders, the Russian state co-financed the establishment of *Russia Today* (2005), Russkiy Mir Foundation (2007), *Russia Beyond the Headlines* (2007),⁶⁰² Rossotrudnichestvo (2008), and *Sputnik* (2014) to provide an authentic and unbiased representation of Russia domestically and abroad.

Regardless of its covert and indirect nature, the importance of soft power has resulted in a growing scholarly literature on Russian soft power and about the extent and success of Official Russia using grey-zone humanitarian and communications-oriented organizations as a means to influence public opinion among domestic and foreign audiences to achieve foreign and domestic policy ends (e.g., Grigas, 2017; Helmus et al., 2018; Khaldarova & Pantti, 2016; Lanoszka, 2016; Marples, 2016; Matveeva, 2018; Pieper, 2018; Sergunin & Karabeshkin, 2015; Sherr, 2013; Suslov, 2018; Van Herpen, 2015a). Furthermore, the alleged Russian interference in prominent events such as the military intervention in Crimea, the tragic shooting down of Flight MH17 over Ukraine in 2014, the 2016 US Presidential Election, and the 2018 poisoning of double agent Sergey Skripal are drawing scholarly attention to the much-needed analysis of concrete Russian media and organizations as well as the role played by ordinary citizens in proliferating (dis-)information in event-specific cases (e.g., Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Golovchenko, Hartmann, & Adler-Nissen, 2018; Jamieson, 2018; Thornton, 2015).

In a recent *Foreign Policy* piece (2018), Russian scholar Mark Galeotti retracts the so-called “Gerasimov Doctrine” gaining widespread attention from scholars, pundits, and policymakers working on the Russian use of subversive soft-power capacities, as news outlets and NGOs have referred to it since 2013.⁶⁰³ Coining the subversive Russian use of informational and humanitarian means as a doctrine mistakenly suggests that there is a “single organizing

⁶⁰¹ “Russia: Government vs. Rights Groups,” *Human Rights Watch*, June 18, 2018: <https://www.hrw.org/russia-government-against-rights-groups-battle-chronicle> (accessed October 10, 2018).

⁶⁰² Currently known as *Russia Beyond*.

⁶⁰³ In his analysis of a transcript of a speech given by Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation Valery Gerasimov brought in an issue of Russian military magazine *Voенно-promyshlennyi kurer* (February 27-March 5, 2013: https://vpk-news.ru/sites/default/files/pdf/VPK_08_476.pdf, accessed October 11, 2018), Mark Galeotti coins the “Gerasimov Doctrine” in “The “Gerasimov Doctrine” and Russian Non-Linear War” on his personal blog *In Moscow’s Shadows* (2013).

principle [and] controlling agency” coordinating Russian efforts. Rather, Galeotti concludes, subversive uses are coordinated by a “bewildering array of political entrepreneurs” opportunistically trying to win the good graces of the Kremlin (2018). Consequently, I agree that more case-specific knowledge about what the state and non-state use of soft-power means is needed to move beyond *if* and to start addressing *how* humanitarian and informational means are used to achieve foreign policy goals; here, disrupting the foreign policy goals of the Western Other.⁶⁰⁴

Moving from foreign policy means to resources, the Russian 2015 Defense Budget manifests one of the most significant increases in Russian defense spending since President Putin announced the significant modernization and rearmament of the Russian Armed Forces in 2012.⁶⁰⁵ According to SIPRI-estimates, the budgeted USD 81 billion spending increase made the Russian 2015 Defense Budget 91 percent larger than the 2006 budget (Perlo-Freeman, Fleurant, Wezeman, & Wezeman, 2016). *TASS* reported that planned Russian military procurements for 2015 included 701 armored vehicles and tanks, 126 new aircraft and 88 helicopters, 3 new submarines and 5 surface combat ships in addition to 4 new strategic missile regiments ready for immediate combat duty.⁶⁰⁶ According to Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, 96 percent of the 2015 Russian military order was fulfilled.⁶⁰⁷

Despite the comprehensive programs since 2012 intended to modernize and rearm the Russian Armed Forces, cuts amounting to an estimated 7–8 percent of Russian military spending were implemented in 2016–2017.⁶⁰⁸ An additional reduction of about 5 percent of Russian military spending is

⁶⁰⁴ For a good example of a recent case-specific study of concrete Russian uses of “active measures” and public diplomacy to influence the Swedish public in its favor, see “Russia’s strategy for influence through public diplomacy and active measures” (Kragh & Åsberg, 2017).

⁶⁰⁵ “Russian Defense Budget to Hit Record \$81 Billion in 2015,” *The Moscow Times*, October 16, 2014: <https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/russian-defense-budget-to-hit-record-81-billion-in-2015-40468> (accessed October 10, 2018).

⁶⁰⁶ “Chart of planned and fulfilled state defense orders for 2014 and 2015,” *ITAR-TASS*: <http://tass.com/infographics/7274> (accessed October 11, 2018).

⁶⁰⁷ “Russia’s 2015 state defense order to be only 96% fulfilled—deputy PM,” *ITAR-TASS*, December 30, 2015: <http://tass.com/defense/847837> (accessed October 11, 2018).

⁶⁰⁸ “The truth about Russia’s defence budget,” *European Council on Foreign Relations*, Mark Galeotti, March 24, 2017: https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_the_truth_about_russias_defence_budget_7255 (accessed October 11, 2018).

planned for 2017–2019.⁶⁰⁹ In addition to the structural problems historically haunting the Russian economy, a combination of a drop in global oil prices, promises of better healthcare and ongoing improvements to the standard of living, and Western sanctions have resulted in numerous restraints on an already struggling and fragile Russian economy.

However, recent reductions to Russian military spending must not be confused with a general halt of the comprehensive modernization and rearmament of Russian Armed Forces. First, Russian defense spending has increased annually by about 20 percent since the first decision to increase Russian defense spending following the Russian military intervention in Kosovo. Russian Armed Forces are significantly different—in terms of training, equipment, and the willingness to project military might—in 2018 compared to 1999. While the modernization and professionalization of the Russian Armed Forces continues, this is proceeding at a wound-down pace. Second, recent cuts to Russian military budgets are real, but not as extensive and influential for the reform of the Russian military as one might think.

According to Galeotti, official data provided by the Russian Federal Treasury only accounts for actual expenditure. Consequently, when, respectively, 96 and 88 percent of the 2015 and 2016 state orders were fulfilled, the cuts would appear to amount to 4 and 12 percent. However, the military orders are not cancelled and will be delivered the following year. Additionally, the Federal Treasury paid 700 billion Russian Rubles in 2016 to write off debt accumulated by the Russian military-industrial complex. De facto, the Federal Treasury subsidizes the Russian military industry with public funds. Third and finally, a number of expenses previously paid by the Russian Defense Ministry are now paid by the Ministry of Education and Foreign Affairs;⁶¹⁰ for instance, the reintroduction of pre-conscript education programs aspiring to enhance patriotism and basic military skills is financed by the Ministry of Education but benefits the Russian Armed Forces, which would otherwise have to allocate funds to train the desired skills.⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁹ “The Collapsing Russian Defense Budget and Other Fairy Tales,” *Russia Matters*, Michael Kofman, May 22, 2018: <https://www.russiamatters.org/analysis/collapsing-russian-defense-budget-and-other-fairy-tales> (accessed October 11, 2018).

⁶¹⁰ “The truth about Russia’s defence budget,” *European Council on Foreign Relations*, Mark Galeotti, March 24, 2017: https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_the_truth_about_russias_defence_budget_7255 (accessed October 11, 2018).

⁶¹¹ On March 23, 2014, President Vladimir V. Putin revived the Stalin-era youth training program “Ready for Labor and Defense” [Готов к труду и обороне СССР] (“Drop, Squat, Thrust: Putin Revives Soviet-Era Fitness Program,” *Radio Free Europe*, March 25, 2014: <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-soviet-era-sports-revived/25309456.html>, accessed October 12, 2018).

In short, Russian military spending seems to have peaked with the 2015 Military Budget introduced in the wake of the Russian intervention in Ukraine. Given the method-related pitfalls associated with compiling an accurate overview of actual Russian military spending, however, the modest budget cuts indicate that defense spending is being planned at a level where Russia remains among the five largest military spenders globally.

In addition to the comparatively well-resourced Russian Armed Forces, 2014 featured a likely increase in the state funding for potential soft-power capabilities in the form of Russian media outlets, humanitarian and religious organizations, and private enterprises aspiring to convey an authentic representation of the Russian Self to audiences at home and abroad.⁶¹² However, a more thorough examination of the resources allocated to enhance the Russian soft power capacity is beyond the scope of this section about the translation of the reconstructed Russian Self into the foreign policy of Official Russia. Whether the Russian state has actually increased funding for enhancing its soft-power potential remains speculative for now.

Conclusion

The aim of Chapter 4 was threefold. First, identifying whose and how senses of ontological insecurity rendered military intervention meaningful in Ukraine. Second, how the Russian Self was reconstructed before, during, and after the intervention. Third, how reconstructed visions of the Russian Self subsequently translated into the foreign policy of Official Russia after intervention. In the following, I chronologically answer each of the three research questions.

First, against the background of a collective recollection of the general traumatic experiences Russia underwent in the 1990s and, consequently, a specific sensitivity to public protest after experiencing chaotic demonstrations in connection with the constitutional crisis in 1993 and more recently widespread public protests across Russia in 2011–13, launching a military intervention emerged as a meaningful response to the Russo–Western encounter in Ukraine. Ultimately, intervention was perceived as a meaningful way to prevent the perceived Maidan chaos from spreading into Russia, but also as a response to what significant parts of the Russian custodianship understood as a Russian responsibility to its compatriots and diaspora community in Ukraine.

⁶¹² “Looking West, Russia Beefs up Spending on Global Media Giants,” *The Moscow Times*, September 23, 2014: <https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/looking-west-russia-beefs-up-spending-on-global-media-giants-39708> (accessed October 12, 2018).

Thus, if Russia as an imagined community failed to act resolutely and stand up to developments in Ukraine and the Western Other supporting these, Russia could quickly find itself back in the existential dread of the 1990s; that is, an anxiety of becoming a politically paralyzed nobody demoted to the mailman of the Western Other. From an ontological perspective, concerns caused by the anxiety of losing an authentic sense of Russian Self rendered military intervention meaningful, despite the expected risks involved in escalating the tense situation as well as significant adverse impacts for material well-being and status in international politics. In short, if the Russian Self did not engage the Western Other and prove its willingness to defend its authentic and meaningful existence, potential material and ideational benefits gained from failing to stand up for the Russian Self would be insignificant.

However—and addressing the second question about the reconstruction of the Russian Self—the inner dialogue about how different Russian foreign policy responses reflected different visions of the authentic Russian Self complicated the path towards rendering military intervention meaningful. Several significant contestations prevailed in the inner dialogue among Russian elites regarding if and how Russia should intervene in Ukraine-related developments.

The most central contestation was about if and how intervention would violate the principle of state sovereignty. As the inner dialogue proceeded, it became clear that violating the principle of sovereignty was particularly problematic for three specific reasons. First, Russia had signed the Budapest Memorandum in 1994. If Great Britain and the USA insisted that the memorandum remained in effect, Russia could find itself in a military encounter with the Western Other with severe consequences for national security. Second, intervention would jeopardize the international status gained from hosting the Sochi Winter Olympics. Third, Russian intervention in Ukraine would cause more far-reaching negative consequences for the Russian economy, possibly even complete collapse. Most prominently, Federation Council Speaker Valentina Matviyenko insists that Russia had no right to violate Ukraine's sovereignty. Besides Matviyenko, non-nationalist journalists and politicians dominate the Russian voices against violating the state sovereignty principle.

In the inner dialogue, I also identify four specific arguments for why Russia should intervene despite the problems imposed by the state sovereignty principle. First, the Kosovo precedent suggested that Russia had to intervene. NATO had intervened in the Balkans without a UN Security Council mandate to protect civilians. Given Russian news reports about the ethnic cleansings and political purges being undertaken by Ukrainian nationalists, Russia could simply not allow itself to remain passive. Second and related, the events unfolding in Ukraine were not isolated; if not stopped in time, the Ukrainian

bloodshed would eventually spread into Russia. Third, the interpretations of events in Ukraine drew heavily on historical comparisons to the rise of Nazi Germany to diagnose and argue why it was better for Russia to intervene now than later; after all, the rise of Nazi Germany eventually resulted in the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. Fourth, if Official Russia failed to intervene in Ukraine, several Russian non-state actors proclaimed their willingness to intervene without the Russian state's blessing. Such unofficial interventions would sow significant doubt regarding the political legitimacy and authenticity of the current Russian government representing it.

In short, these four arguments suggested that if Russia refrained from intervening it would not only cause significant material and ideational costs, but more fundamentally a loss of Russian Self. A coalition of prominent nationalist journalists and pundits as well as politicians from the nationalist political opposition constitute the core of agents narrating the events unfolding in Ukraine as a threat to Russia's ontological security.

After the intervention became a reality, non-nationalist oppositional voices remained present in the inner dialogue about the extent to which the military intervention carried out by Official Russia is an authentic representation of the envisioned Russian Self. Whereas some critical voices claimed that intervention spelled the beginning of the end of Russia, others interpreted Russian intervention as the beginning of an increasingly independent (and, hence, authentic) vision of the Russian Self gradually materializing. Western condemnation and sanctioning of Russia was interpreted as acknowledgment and encouragement of the rightness of Russian foreign policy conduct. In more radical outward-looking nationalist variants of intervention as the start of a brighter future for the post-Soviet Russian Self, the path to Russian greatness and meaningfulness lay beyond the formal borders of Russia. These voices suggested military interventionism as an essential component of the vision of the authentic Russian Self. Outward-looking nationalist voices were contested by inward-looking nationalists, who argued that Russian interventionism jeopardized the foundation for Russian revival laying within—not beyond—Russia's formal borders.

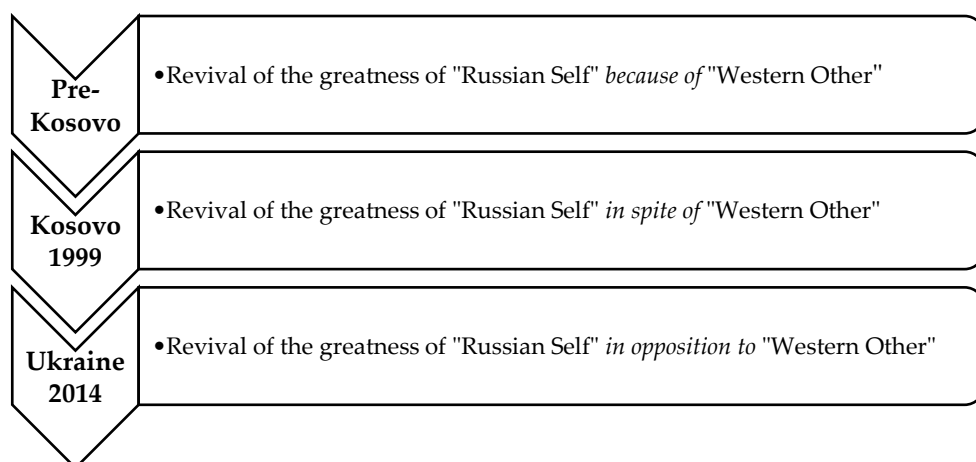
The contestation between inward-looking and outward-looking nationalist voices constitutes a critical split between the visions of Russia's formerly united post-Soviet nationalist movements elucidated by intervention. This is an important finding, which I elaborate on in Chapter 5, where I contrast the reconstruction of the Russian Self before, during, and after the Russian intervention in Kosovo and Ukraine.

As the annexation of Crimea became a fact, it also became clear that a commonplace about the visions of the Russian Self and the revival of Russian greatness were not merely reconstructed along the trajectory of being *in spite*

of the Western Other—emerging as meaningful in the wake of the Kosovo intervention—but *in opposition to* the Western Other. Critical non-nationalist voices stressing the need for a working—and to a lesser degree constructive—relation with the Western Other remained present in Russian media outlets and among prominent oppositional figures, but criticism from the established non-nationalist Russian opposition remained absent. President Putin’s legitimizing use of concepts like “national traitors” and “fifth column” as well as increased censorship activity by official Russian federal agencies and private companies played (in addition to likely self-censoring) a significant role in explaining the lacking resonance and proliferation of contestations to the gradually growing commonplace around a meaningful vision of Russian Self in opposition to the Western Other.

In sum, whereas the Kosovo crisis manifests a crucial national ideational tilting point toward reconstructing Russia’s post-Soviet Self in spite of the Western Other, the Ukraine Crisis manifests a tilting point toward the revival of Russian greatness in opposition to the Western Other (see Figure 8 below).

Figure 8: Changing visions for the reconstruction of the post-Soviet “Russian Self” before and after Russian military intervention in Kosovo and Ukraine



Foreshadowing a finding from contrasting the reconstruction of the Russian Self in Ukraine to Kosovo in Chapter 5, the inner Russian dialogue about what meaningfully constitutes the Russian Self during the Ukraine crisis had shrunken to a couple of Russian Selves envisioning the revival of post-Soviet greatness from within versus beyond the existing borders of the Russian Federation.

Unlike the Kosovo crisis, there was no split between Russian civil servants in the media landscape. Foreign policy responses taken by Official Russia—both declared and covert—were supported by a majority of State Duma and

Federation Council deputies. Unlike the parliamentary context surrounding the intervention in Kosovo, neither threats to impeach nor petitions to dismiss Russian officials or members of the Russian government materialized in connection with the intervention in Ukraine. Additionally, the composition of agents participating in inner Russian dialogues had changed from primarily involving Russian politicians and senior officers in 1999 to including a variety of pundits, journalists, and politicians in 2014.

Table 5: Key commonplaces and contestations in the Russian inner dialogue before, during, and after military intervention in Ukraine

| Commonplaces | Contestations |
|--|--|
| (1) Envisioning the post-Soviet Russian Self becoming a great power on par with Western Others. | (1) Russian responsibility to protect compatriots in Crimea versus respect for the state sovereignty principle. |
| (2) Gradually emerging commonplace around Intervening Russia in alignment with international law before intervention. | (2) Russo–Western encounter benefits versus significantly harms Russian economy. |
| (3) Gradually emerging commonplace around Intervening Russia in alignment with a Russian economy becoming increasingly independent after annexation. | (3) Revival of post-Soviet greatness of Russian Self lays beyond or within the existing borders of the Russian Federation. |
| | (4) Revival of Russian Self because of, in spite of, or in contrast to the Western Other. |

Third, the reconstructed visions of the Russian Self along the lines of “in opposition to Western Other” translated into a reaffirmation of the use of military force as an effective means to disrupt unwanted Western foreign policy goals and two central revisions of the foreign policy of Official Russia. First, Russia explicitly declared its willingness to respond “asymmetrically” to any hostile action by the Western Other. Introducing “asymmetrical measures” manifests a rhetorical intensification and escalation of an increasingly antagonistic Russo–Western relationship. Second, visions of post-Soviet Russian greatness in opposition to the Western Other manifest themselves in a significant increase of the 2015 Defense Budget. Besides injecting significant financial resources into increasing Russia’s hard-power capacity for disruption, since its official introduction in FPC-2013, the Russian soft-power capacity has been assigned a seemingly larger and more central role in Russian foreign policy; both in terms of its order and proportion in central Russian foreign policy documents and the apparent additional financial resources devoted to humanitarian and informational sorts of soft-power means to continue foreign political disruption.

Disruption remains the most central foreign policy goal—or rather non-goal—but the means and resources for disruption have become more diverse

and significantly increased in the wake of the military intervention in Ukraine. I argue that the increase and diversification of resources and means for disruption reflect a shift in the assessment of threats against Official Russia and the Russian Self as—on one hand—becoming increasingly explicit in terms of the Western Other as an adversary actively trying to contain the Russian revival, while—simultaneously—the Russian understanding of the Western means and resources for expected subversive actions targeting Russian security are becoming increasingly unclear.

Looking beyond the intervention in Ukraine, not since Russia's rude awakening in the Kosovo Crisis 15 years earlier had the Russian Self been so seemingly far along its quest for an ontologically secure—hence, authentically meaningful—Russian Self. Not since the Soviet era had so many Russians felt such a seemingly meaningful sense of belonging to the Russian Self (Lipman, 2016).

Putin's soaring approval ratings after the crisis—which had hit an all-time low in the wake of the 2011–13 protests—clearly demonstrate that a clear majority of Russians approve of the decision to intervene and are willing to accept the high material costs associated with ontological and ideational gains. The overwhelming electoral support for President Putin—despite the decreasing voter turnout—in the 2018 Russian Presidential Election demonstrates that the popular support for the annexation of the Crimea was not merely a “temporary phenomenon” and the “fog of gung-ho patriotism,” as Boris Nemtsov claimed on March 13, 2014.⁶¹³

Almost exactly 70 years after Nikita S. Khrushchev relinquished Crimea to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic on February 19, 1954, Crimea and Russia were again unified. From the perspective of a majority of Russians, the Russo–Crimean unification not only corrects a central historical injustice and awards Official Russia exclusive membership in a club of great powers who have demonstrated their capacity and willingness to use military force unilaterally, it foreshadows the resurrection of Russia's superpower status. In short, intervention and annexation are manifestations of Russia's resurrection. Two pro-Kremlin authors, Dmitry Belyaev and Nikolay Starikov, write in *Russia.Crimea.History* (2015) that:

Each time after uniting with Crimea, Russia was also becoming the superpower. Each loss of Crimea resulted in the loss of this status. In 2014, our country has become superpower once again (Back-cover of Belyaev & Starikov, 2015).

⁶¹³ “Crimea swallows up Russian opposition,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Aleksandra Samarina & Aleksey Gorbachev, March 13, 2014.

After intervention and annexation, a majority of the Russian population understood Russia as moving increasingly closer to superpower status after intervention. In November 2014, 68 percent of Russians considered Russia to be a superpower.⁶¹⁴ Despite some critical Russian voices rejecting this interventionistic and annexationist vision of the Russian Self as a “poisoning of the national consciousness of Russians,” a clear majority of the imagined Russian community supports the foreign policy actions of Official Russia.⁶¹⁵

Despite the oppositional Russian voices contesting the meaningfulness of the “Intervening Russian Self” as an authentic representation of the post-Soviet Russian Self, attempts at proliferating the consequences of adverse economic and social impacts for material well-being, as well as the regime’s vested personal interests in keeping Russia in a constant state of international conflict, Russians have persistently supported Official Russia’s foreign political conduct in the near and far abroad.⁶¹⁶ On the 2015 anniversary of the Russian intervention in Ukraine, central oppositional voice Boris Nemtsov was symbolically killed while crossing the Bolshoy Moskvoretsky Bridge near Kremlin around midnight February 27, 2015. While Nemtsov’s assassination echoed in the Western media landscape, his death was ranked the 21st most important event of the year (out of 40) in a survey undertaken by *Levada Center* in December 2015.⁶¹⁷

Whether the Russian support for Russian foreign policy will be jeopardized by recent popular dissatisfaction with President Putin having signed a pension bill increasing the retirement age with 5 years is hanging in the balance.⁶¹⁸ After all, as also shown by the Levada Center superpower survey from

⁶¹⁴ “68% of Russian citizens consider Russia a superpower,” *Levada Center*, December 23, 2014: <https://www.levada.ru/en/2014/12/23/68-of-russian-citizens-consider-russia-a-superpower/> (accessed October 15, 2018).

⁶¹⁵ “Мир и Война. Как достичь первого и не допустить второго [Peace and War. How to reach the first without getting the second],” *Novaya Gazeta*, Gregory Yavlinsky, March 16, 2014.

⁶¹⁶ A concrete example of systematic oppositional efforts to disclose covert human costs and the unholy motives driving Russian intervention in Ukraine is found in Путин. Война [Putin.War.] (2015), published in May 2015 after the assassination of Boris Nemtsov, but based on material gathered under Nemtsov’s leadership.

⁶¹⁷ “The results of the year,” *Levada Center*, January 11, 2016: <https://www.levada.ru/en/2016/01/11/the-results-of-year/> (accessed October 15, 2018).

⁶¹⁸ “Thousands rally across Russia in rare protest over pension age increase,” *The Independent*, Adam Forrest, September 22, 2018: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-protests-pension-age-raise-vladimir-putin-retirement-a8550291.html> (accessed October 15, 2018); “They committed political

November 2014, 60 percent of Russians surveyed consider the “high standard of living of its citizens” and the “economic and industrial potential of the country” to be the primary characteristics of a superpower, while “military might, including nuclear missiles” comes in at third place with 44 percent.⁶¹⁹ In short, Russians are—presumably—not unaffected by a significant loss of material well-being or reduction of their standard of living.

A fundamental question arises: How much of the material well-being and international status are the imagined Russian community and custodianship willing to sacrifice to maintain and augment a disruptive Official Russian foreign policy as an authentic representation of a meaningful vision for the post-Soviet Russian Self in opposition to the Western Other? In short, how sustainable is the disruptive foreign political performance for moving the Russian Self forward along its post-Soviet quest for ontological security? I attend to this emerging question in the Epilogue.

suicide today’—Kremlin problems grow as Russian pension reform passes second reading,” *The Independent*, Oliver Carroll, September 26, 2018: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-pension-reform-vote-passes-reading-duma-protests-putin-kremlin-a8556196.html> (accessed October 15, 2018).

⁶¹⁹ “68% of Russian citizens consider Russia a superpower,” *Levada Center*, December 23, 2014: <https://www.levada.ru/en/2014/12/23/68-of-russian-citizens-consider-russia-a-superpower/> (accessed October 15, 2018).

Part III: Contrasting the “Russian Self”



The third and final part of my conduct of inquiry into the “Russian Self” perspectively contrasts the reconstruction of the Russian Self before, during, and after “Official Russia” intervened militarily in Kosovo and Ukraine. Perspectively contrasting the two crisis reconstruction processes, this third part elucidates case-specific configurations that are critical to understanding and explaining the processes and outcomes of the military interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine.

Chapter 5: Contrasting the “Russian Self”

[I decided that] Russia must make a crowning gesture, even if it had no military significance. Russia had not permitted itself to be defeated in the moral sense [...]. The last gesture was a sign of our moral victory in face of the enormous NATO military, all of Europe, and the whole world.

—*Boris Yeltsin* (Yeltsin, 2000, p. 266).

One of the unexpected and paradoxical results of Maidan was a sharp crisis within the ranks of Russian nationalists in Russia. The movement, recently united by Russian marches, support for protest speeches in Biryulyovo, and a sharp criticism of the migration policy of the Russian Federation, turned out to be a split world.

—*Yegor Kholmogorov*, *February 27, 2014*.⁶²⁰

Chapter 5 focuses on elucidating the similarities and particularities between how senses of ontological insecurity develop in these two key episodes of Russo–Western encounters after the Cold War and how the processes aimed at reconstructing the “Russian Self” developed before, during, and after the Russian military interventions. The two quotes above relate to the Russian interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine, respectively, and offer testimony to the significance ascribed to both episodes of post-Soviet Russo–Western encounters by Russian custodians, but they also offer evidence of the substantially different outcomes of two apparently similar foreign policy decisions. The two quotes depict one of numerous particularities elucidated by contrasting Kosovo and Ukraine in this chapter. Whereas the intervention in Kosovo manifests a tipping point toward constructing a commonplace around a vision of the “Russian Self” *in spite of* the “Western Other,” intervention in Ukraine discloses continuity of a commonplace around a vision for Russian Self distinctively different from the Western Other and—paradoxically—contestation among the group of nationalist Russian custodians about the source of revival

⁶²⁰ “Аватары русского национализма [Avatars of Russian nationalism],” *Izvestiya*, Yegor Kholmogorov, February 27, 2014: <https://iz.ru/news/566689> (accessed October 2, 2018).

of the Russian Self located inside versus outside the Russian Federation's existing borders.

In the previous in-depth studies about Russian military intervention in Kosovo and Ukraine, I argue that the interventions are rendered meaningful in response to the ontological security concerns among the Russian custodians emerging out of their interpretations of the consequences of the Bonn Agreement and turbulent Ukrainian developments for the authenticity of the Russian Self. In Kosovo and Ukraine, ontological concerns are supplemented by ideational and material concerns regarding, respectively, Russian status and economic as well as physical well-being. Ultimately, however, ontological concerns rendered intervention meaningful despite the expected ideational and material adverse impacts likely jeopardizing the international status of "Official Russia" and the material well-being of the imagined Russian community.

The idealized ontological perspective contributes with important yet over-looked insight into how the Self–Self dimension of politics renders the use of military force meaningful. Such insights into how human action intended to secure the envisioned ontology of the "Self" supplements idealized material and ideational Self–Other perspectives, which in isolation would deem military interventions risky and counterproductive following their respective exogenously and endogenously given bedrock assumptions about foreign policy as driven by survival- and status-seeking logics. In short, an idealized ontological security perspective offers a novel interpretation of foreign policy actions as related to human meaning-seeking in an existentialist sense.

As demonstrated in Chapters 3 and 4, the Russian custodianship voiced material and ideational concerns in the inner dialogue about if and how to intervene in Kosovo and Ukraine. As these dialogues developed, however, those arguing in favor of an Official Russia needing to avert a fundamental threat against the ontological security of a vague and contested Russian Self encountering an engulfing Western Other and—in the case of Ukraine—additional subversive fifth columns of national traitors among members of imagined Russian community.

Contrasting Kosovo and Ukraine reveals similarities and particularities elucidating case-specific configurations that are fundamental to understanding how, in these concrete settings, the custodians render military intervention meaningful and reconstruct the Russian Self. I prefer to use the term *contrasting* rather than *comparing*, as the practice of contrasting begins from a premise of Kosovo and Ukraine as similar yet fundamentally particular episodes of the same series of interconnected Russian foreign policy acts, whereas the practice of comparing operates from a premise of Ukraine and Kosovo as more or less similar (yet self-contained) cases of the same social phenomenon; hence, post-Soviet Russian interventionism. In short, contrasting—rather

than comparing—Kosovo and Ukraine accepts the configurational uniqueness of the two particular episodes while acknowledging the historically contingent interconnectedness between the two.

Importantly, these two specific episodes differ quite significantly in several respects in terms of context, process, and outcome. First, the spatiotemporal contextual settings of 1999 and 2014 are hardly comparable. In 1999, President Boris Yeltsin and his government were in an extremely delicate and vulnerable domestic political situation, and Kosovo was but a distant issue in terms of culture and geography compared to the domestic and foreign political contexts in which President Vladimir Putin found himself in 2014. Second, and as mentioned above, Kosovo and Ukraine are not independent but historically interconnected cases, a fact which influences the processes of rendering military intervention meaningful, reconstructing the Russian Self, and translating the reconstructed Russian Self into the foreign policy of Official Russia. Third, even though Russia decided to intervene militarily in both Kosovo and Ukraine, the respective paths toward and execution of military intervention differ quite substantially. For instance, military intervention was undertaken overtly in Kosovo, while covertly in Ukraine.

So what is the analytical value-added of contrasting two markedly different episodes of post-Soviet Russian interventionism? The value-added of contrasting Kosovo with Ukraine is the knowledge gained from moving back and forth between interpreting Ukraine from the perspective of Kosovo and vice versa (Schaffer, 2016, p. 63). In such moving-back-and-forth perspectives—hence, simultaneously focusing on and neglecting case-specific configurations in Kosovo and Ukraine—the relative analytical importance of already identified case-specific configurations is eventually elucidated and new insights disclosed. In short, significant analytical insights are gained from not merely juxtaposing Kosovo with Ukraine as more or less “like cases,” but perspectively contrasting Kosovo to Ukraine as well as Ukraine to Kosovo. Such perspectival contrasting reveals *partial* insights about Kosovo and Ukraine established by the *differentness* of the points of view—hence, insights gained from viewing “one in thing in terms of another” (Schaffer, 2017, p. 3).

The logic underlying perspectival inquiry aligns with the analyticist logic of inquiry outlined in the Introduction. From a Weberian ideal-typical point of view, scientific knowledge production is located in the contrast between ideal-typical understanding of and observed phenomenon. Knowledge production utilizing ideal types is propelled by viewing “one thing in terms of another” (Schaffer, 2017, p. 3). By viewing one case-specific thing in terms of another, ideal-typically contrasting findings specific to Kosovo and Ukraine, I can “delineate the *situationally specific* configurations” that sharpen under-

standing and explanations of how specific agents, in setting through their sayings and doings, developed specific processes toward the concrete outcomes observed in Kosovo and Ukraine (P. T. Jackson, 2016, p. 222).

Consequently, the ideal-typical and perspectival logics of inquiry reflect an instrumental understanding of scientific knowledge production as produced by someone trying to achieve something from somewhere (P. T. Jackson, 2016, pp. 123-126). Both logics originate from a monistic understanding of the relation between scholar and object of inquiry as inseparable, which aligns with my methodological and epistemic commitments to analyticism and interpretivism. Rejecting mind-world dualism, hypothesis-testing becomes redundant to validate knowledge claims produced by ideal-typical and perspectival inquiry. Instead, the assessment of the scientific validity of such knowledge claims relies on the *usefulness* of the analytical narrative crafted to understand and explain a specific social phenomenon (P. T. Jackson, 2016, pp. 219-222). Concretely, perspectively contrasting enhances the usefulness of the dissertation's analytical narrative about how idealized ontological security concerns and national ideational reconstruction processes, respectively, rendered military intervention meaningful and proceeded in Kosovo and Ukraine by elucidating partial configurational insights otherwise hidden.

In the remainder of Chapter 5, I perspectively contrast Kosovo and Ukraine using the three key analytical categories mentioned in Chapters 3 and 4 (encounter, intervention, and closure) before summing up the key findings in the conclusion.

Encounters

Inner Russian dialogues about the intent underlying the Western Other's actions in Kosovo and Ukraine as well as how inadequate, irrelevant, and unauthentic these respective intentions would make Official Russia look in the eyes of the world community and, more importantly, the eyes of the imagined Russian community turned (from the perspective of certain Russian custodians) Kosovo and Ukraine into paradoxical Russo–Western encounters threatening the ontological security of the Russian Self.

Both of these Russo–Western encounters developed into something that Official Russia could not just walk away from. Appearing to look as though they had been outplayed by the Western Other on what was perceived to be Russia's home turf was not a pleasant perspective for the custodians responsible for a vaguely defined Russian Self. In both Kosovo and Ukraine, being outplayed could potentially undermine Russia's status as an independent great power in world politics; but more importantly, as demonstrated in Chapters 3 and 4, jeopardize the existing senses of national belonging to a Russian

Self, the authenticity of which had already been contested in the eyes of an imagined community; in short, a complete breakdown of existing post-Soviet ontology.

Seen from the perspective of the inner Russian dialogue in the context of Kosovo and Ukraine, considerations related to the loss of international prestige, economic well-being, and even physical security (i.e., Self–Other considerations) was supplemented by more fundamental ontological security concerns about the authenticity of the Russian Self playing out at the Self–Self level among the Russian custodians. That the intervention in Ukraine was carried out covertly indicates that the Russian government was not indifferent to the adverse impacts on its international status and economic well-being, but military intervention testifies that Russia chose authenticity concerning the Self–Self relation over the “bid for recognition” from the Western Other and broader international community, which the Sochi Winter Olympics manifests.^{621,622}

Whose ontological insecurity transformed the unfolding of events in Kosovo and Ukraine into Russo–Western encounters? In the context of the Kosovo crisis, the members of the Russian General Staff took the initial step. Speaking out on behalf of the Russian military, the moment Leonid Ivashov publicly contests the meaning of the Bonn Agreement (which was negotiated by Viktor Chernomyrdin) on June 3, the Kosovo crisis went from being a foreign policy crisis to one concerning Russian ontological security. Military dissatisfaction ignites a debate about the fundamentals of Russo–Western relations and the visions for the Russian Self that such official relations reflected.

In Kosovo, the initial discussion between Viktor Chernomyrdin and Leonid Ivashov was about trust in the power of international law to defend Russia’s well-being and status against unilateralism. If Russia could not trust the Western Other to respect international law, why then trust it to honor the Bonn Agreement or agreements about the joint NATO–Russian occupation of Kosovo? If the Western Other was not playing by international law, why should Russia then refrain from acting unilaterally?

To Chernomyrdin, Aleksandr E. Lebedev, and Grigory A. Yavlinsky, the Bonn Agreement manifests a vision of the Russian Self that once and for all had parted with its traumatic past and succeeded in forcing the World’s sole

⁶²¹ “Olympics as a Bid for Recognition,” editorial, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, February 18, 2014.

⁶²² For recommendable studies about the meanings ascribed and importance of the Sochi Winter Olympics to Russian political elites, see *The Sochi Predicament* (Petersson & Vamling, 2013) and “Still Embodying the Myth?” (Petersson, 2014).

superpower to the negotiation table to broker an international agreement, effectively making the peace negotiations a matter of international law instead of US unilateralism. The successful use of “political methods” to land an agreement was in the common interest of the Russian people, who suffered tremendously the last time Russia intervened on the Balkans; evoking a historical analogy to Russia’s participation in World War I and the Russian Revolution that followed in the wake of the fatal shots in Sarajevo.

To the General Staff, members of the Foreign and Defense Ministry, CPRF, and the LDPR, the Bonn Agreement was comparable to the Munich Agreement. Similar to the agreement in Munich, the agreement brokered by Chernomyrdin in Bonn would not bring peace but rather appease a Western Other taking the first of several future steps toward “Balkanizing” the entire post-Soviet space with the ultimate goal of breaking Russia apart. Chernomyrdin personified national treason and a more fundamental syndrome that had marred Russia since the end of the Soviet Union. A syndrome that reduced Russia from being a great power without which not a single important issue could be solved—echoing former Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko—to a simple mailman delivering the Western Other’s messages.

On June 3, 1999, the Russian custodianship gradually realized that they were at a crossroads; they could follow the trajectory personified by Chernomyrdin or the one by Ivashov. When Russia crossed into Kosovo and made its dash to Slatina on June 12, a choice was made: Russia picked the pathway to greatness *in spite of* the West. Chernomyrdin’s—hence, Russia’s—faith was sealed on June 4 after closed-door hearings in the Russian State Duma, where Aleksandr Avdeyev and Leonid Ivashov participated. On June 7, Chernomyrdin was *persona non grata*, and Foreign Minister Igor S. Ivanov took him of the urgent follow-up meeting in Cologne. Despite a final effort from those supporting the Russian Self as personified by Chernomyrdin—following in the wake of adopting Resolution 1244 ending the NATO air campaign against Serbia—the Russo–Western encounter manifested much more than a showdown between Chernomyrdin and Ivashov. Kosovo represented a showdown between visions of a Russian Self versus acknowledging the joint Russo–NATO occupation of Kosovo without trying to appropriate a separate Russian sector, which would be the same as indulging—or giving in—to the Western Other.

Unlike Kosovo, the inner dialogue preceding Russia’s military intervention in Ukraine was not personified. Whereas Chernomyrdin signed the Bonn Agreement, Putin’s envoy Vladimir Lukin refused to sign the EU-brokered agreement between then Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich and the protesters on February 21, 2014. In short, there was no official Russian representative upon whom the blame could be pinned for giving in to the Western Other when Yanukovich fled Kiev. Instead, the inner dialogue took place

among the deputies of the State Duma and Federation Council together with pundits and journalists. The Federation Council Speaker for United Russia, Valentina Matviyenko, was the most prominent and outspoken critic of intervention, while Leonid Slutsky from LPDR was to be counted among the warmest supporters of Russian intervention.

The inner dialogue before the intervention in Ukraine developed quite differently from the one preceding the intervention in Kosovo. First, there were no personal attacks because there was no clear personification of the different visions of the Russian Self. Second, inner dialogue was characterized by less polarized contestations and larger commonplaces in the inner dialogue about if and how Russia should intervene compared to Kosovo. Oppositional voices uttered criticism of eventual Russian intervention, pointing to the negative implications for international law pivoting the state sovereignty principle and Russian national economy, but—with the exception of Valentina Matviyenko—these objections and the alternative visions for the Russian Self with which they aligned were uttered by custodians who had temporarily belonged to the periphery of the Russian custodianship. In short—and unlike Kosovo—the inner dialogue preceding intervention in Ukraine was between custodians with quite asymmetrical voices in the polyphony of Russian voices about if and how to intervene.

The asymmetry was supported by state-owned television stations flooding the Russian media landscape with live reports from hotspots across Ukraine and Russian politicians visiting south-eastern Ukraine and Crimea. Oppositional voices primarily came from a variety of online Russian media outlets, *Radio Moskvyy*, and *Dozhd*. As the crisis unfolds, a joint effort between federal services (e.g., Roskomnadzor) and private enterprises (e.g., Red October) effectively censored and constrained the resources crucial to disseminate the narratives contesting the role that Official Russia ought to play in the tumultuous events unfolding in Ukraine and what vision of the Russian Self such intervention would entail in addition to the significant adverse impacts for the Russian economy and Russia's international status. Thus, the change of ownership and loyalty within the Russian media landscape between Kosovo and Ukraine significantly changed the resources and means available for the custodians to disseminate their respective visions for the Russian Self. Whereas the Russian media communicated a range of different voices in the inner dialogue about Kosovo, helping disseminate certain oppositional voices could result in major sanctions.

Third, the inner dialogue preceding the events in Ukraine was characterized by a more diverse field of custodians contributing with relatively fewer significant inputs prior to the invasion. Similar to Kosovo, however, senior Russian government representatives were mostly silent and refrained from

commenting directly on the discussion about if and how to intervene in Ukraine. Besides the entry of prominent Russian television personalities and journalists into the inner dialogue preceding Ukraine, a group of Russian political pundits were also present in the paradoxical question about if and how to intervene. On February 24, 2014, intellectual Yegor S. Kholmogorov wrote in *Komsomolskaya Pravda*:

If the Banderovites take Sevastopol before our very eyes and organize a slaughter there, and we stand by and watch, I am afraid that we ourselves will not be able to survive as a nation after such a betrayal. [...] there will be no forgiveness for us, neither from others, nor from ourselves.⁶²³

Utterances by independent pundits and intellectuals like Kholmogorov's appear less frequently and significantly in the polyphony of voices surrounding the inner dialogue about intervention in Kosovo.

In sum, perspectively contrasting the inner dialogues preceding intervention in Kosovo and Ukraine, four central differences become apparent: (I) Dialogue is less person-driven in Ukraine, (II) fewer significant contestations and larger commonplaces are present in Ukraine, (III) dialogue is between more asymmetrical voices in Ukraine, and (IV) the kind of custodians participating in inner dialogue are more diverse in Ukraine. Additionally, two central similarities become apparent when contrasting Ukraine and Kosovo. First, statements by Russian government representatives are few and surprisingly neutral before the intervention. Second, such utterances about if and how Official Russia should intervene in Kosovo and Ukraine are aligned with different visions for if and how an authentically Russian Self ought to do so.

In the next section, I contrast how the inner dialogues unfold during the military interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine together with the alignment between the actions by Official Russia and visions for the Russian Self.

Interventions

Russia intervened militarily in Kosovo on June 12, 1999, and in Ukraine on February 27, 2014. What had occurred up until the very point that Russian troops crossed the border into Kosovo and Ukraine had been subject to inner dialogue among the Russian custodians about *if* and *how* to intervene. Disregarding whether the individual members of the Russian custodianship interpreted intervention as a meaningful way of safeguarding Russia's ontological

⁶²³ "Time to save our own people in Ukraine," Yegor Kholmogorov, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, February 24, 2014.

security—and if experiencing a sense of ontological insecurity at all—intervention was a fact.

The inner dialogues following in the wake of the actions in Kosovo and Ukraine pivoted around the alignment between the official act of intervening militarily and the specific vision for the Russian Self and—further along those lines—whether these visions for the post-Soviet Russian Self were authentic or not in the eyes of the Russian custodianship.

The inner dialogues following intervention in Ukraine and Kosovo reveal interesting insights about the mutually constitutive relationship between foreign policy actions (policy of belonging), national identity (sense of belonging), and ontological security (authenticity of mutually constitutive relationship between policy and sense of belonging). Performing the expected foreign policy actions of a given “National Self” is not equivalent to the existence of a commonplace among custodians that the “Performing Self” is authentically representing what constitutes the “Meaningful Self.” In other words, whether the experienced “Intervening Russian Self” was authentically representing the envisioned Russian Self was not a priori given, but in the context of two episodes of Russo–Western encounters up for debate among the Russian custodianship.

Interesting similarities and particularities about the doubts entertained by Official Russia in relation to the decision to stand up and defend the existing Russian ontology from engulfment by the Western Other are elucidated when contrasting the Russian government’s initial reactions in the wake of intervention becoming a fact. In Kosovo, Foreign Minister Igor S. Ivanov immediately branded Russian troops crossing the border into Kosovo as a mistake that changed nothing in Russo–Western relations. In Ukraine, the Russian State Duma and Federation Council authorized the President to use the Russian Armed Forces in Ukraine on March 1, four days after the intervention; if necessary, that is.

Whereas the situation in Kosovo resembled the sense of instant remorse felt after someone has acted in a way strange to them, the lacking official response following the actual intervention on February 27 and the official authorization of an eventual intervention—carried out four days earlier—is Kafkaesque. Whereas the Russian government avoided taking responsibility for its military intervention in Ukraine until April 17 2014, Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Avdeyev elaborated on what might sound like Ivanov’s initial remorseful response post-intervention in Kosovo. In Kosovo—Avdeyev elaborated—Russia’s intervention was a military-backed reminder to the Western Other that if it did not acknowledge the equal great power role to which Russia was entitled, then Russia would simply act in accordance with the role it ought

to have unilaterally; that is, demonstrating its role to act independently by rebuking the Western Other.

With Russian troops occupying Slatina Airbase, it was up to the Western Other to deal with Official Russia by political or military means. On behalf of the Russian imagined community, the Russian government had taken a decision to act independently; and, hence, to stop being a mailman. On June 18, 1999, Russia and the USA concluded the Helsinki Summit with an agreement that settled the dispute over Kosovo. While the Helsinki Agreement did not differ noticeably from the one concluded in Bonn, one important difference from a Russian perspective was that the new agreement was concluded on “a more equal footing” and based on actions undertaken by an independent vision for the Russian Self. In short, from an ideational perspective, Official Russia increased its international status by placing it on a more equal footing with the Western Other (via an exclusive Russia–US Summit and better representation in G8) manifesting a positive outcome of an otherwise risky act. From an ontological perspective, the essential gain was that Russia had dared to looking itself in the eye and, for the first time, taken a stance by engaging the Western Other, clearly demonstrating its capacity to act independently and, in more than words, that Official Russia can make a difference in world politics. In short, Russian custodianship had proven to the world (Self-Other) and—more importantly—to itself (Self-Self) that the post-Soviet Russian Self was something authentic in its own right and existence.

In contrast to Ukraine—where Russian custodianship also took a stance by engaging in a conflict with the Western Other—the Russian government officially denied its role in the intervention until April 2014. Instead, the dialogue about whether the Intervening Russian Self authentically represented the Russian Self was discussed between a diverse group of journalists, State Duma and Federation Council Deputies, and pundits. Some of the most oppositional voices interpreted the intervention as a manifestation of pure tokenism jeopardizing the economic wellbeing and political freedom of ordinary Russians. They had been temporarily blinded by the Cold War revanchism and patriotism infused by Russian state-controlled media and the majority of its national politicians. To others, the Russian action was the most significant sign of redemption in terms of letting the Soviet Union collapse and of the promising future ahead.

The lack of acknowledgement from the Western Other testified to the greatness of the stance taken. Arguably more than ever before, the Russian intervention proved Official Russia as a truly independent great power. The lack of Western acceptance was the clearest evidence of the authenticity of the decision to intervene in Ukraine. Whereas the Western Other acknowledging

Russian great power status was interpreted as a positive outcome of the Kosovo crisis aligning with the increased sense of ontological security gained by taking a stance against the Western Other, in the setting of Ukraine, the absence of Western reaffirmation of Russia's status was interpreted as the clearest manifestation of an authentic vision of Russian Self successfully proceeding along its quest to reestablish its meaningful existence prior to the end of the Cold War; and with it, the "Soviet Self."

The expressed lack of interest in the Western Other reaffirming the Russian Self offers key testimony to a tipping point: from reconstructing the Russian Self *in spite of* the Western Other emerging during the intervention in Kosovo to reconstructing a Russian Self *in opposition to* the Western Other. Whereas the expressions of reaffirmation made by the Western Other align with an authentic Russian Self in Kosovo, alignment between the Western Other acknowledging the international status of the Russian Self and the ontological security—hence, authenticity—of the Russian Self is equivocal due to the shift in the vision for the reconstruction of the Russian Self in Ukraine. In short, because of the changing vision for the Russian Self, Russian custodianship interprets expressions of Western reaffirmation of Russian international status equivocally. Some interpret it Western reaffirmation as reassuring, while others interpret it as a potential threat against the ontological security of the Russian Self in the context of Ukraine.

Where the intervention in Kosovo was a game-changer, settling built-up tensions about what meaningfully constitutes the post-Soviet Russian Self, Russian intervention in Ukraine settled some issues while laying new seeds to contestations about what constitutes a meaningful vision for the Russian Self among a once-unified group of Russian nationalists. Here, my interpretation of the Ukraine crisis deviates from the interpretation in *Conflict in Ukraine* by Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer (2015), who conclude that the Ukraine crisis at the very least "represents a major detour from the course Russia has been on for the previous quarter century. At most, it is truly a turning point that marks the beginning of a protracted break with the West" (2015, p. 94). Similarly, Marlene Laruelle concluded that the Ukraine crisis was a "game changer" in the Russian "domestic landscape" (2016b, p. 55).

Regarding settlement, the intervention alienated those still giving voice to a vision for the rise of the Russian Self to greatness because of increased collaboration and integration with the Western Other. As regards the laying of seed to new contestations, the intervention gradually opened up for a whole range of potentially dissent-building issues between custodians subscribing to inward-looking and outward-looking nationalist visions for the Russian Self. In sum, the intervention in the Ukrainian encounter discloses a deepening nationalist schism looming from beneath the thin veneer of Russian patriotism

following in the wake of intervention; a schism that became more pronounced as the annexation of Crimea became a reality and the onward direction for the quest for realizing an ontologically secure vision for Russia moved forward.

Closures

The potential of the Russian government to become caught up in discussions between inward-looking and outward-looking Russian nationalists increased as annexation became a reality on March 18, 2014. Whereas the implications of the Kosovo crisis were contained by the Helsinki and G8 summits, the Russian intervention in February and annexation in March spilled over into active Russian support for Ukrainian separatists in Lugansk and Donetsk in April 2014.

Despite this key difference, a similar crystallization process took place after the two interventions. In Kosovo, skepticism was mainly expressed in terms of materialism. More precisely, Russian governors express dissatisfaction with prospects for cuts to the federal budget to finance the agreed-upon joint Russian–NATO peacekeeping mission. Echoing the Gromykin vision for the Russian Self, Viktor Chernomyrdin declared on June 25 that Russia had successfully demonstrated that “no problems must be solved without” them. In short, the new vision for the Russian Self intervening in Kosovo had not only successfully reaffirmed its status as an equal and independent great power and been fully acknowledged by the Western Other in an unprecedented televised statement by US President Bill Clinton, it also effectively settled the inner dialogue among the Russian custodianship. In short, the gap between the experienced and envisioned senses of the Russian Self was again successfully bridged and the security of a reconstructed ontology reestablished by the custodians refraining from questioning the revival of the post-Soviet Russian Self in spite of the Western Other.

In contrast to Kosovo, the euphoria and skepticism were both more pronounced in Ukraine, albeit not voiced as symmetrically. Skeptics argued that the vision of the Russian Self annexing Crimea was a relic of the Cold War period or even one that predated the Peace of Westphalia (1648), which established the principle of sovereignty. As shown in Chapter 4, the majority of reconstructed Russian voices considered the “Annexing Russian Self” as the preliminary culmination of the quest to become a truly independent, truly authentic Russia. Unlike Kosovo, the Western Other did not reaffirm Russia’s role as an equal great power, instead suspending Russian membership of the exclusive G8 club and imposing sanctions on individual Russians and their assets. As written above, this lack of Western reaffirmation actually *assured* more than *concerned* the majority in the Russian custodianship.

Together with widespread fear of future Russian interventions in Ukraine and the near abroad, the Western contempt reaffirmed the exclusivity of the membership of a small club of great powers to which Russia proved its membership; Russia now belonged to an exclusive club of states able and, more importantly, willing to use military force and not only occupy but annex the territory of a neighboring state, the first country to do so in the 21st century. This reorientation of what is status-giving and its alignment with what constitutes a source of ontological security, cherishing the membership of this exclusive club stands in stark contrast to the reaffirmation of Russia's great power status, which Official Russia sought less than a month earlier with the Sochi Winter Olympics. In short, whereas the Western reaffirmation of Russian status—besides safeguarding ontological security—was a desired outcome of Kosovo, the Western contempt was interpreted as a key manifestation of Official Russia finally acting truly authentically for the first time since the end of the Cold War. Russia was redeeming itself for its unauthentic behavior while under the domination of the liberal Western Other during the 1990s.

However, whether this redemption was sufficient—and to what extent continued Russian salvation was to be found within or beyond the formal borders of the Russian Federation—was a discussion gaining momentum following the annexation of Crimea and has continued until the present day. The incomplete bridge of the nationalist divide illustrates two key findings. First, and unlike Kosovo, Ukraine did not cement a clearly unanimous pathway for the Russian Self. The divide among the inward-looking and outward-looking Russian nationalist factions became more pronounced as the question about Russian support to pro-Russian separatists in Donetsk and Lugansk became more pressing throughout March and April 2014.

Second, and interconnected, the Russian nationalists were contesting what meaningfully constitutes the Russian Self in the wake of the annexation. The outward-looking faction called for further interventions and annexations. While President Vladimir Putin's government had taken a step in the direction of a more authentic Russia, more needed to be done. Outward-looking nationalists called for increased support, including military support, to Russian compatriots throughout the post-Soviet area. Aleksandr Dugin has been among the most elaborate Russian voices for such outward-looking vision. In May 2014, he published *Putin against Putin*, complementing Putin for taking a step in the right direction but at the same time urging him to do more.

The inward-looking Russian nationalist faction agreed that intervention and the annexation of Crimea would correct a historical mistake, but they discouraged further interventions and annexations. Such foreign political behavior would come at the cost of planned improvements to the standard of living enjoyed by the ethnic Russians living in Russia and potentially complicate the

existing ethno-religious cleavages within the Russian Federation. The considerable Muslim minority living in Russia could become particularly agitated by Russian interventions in areas populated by Muslims. Inward-looking Russian nationalists became increasingly vocal with their frustrations over Russian state spending on sympathizers abroad at the expense of Russians living in Russia. For instance, under the banners of the *Natsdem*⁶²⁴ movement, Aleksey Navalny attacked the Russian government for its interventionist foreign policy, which compromised the economic and democratic well-being of ordinary Russians.⁶²⁵ Echoing the sentiment of Soviet era dissidents (e.g., Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's thoughts on the Russian nation in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union⁶²⁶), Navalny employed a seemingly contradictory mix of national-democracy to argue for the revival of Russian Greatness from within and in the shape of a Russian nation-state. Outward-looking nationalists like Dugin, Aleksandr Prokhanov, and Sergey Glazyev—Navalny argued—were not proponents of a *Russian* revival (in the ethnic sense of *ruskiy*) but rather an *imperial* revival, calling for a “Eurasian revolution” and interventionism. With their outward-looking visions, these people were more *Soviet* than authentically *Russian* patriots (Laruelle, 2014, pp. 279 & 285).

Both before and after the intervention in Ukraine, Navalny frequently criticized Putin's government—alongside outward-looking Russian nationalists—for wasting public Russian funds on what he perceived to be diversionary wars and interventions in Russia's near abroad and Syria.⁶²⁷ Under the pretext of a responsibility to protect the Russian diaspora and a desire to play a grandiose role—that Russia cannot afford—against the Western Other on the world stage, the economic and political well-being of Russians was jeopardized at

⁶²⁴ Russian acronym for “nationalist-democratic.”

⁶²⁵ “For Navalny, Foreign and Domestic Policy Are One,” *Carnegie Moscow Center*, Maximilian Hess & Lincoln Pigman, May 21, 2018: <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/76403> (accessed June 8, 2018).

⁶²⁶ In *Rebuilding Russia* (1991) and *The Russian Question* (1995), Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn argued that the only viable pathway for post-Soviet Russia was to once and for all part with the burdensome imperial legacy and exclusively focus on the spiritual revival of Russia within the existing borders of the Russian Federation. With the exception of Crimea—which Solzhenitsyn considered a legitimate part of Russia—post-Soviet Russia had to break with the traditional interventionistic mechanism, which had historically undermined such spiritual recovery of the Russian nation.

⁶²⁷ “Navalny Wouldn't Return Crimea, Considers Immigration Bigger Issue Than Ukraine,” *The Moscow Times*, Anna Dolgov, October 16, 2014: <https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/navalny-wouldnt-return-crimea-considers-immigration-bigger-issue-than-ukraine-40477> (accessed June 7, 2018).

home. The Russian taxpayers were paying to maintain the so-called “Frozen Conflicts” in the post-Soviet area, to subsidize breakaway republics, to cancel debts owed by developing states and allies, and to actively sponsor separatist fighting in Eastern Ukraine. The negative consequences of Putin’s disruptive foreign policy were severe enough in the short term, but in the long term the outward-looking visions would only further isolate Official Russia internationally and intensify the vicious circle that was leading to complete economic and political collapse while diverting attention away from making prosperous bilateral and multilateral trade agreements with markets in the developing world and the West (Patalakh, 2018, pp. 18-19).

Navalny dismisses the existence of an alleged Western conspiracy against Russia, which served as the pretext for undertaking domestic and foreign policies that served the interests of corrupt politicians in the Kremlin. However, this does not imply that Russia should become like the West. Navalny supports the creation of a strong Russian nation-state. While in favor of Eurasian integration for economic and cultural reasons, Navalny strongly supports abolishing the existing agreements granting citizens from former Soviet republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus the right to enter Russia without a visa; such visa-free regimes should only apply to citizens from Ukraine and Belarus (Patalakh, 2018, p. 17). The context of this critical stance on the further integration of the near abroad is the strong stance against immigration that Navalny has taken alongside other Russian anti-immigrant movements. In sum, Navalny criticizes the outward-looking nationalists for promoting an inauthentic vision for the Russian Self, because it directs resources away from revival from within and compromises the well-being of the ethnic Russians actually living in the Russian Federation. Russian foreign policy should therefore support the domestically driven revival of Russian greatness—not the other way around.

In sum, Putin’s government found itself in an awkwardly locked and divided position between outward-looking and inward-looking Russian nationalists after intervening militarily in Ukraine. Further complicating the political implications of the nationalist schism emerging in the wake of Ukraine, the nationalist divide also mirrors the disagreement among ministers and advisers within the Kremlin who allegedly differed on the strategy in Ukraine and the visions for the Russian Self. While the Kremlin “war party” favored full support to the separatists and denied negotiating a ceasefire, the competing subgroup denoted as the “corporate” had less radical goals. To make the deci-

sion-making context even more complicated, the individual “war party” hardliners favored different local commanders and separatist militias in Eastern Ukraine.⁶²⁸

If Putin sides with the outward-looking vision, inward-looking nationalists would hold Putin accountable for the political and economic consequences. If Putin sides with the inward-looking nationalists and abstained from supporting Ukrainian separatist movements in Eastern Ukraine and Russian compatriots in Transnistria, outward-looking nationalists would call Putin out as a hypocrite preaching responsibility to protect Russian compatriots and then refusing to come to the rescue when push comes to shove. If Putin decides to reset his relations with the Western Other (e.g., giving major concessions in the continued disputes in Ukraine or Syria) both inward-looking and outward-looking nationalists would instantaneously begin undermining Putin’s political legitimacy by pointing to the lack of authenticity in his representation of Official Russia to the Western Other. Making a grand bargain over Ukraine and Syria with the Western Other would make Putin appear weak, hypocritical, and wrong in carrying out the foreign policy it predates. A Russian reset would help reconstruct the deteriorating Russian status and economy, but potentially also infuse new senses of ontological insecurity with respect to the discrepancy between how the Russian government represented its Self outwardly and how Russian voices envisioned the Russian Self after intervention and annexation. In other words, below the euphoria sweeping across Russia in the week following Putin’s annexation speech, Putin’s government found itself in an extremely delicate situation on March 25, 2014. Together with the Western Other, the divided Russian nationalists carefully watch Putin’s next step. What would it be: Reset, inward-looking or outward-looking foreign policy?

A preliminary answer from the Russian government came in April 2014, when Russia began supporting separatist endeavors in southeastern Ukraine; an answer leaning toward an outward-looking foreign policy. Throughout April, Russian Spetsnaz began actively, yet covertly, supporting pro-Russian separatists in Donetsk and Lugansk. On April 7 and 27, respectively, the People’s Republic of Donetsk and Lugansk were established. On May 22, the People’s Republics declared independence from Ukraine and joined forces under the confederate banner of Novorossiia.

However, the Kremlin’s response to the events unfolding in East Ukraine was more ambiguous than Spetsnaz’ support otherwise suggests. On April 17,

⁶²⁸ “Are the Kremlin Hardliners Winning?,” *Institute of Modern Russia*, Donald N. Jensen, October 1, 2014: <https://imrussia.org/en/analysis/world/2041-are-the-kremlin-hardliners-winning> (accessed May 30, 2018).

Putin publicly began denoting the disputed part of southeastern Ukraine, Novorossiia. Something outward-looking nationalists (e.g., like Dugin) would interpret as the Kremlin's go-ahead for enhanced separatism. On May 6, however, the Kremlin slammed on the brakes by publicly requesting that the political leaders of the People's Republics postpone the referendums about independence from Ukraine—hence, the call for annexation by Russia—planned for May 11.⁶²⁹ The planned referendums were held according to plan, but Russia's annexation of Novorossiia failed to materialize. Putin's request and the annexation which subsequently did not occur are testimony to the persistent hesitance among the members of the Kremlin about siding with outward-looking nationalist visions and policies. In short, the military support for separatism in southeastern Ukraine signals a Kremlin leaning toward an outward-looking nationalist vision while requesting the postponement of status referendums and the unwillingness to annex Novorossiia indicate hesitance regarding the consequences of distancing the Russian government from the agenda of inward-looking Russian nationalists.

Aside from a few notable exceptions, the concept of Novorossiia was completely absent in official Russian narratives by June 2014.^{630,631} One year after the official establishment, even pro-Russian separatist leaders conceded that Novorossiia would not materialize but rather that it would remain a geopolitical imaginary (O'Loughlin et al., 2017, p. 131). From May 2014, the Kremlin did not merely refrain from mentioning Novorossiia publicly, but was also encouraging the Ukrainian separatists to accept a ceasefire.

Within Russia, the firing of Dugin from Lomonosov Moscow State University (LMSU) on June 27, 2014, was yet another indication of the Kremlin's seemingly lackluster support for outwards-looking nationalist visions for the

⁶²⁹ "Press statements and replies to journalists' questions," *The Kremlin*, May 7, 2014: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/20973> (accessed June 6, 2018).

⁶³⁰ John O'Loughlin et al. convincingly trace the short-lived revival of Novorossiia as a term normally associated with historical documents and Russian history books, which moved to the scene of high-politics in the spring of 2014 until its disappearance by June 2014 (2017).

⁶³¹ Two notable exceptions of the official use of Novorossiia in 2014 include August 29, where the Kremlin issued a statement entitled "President of Russia Vladimir Putin addressed Novorossiia militia" (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/46506>, accessed June 6, 2018) and October, where Putin used the term when answering a question from Neil Buckley from the *Financial Times* ("Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club," *The Kremlin*, October 24, 2014: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/46860>, accessed June 6, 2018).

Russian Self.⁶³² According to Dugin, the firing was politically motivated and a result of his support for Novorossiia. Dugin cited the official notice he received on VKontakte,⁶³³ saying that LMSU was “a place for science, not politics, and Dugin has become too involved in politics.”⁶³⁴ The fact that President Putin was chair of the Supervisor Council of LMSU made the matter even more sensational. Commenting on rumors that Putin had personally approved of—or even ordered—the firing, Dugin wrote that all his statements were “in harmony with what Putin has said about the Russian World,” but, as Dugin argued in *Putin against Putin*, Putin embodied two identities: “the patriotic, heroic (solar) and the one inclined toward liberalism and compromises of the West (lunar).”⁶³⁵ In July, Dugin publicly announced that if Putin did not begin actively backing the Russian compatriots in southeastern Ukraine, Putin—whom he had personally convinced to join the ranks when invoking Novorossiia publicly for the first time during the 2014 “Direct Line”—would not only let compatriots who counted on his support down, but himself “be done.”⁶³⁶

Dugin was but one of several examples of the array of ambivalent relations between the Kremlin and the Eurasianists after the annexation of Crimea. Another prominent example is former GRU and FSB officer Igor “Strelkov” Girkin, known for leading the separatist takeover of the Ukrainian town of Slavyansk on April 12, 2014, and later becoming the first defense minister of the Donetsk People’s Republic. In August 2014, Strelkov left eastern Ukraine. After returning to Russia, Strelkov, along with most of the members of the liberal opposition, like Boris Nemtsov and oppositional nationalists like Aleksey Navalny, was put on the unofficial “stop list” of those who cannot be given airtime in Russian media.

⁶³² According to the LMSU press service, Aleksandr Dugin’s contract was not terminated.

⁶³³ VKontakte is the Russian equivalent of Facebook.

⁶³⁴ “Euromaidan Press’ spring fundraising campaign has been reached! Thank you for your support. Putin’s ideologist, chauvinist philosopher Dugin fired from work,” *Euromaidan Press*, June 28, 2014: <http://euromaidanpress.com/2014/06/28/putins-ideologist-chauvinist-philosopher-dugin-fired-from-work/> (accessed May 29, 2018).

⁶³⁵ “Russia This Week: Dugin Dismissed from Moscow State University?,” *The Interpreter*, Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, June 27, 2014: <http://www.interpretermag.com/russia-this-week-what-will-be-twitlers-fate-in-russia/> (assessed May 29, 2018).

⁶³⁶ “Russian Nationalists Feel Let Down by Kremlin, Again,” *The Wall Street Journal Online*, Paul Sonne, July 4, 2014: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/russian-nationalists-feel-let-down-by-kremlin-again-1404510139> (assessed May 29, 2018).

Prior to Strelkov leaving the separatist-held territories, the Putin government came under public criticism for only offering lackluster support—particularly a lack of heavy arms—for the separatist compatriots advancing in Ukraine. Discussion among Russian nationalists and Eurasianists intensified after the separatists lost Slavyansk to Ukrainian Armed Forces in early July 2014. Eduard Bagirov, a former Putin campaign manager, and ultranationalist theater director Sergey Kurginyan accused Strelkov of not fighting for Russia but rather a vision of outward-looking Russian ultranationalists and being a self-minded coward. Bagirov noted that “Russia is more primary than Donbass [...] Donbass is not our Russian Crimea [...] we are not at all obliged to fight there.”⁶³⁷

Other Russian voices defended Strelkov, including Yegor Prosvirnin, who suggested on public Russian television that Strelkov would be a better presidential candidate than Navalny or Boris Nemtsov. While not agreeing with the suitability of Strelkov, Nemtsov replied that when Strelkov would return together with other fighting outward-looking Russian nationalists, they would “return very angry, since [...] Putin has betrayed them.”⁶³⁸

Dugin concluded that the character assassination of Strelkov, like that which he had undergone himself, was organized by Vladislav Surkov; a key figure in Putin’s administration. Allegedly, Surkov had systematically undermined the increasingly popular outward-looking visions for the Russian Self in order to settle an agreement with the West turning separatist eastern Ukrainian territory into something like Transnistria. Thus, Strelkov and Dugin needed to have their wings clipped to avoid exciting pro-Russian separatists abroad and outward-looking Russians domestically to strive for something more radical than an “independent Novorossiia, friendly and loyal” to Russia, Russian journalist Evgeny Gilbo wrote.⁶³⁹

Similar to Dugin’s interpretation of his 2014 firing, Strelkov concluded in a 2016 personal interview to *The Guardian* that he became an

inconvenient figure for them [Kremlin]: am I a hero or a terrorist? They can’t arrest and jail me because it would be seen as bowing to the west [, but] to give me honours is also inconvenient for them, so I’m in this strange gap.⁶⁴⁰

⁶³⁷ “Russia This Week: ‘If Putin Sends in Troops,’” *The Interpreter*, Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, July 12, 2014: <http://www.interpretermag.com/russia-this-week-novorossiia-supporters-in-moscow-denounce-strelkov/> (accessed October 14, 2018).

⁶³⁸ Ibid.

⁶³⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁰ “Russia’s ‘valiant hero’ in Ukraine turns his fire on Vladimir Putin,” *The Guardian*, Shaun Walker, June 5, 2016: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/>

A week before the *Guardian* interview, Strelkov held the first party congress of the Russian National Movement on May 28, 2016. The movement intended to

unite the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus and other historic Russian lands into a single all-Russian superstate and transform the entire territory of the former Soviet Union into an unconditional Russian sphere of influence.⁶⁴¹

According to Strelkov's press officer, the movement is in opposition to the Kremlin's "too lenient, liberal and Western-influenced" vision for Russia.⁶⁴²

In sum, what started as a joint effort between various groupings of Russian nationalists, pundits, journalists, and politicians—founded on the common ground laid by the NATO air campaign against Serbia in 1999—fractured into infighting as a new dilemma was imposed on the Russian Self after the 2014 annexation: If and how should Russia intervene in southeastern Ukraine? Importantly, this dilemma is not imposed on Russian custodianship by the Western Other, but rather by proponents of inward-looking and outward-looking visions for the Russian Self. More speculatively, I elaborate on the implications of this new dilemma for Russia's onward quest for ontological security after March 25, 2014 in the Epilogue.

Conclusion

Perspectively contrasting how senses of ontological insecurity render Russian interventions meaningful and how processes of reconstructing the Russian Self proceeded across Russo–Western encounter, intervention, and closure, partial insights about configurational similarities and particularities central to deepening the understanding and explanation of specific processes and outcomes to military interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine are elucidated.

Besides an apparent lack of material concerns regarding Russian survival—in terms of economic and physical well-being—contrasting Kosovo with Ukraine reveals three key similarities. First, ontological security concerns figure significantly in the inner Russian dialogue preceding both interventions.

[jun/05/russias-valiant-hero-in-ukraine-turns-his-fire-on-vladimir-putin](http://www.guardian.com/world/2016/jun/05/russias-valiant-hero-in-ukraine-turns-his-fire-on-vladimir-putin) (accessed May 30, 2018).

⁶⁴¹ "Ex-Separatist Leader Launches Party Aimed at Restoring Russia's Empire," *Georgia Today*, Nicholas Waller, June 2 2016: <https://web.archive.org/web/20160602041435/http://georgiatoday.ge/news/3927/Ex-Separatist-Leader-Launches-Party-Aimed-at-Restoring-Russia%E2%80%99s-Empire> (accessed May 30, 2018).

⁶⁴² Ibid.

Evidence of the anxiety caused by the existential consequences of Official Russia failing to dare to stand up to the Western Other and authentically maintain and augment an independent Russian Self are particularly explicitly manifest in utterances made by General Leonid Ivashov and Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Avdeyev in Kosovo and nationalist intellectual Yegor S. Kholmogorov and Director of the Progressive Politics Foundation Oleg Bondarenko in Ukraine.

Second, senior Russian government representatives are surprisingly silent in the phase preceding both interventions. The Russian government does not immediately embrace the military intervention immediately in either case. Among other alternative material and ideational concerns, this is evidence of the doubt in the Self associated with daring to take a potentially faithful stance encountering an “Other.”

Third, the ideal vision for the reconstruction of the Russian Self gradually changes across the two episodes. Kosovo represents the most significant tipping point from reconstructing the Russian Self along the lines of revival of greatness *because of to in spite of* the Western Other, whereas the change from *in spite of to in opposition to* the Western Other in connection to Ukraine represents an in-group tipping point between inward-looking and outward-looking nationalist Russian custodians. The nationalist custodians operate from a fundamental ontological premise of Russian distinctiveness incompatible with the lifeworld of Western Other, without necessarily implying an antagonistic relation.

Contrasting Kosovo and Ukraine elucidates four key particularities. First, the Russian custodianship is more diverse in the Ukrainian episode. Additionally, a new group of Russian journalists and pundits participate in the inner dialogue before, during, and after the intervention in Ukraine.

Second, an increasingly asymmetrical polyphony of Russian voices characterizes the reconstructed inner Russian dialogue in Ukraine. A more uneven distribution of means and resources to disseminate oppositional voices—and, hence, influence—the inner dialogue about what constitutes a meaningful Russian Self.

Third, whereas the Western reaffirmation of Russia’s international status aligns with a vision for the authentic Russian Self held by the majority of the custodianship in the context of Kosovo, alignment between Western reaffirmation and the vision for the Russian Self develop ambiguously toward reaffirmation becoming a source of concern for ontological security in Ukraine.

Fourth, unlike Kosovo, which settled a fundamental paradox regarding the reconstruction of the Russian Self—in favor of non-liberal voices arguing along the lines of *in spite of* the Western Other—Ukraine disclosed a nationalist schism lurking beneath the thin veneer of Russian patriotism covering

fundamentally different inward-looking and outward-looking nationalist visions for the Russian Self. Thus, contestations about what constitutes a meaningful post-Soviet sense of Russian Self are present in Ukraine. Unlike Kosovo, however, the commonplaces among the Russian custodians are more fundamental. The contestations in Kosovo were between custodians arguing for Russian revival *because of* and *in spite of* the Western Other, whereas the central contestations in Ukraine were between custodians who fundamentally agree that the Russian Self is distinctively different from the Western Other. In short, the crossroads facing the Russian Self elucidated in Ukraine were between visions of post-Soviet revival departing from within versus beyond the Russian Federation's existing borders.

Conclusion

This chapter marks the end of my quest to enhance our knowledge about how the mutually constitutive relationship between the senses of belonging and foreign policy of belonging to the “Russian Self” unfolded in the context of the “Official Russian” military intervention in the Kosovo and Ukraine crises; a mutually constitutive relation I argue benefits from being interpreted from the perspective of a fundamental Russian quest for ontological security. This quest commenced with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and along with it the dissolution of the “Soviet Self” together with “Official Soviet” foreign policy.

The Conclusion consists of three main parts. The first part chronologically addresses each of the three key research questions motivating my inquiry in relation to the Russian decision to militarily intervene in Russo–Western encounters over Kosovo and Ukraine. In the second part, I present what I believe to be the most significant substantial, theoretical, and methodical contributions to take away from my inquiry. Based on the implications of how I conducted—or, in hindsight, ought to have conducted—my inquiry, I recommend some promising avenues for future research and foreign policy in the final part of the Conclusion.

When assessing the contributions and implications offered by any piece of research, its relative scientific quality is obviously crucial. A quick review of scholarly works on social science methods discussing what defines scientific value—in relation to their specific methodological and methodical commitments—reveals that relevant implications and novel contributions to a specific scientific and/or wider audience are key components (e.g., Beach & Pedersen, 2016; Flyvbjerg, 2001; George & Bennett, 2005; Goertz & Mahoney, 2012; King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994). The articulation of what defines scientific value is probably most explicit in Gary King et al., who elevate “real world importance,” understood as “understanding and predicting events that might be harmful or beneficial” to many people, and “*specific contribution to an identifiable scholarly literature*” as universal determinants of scientific value (1994, p. 15).

Besides using the novelty of the contributions and implications coming out of this dissertation research to assess its scientific value to society and scholarly communities, the contributions and implications are also critical to warrant the scientific validity of the knowledge claims produced here. Recapping my methodological commitment to analyticism in the Introduction, it is the assessment of the *usefulness* of my analytical narrative that warrants the scientific validity of my knowledge claims (P. T. Jackson, 2016, p. 219).

Answers

This inquiry was conducted with three key research questions in mind. Adopting my retranslated ontological perspective, I asked:

- (I) How do ontological security concerns render military intervention a meaningful Russian response to the Russo–Western encounter in Kosovo and Ukraine?
- (II) How was the Russian Self reconstructed before, during, and after intervention?
- (III) How was the reconstructed Russian Self subsequently translated into Official Russian foreign policy?

Respectively, each of the key research questions mirrors the threefold motivation and aim of writing this dissertation. First, enhancing our existing knowledge about how puzzling risky and counterproductive Russian decisions to militarily intervene became meaningful in two specific episodes of post-Soviet Russo–Western encounters. I argue that a retranslated ontological security perspective supplements the existing material and ideational perspectives with an overseen Self–Self dimension of security, which adds a meaning-seeking logic elucidating novel insights about how puzzling Russian foreign policy actions became meaningful from a domestic Russian perspective.

Second, and given the theoretical assumption of the mutually constitutive relation between national identity and foreign policy, I wanted to examine how the custodians, realizing that an envisioned sense of Russian Self was threatened by experienced actions by the “Western Other,” provoke a reconstruction processes of the Russian Self before, during, and after military intervention. I argued that the two encounters between the existing Russian Self and Western Other imposed a fundamental existential dilemma on Russian custodianship that challenged the existing contestations and commonplaces between different visions of what constitutes the authentic post-Soviet Russian Self. The two episodes of Russo–Western encounters simultaneously manifest both breakdown and breakthrough for, respectively, existing and novel visions of what defines a meaningful vision for the post-Soviet Russian Self.

Third, I wanted to investigate the remaining part of the mutually constitutive relation between national identity and foreign policy; and, hence, how the reconstructed Russian Self was subsequently translated into the foreign policy of Official Russia after the two interventions. I argued that the change of vision from the revival of post-Soviet Russian Self from *because of* to *in spite of* the Western Other in Kosovo and from *in spite of* to *in opposition to* the Western

Other in Ukraine translated into, respectively, the introduction and continuation of an Official Russian *disruptive foreign policy strategy*. Disruptive foreign policy is a second best strategy, which in response to a lack of alternative Russian foreign policy visions and goals aims at ideally preventing “Foreign Others” (here, the Western Other) from realizing theirs.

In the following three sections, I answer the three research questions in greater detail and summarize the main findings before turning to the contributions and implications hereof in the remaining part of the Conclusion.

Rendering military intervention meaningful

How did ontological security concerns render military intervention meaningful in the respective Russian responses to the Russo–Western encounters over Kosovo and Ukraine? Against the traumatic collective experience resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union—and along with it the Soviet Self—and the chaotic political, economic, and institutional upheaval following in the wake of the collapse, the Russo–Western encounters in Kosovo and Ukraine imposed fundamental existential dilemmas on the Russian custodianship. Realizing that the existing and envisioned senses of Russian Self were contested by dilemmas, a heightened sense of ontological insecurity is observable prior to the military interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine. In both cases, a heightened sense of ontological insecurity manifest itself empirically in the inner dialogue among different Russian voices contesting the authenticity of the Russian Self if deciding to or refraining from unilaterally intervening. Concrete contestations of the authenticity of the Official Russian foreign political actions mirror different visions of what constitutes a meaningful Russian Self.

In the context of intervention in Kosovo, the inner dialogue about if and how to intervene was initiated with the public showdown between Viktor Chernomyrdin and Leonid Ivashov on June 3, 1999. At the press briefing, Ivashov contested the Bonn Agreement, which had been negotiated by Chernomyrdin, as an authentic foreign political representation of the Russian Self. The questions raised here regarding the authenticity of the Bonn Agreement quickly spread to the State Duma and proliferated throughout the Russian media. This proliferation accelerated after the closed-doors hearing held in the State Duma on June 4, where Ivashov and Aleksandr Avdeyev both testified. After the State Duma hearing, the accusations leveled against Chernomyrdin and the vision for the Russian Self he represented increased. On June 7, Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov left for renegotiations in Cologne with Ivashov, but without Chernomyrdin. Although Resolution 1244 was adopted on June 10 in the UN Security Council, thereby putting an end to the NATO air campaign against Serbia, Chernomyrdin and his allies were unable to call a halt to voices

like Ivashov, Avdeyev, and Communist Party Leader Gennady Zyuganov who were calling for Russia to find the courage to stand up to the Western Other with military force, as envisioned by an authentic representation of the Russian Self. Thus, the sense of ontological insecurity felt among the Russian General Staff, some civil servants within the Defense and Foreign Ministries, and nationalist political opposition rendered the military intervention on June 12 meaningful despite the expected ideational and material adverse impacts.

In the context of the intervention in Ukraine, the inner dialogue about if and how to intervene started with the Kharkiv Congress on February 22, 2014. If the congress of deputies from southeastern Ukraine voted for splitting Ukraine, all eyes would be on Russia's next move. Once again, the Russian custodianship was presented with a central existential dilemma, which was about if at all and if so which kind of intervention in Ukraine would authentically align with the vision of the post-Soviet Russian Self. Despite the decision at the Kharkiv Congress to keep Ukraine unified, the inner Russian dialogue intensified on February 23, when the Rada voted to abolish the Ukrainian Language Law. While this was immediately vetoed, the result of the vote influenced the dialogue between a diverse group of nationalist and non-nationalist politicians, pundits, and journalists who were discussing if and how Russia should intervene in Ukraine and what doing so would imply for the Russian Self's continued quest for ontological security. Examples of the most vocal voices in favor of intervening are Leonid Slutsky, Yegor S. Kholmogorov, and Sergey Brilev, whereas Valentina Matviyenko figures prominently among the voices opposing intervention.

The combination of the 1993 Constitutional Crisis, the Kosovo precedent, and the series of Russian protests from 2011–2013 prepared the ground for anxieties regarding the consequences of the diffusion of Ukrainian unrest into Russia and failing to prevent alleged purges and cleansings targeting Russian compatriots in Ukraine gradually rendered unilateral Russian intervention increasingly meaningful; meaningful, despite the expected material and ideational costs in terms of economic well-being and international status.

However, this does not imply the absence of material and ideational concerns. On the contrary, both adverse impacts on the international status and national economy caused by, respectively, a violation of state sovereignty and international isolation are elaborately discussed throughout the source material. Contemporary inner Russian dialogue is characterized by ontological concerns taking precedence over material and ideational ones. In short, the inner dialogue is characterized by the line of thinking that the importance of material well-being and international status are contingent on the existence of a secure Russian Self.

Perspectively contrasting Kosovo and Ukraine elucidates interesting similarities and particularities between the senses of ontological security between the two episodes of post-Soviet Russo–Western encounters. Whereas a heightened sense of ontological insecurity is observable before the intervention in Kosovo and even more explicitly in Ukraine, the sense of ontological insecurity is more personified in Kosovo than Ukraine. Whereas Chernomyrdin and Ivashov represented two distinct visions of the authentic Russian Self, a more diverse group of Russian custodians presented their individual visions of the Russian Self and the senses of ontological insecurity with which the respective visions aligned.

Reconstructing the “Russian Self”

How was the Russian Self reconstructed before, during, and after the interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine? In short, the Russian Self was gradually reconstructed along visions seeing its revival *because to in spite of* Western Other before in contrast to after Russia militarily intervened in Kosovo. In the case of Ukraine, the revival of the authentic Russian Self went from being *in spite of* to *in opposition to* the Western Other across the span of military intervention. In both Kosovo and Ukraine, the notion of reviving post-Soviet Russian greatness was not in question; that which was in question was what defines greatness and the pathway toward realizing such.

Ivashov questioned both the Bonn Agreement brokered by Chernomyrdin and the authenticity of the vision for the Russian Self that the brokered agreement represents. Questioning the Bonn Agreement, Ivashov triggered the emergence of an otherwise latent dialogue about what meaningfully defines the Russian Self and how to realize this vision of a “National Self.” Chernomyrdin personified a vision for the Russian Self, the realization of which posits further integration with the Western Other through constructive engagements with its fundamental multilateral institutions—in the case of Kosovo, primarily NATO—and developing bilateral ties to the central stakeholders—the USA, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany—in the imagined community constituting the Western Other. Ivashov personified a vision for the Russian Self the realization of which was preconditioned by Official Russia daring to stand up to the Western Other, independently developing and implementing a vision for the Russian Self departing from ideas and values distinguishably different from (but not necessarily in opposition to) those of the Western Other. Further integration into the sphere of the Western Other might prove the fastest path to improving the international status of Official Russia and the significantly increased economic well-being of the members of the imagined Russian community, but these gains would occur at the expense of the authenticity

of the Russian Self. Disregarding how much the Russian Self is ready to sell out to become an equal member of the community of Western Others, neither the Russian Self nor Official Russia will ever be acknowledge or treated as an equal on the premise of its distinctly different core ideas and values. Thus, the Russian Self must dare to stand up to the Western Other and realize that an authentic revival of post-Soviet greatness runs along a vision of not *because of* but *in spite of* the Western Other. Echoing Soviet Foreign Minister Andrey A. Gromyko, Ivashov's vision prescribes that the Russian custodianship and Western Other must acknowledge that "no problem relating to world politics can be solved" without Russia.

Significant tilting points toward the reconstruction of the Russian Self in the context before, during, and after the military intervention in Kosovo are, respectively, constituted by Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov leaving for renegotiations with the Western Other in Cologne without Chernomyrdin on June 7, the Western reaffirmation of the "Intervening Russian Self" in the form of a new agreement at the Helsinki Summit on June 18, and (after intervention) Chernomyrdin endorsing Ivashov's vision for the Russian Self as a country "no problems must be solved without."

As the inner Russian dialogue proceeded from before to after Official Russia militarily intervened in Ukraine, the reconstruction of the Russian Self gradually changed from the aforementioned pathway envisioning the revival of post-Soviet greatness *in spite of* the Western Other to *in opposition to* the Western Other. The most significant and novel change from the earlier envisioned Russian Self is that its revival necessarily will proceed along a path to ontological security, encountering an opposing Western Other that is actively trying to contain and engulf it. Essentially, the events in Ukraine were orchestrated by the Western Other to destabilize the Russian near abroad sufficiently to allow this political and economic dissatisfaction to spread within the Russian formal borders. With the Kosovo precedent in fresh memory, the events in Ukraine were understood in the light of the existing narrative regarding the Western Other's alleged Balkanization grand strategy to maintain a weak Official Russia and disrupt the development toward an ontologically secure Russian Self by destabilizing the near abroad by particularly covert means.

Particularly significant to the emergence of the Russian Self reconstructed along a pathway *in opposition to* the Western Other (before the intervention) was the Rada's vote on February 23, 2014, to abolish the 2012 Language Law allowing Russian-speaking minorities the right to speak and write in Russian in official matters with Ukrainian authorities. During the intervention, a mix of Russian pundits and journalists spread two interconnected narratives about, first, the Russian responsibility to save its compatriots in immediate danger from purges and cleansings by Maidan putschists in Kiev supported by

the Western Other, combined with, second, the discovery of a promising pathway toward the authentic Russian Self located beyond Russia's formal borders that could be realized when intervening to protect compatriots in Ukraine.

Whether the pathway to an authentic Russian Self was envisioned beyond or within the confines of its existing borders manifest a key contestation between the inward-looking and outward-looking Russian nationalist factions elucidated by the military intervention in Ukraine. Importantly, the contestation takes place between non-liberal Russian custodians. The revival of the authentic post-Soviet Russian Self depends on distinctively Russian ideas and values. Moreover, whereas the outward-looking nationalist custodians agree that the revival of the Russian Self is in opposition to the Western Other—representing a distinctly different civilization than that which the Russian Self ought to align with—the inward-looking custodians are not necessarily envisioning Russo–Western relations antagonistically.

For instance (and contrary to outward-looking nationalist custodian Aleksandr Dugin), Aleksey Navalny supports an inward-looking vision for the Russian Self based on distinctly different ideas and values than those of the Western Other, but does not necessarily imply an antagonistic Russo–Western relation. Central to his vision is the concentration of resources to post-Soviet revival from within, which means to stop diverting resources to an increasingly disruptive Official Russian foreign policy undermining his inward-looking vision.

The introduction of Western sanctions combined with Vladimir Putin's annexation speech on March 18 and the suspension of Russian G8 membership reaffirmed the shift toward a vision for a reconstruction of the Russian Self in opposition to the Western Other. Sanctions associated with uttering oppositional voices in the inner Russian dialogue—primarily about ideational and material adverse impacts, respectively, caused by Russian international status due to the breach of the state sovereignty principle and national economy caused by sanctions isolating Russia—increased with Putin publicly legitimizing the use of concepts like “national traitor” and introducing the idea of subversive fifth columns operating within the imagined Russian community. Whereas the custodians interpreted expressions of the Western Other's acknowledgments of Official Russia as a reaffirmation of the reconstructed Russian Self in the context of Kosovo, the Western Other's lack of acknowledgment manifested by sanctions and the suspension of Official Russia reaffirmed the reconstructed Russian Self after the military intervention in Ukraine; that is, reaffirming a reconstructed Russian Self increasingly defined in terms of opposition to the Western Other.

Translating the “Russian Self”

How did the reconstructed Russian Self subsequently translate into foreign policy after the military interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine? In short, the reconstructed Russian Self translated after Kosovo and Ukraine into, respectively, the introduction and continuation of a disruptive Official Russian foreign policy. In a nutshell, the disruptive foreign policy represents a next-best strategy which, in the absence of alternative foreign policy goals (beyond statements of intent about increased multipolarity and multivectoral diplomacy) and necessary means and resources to deny the Western Other from realizing its goals, directs the available means and resources toward hindering the realization of the most optimal outcome.

Besides the decision to militarily intervene in Kosovo on June 12, deleting passages about the withdrawal of Russian troops from the near abroad in central official foreign policy documents and a significantly increased 2000 military budget (otherwise hitting an all-time low in 1999) are key evidence indicating the introduction of disruptive foreign policy.

Having used military force to disrupt the perceived engulfment of the Russian Self by the Western Other in Ukraine, the reconstructed Russian Self translated into a continuation of a disruptive foreign policy strategy. In contrast to the translation following in the wake of the military intervention in Kosovo, the means and resources for disruption became, respectively, more diverse and plentiful. After the intervention in Ukraine, the 2015 Military Budget is significantly increased—on top of a trend of steadily growing Russian military budgets since Kosovo—and non-conventional soft-power capacities (e.g., informational and humanitarian means targeting public audiences and infrastructure) were assigned a more central role in the official central Russian foreign policy documents.

I conclude that the diversification of means and increased resources earmarked for disruption reflect a shift in the threat assessment against Official Russia and the Russian Self. While the Western Other is increasingly identified as an explicit adversary, Russian perceptions of the means and resources likely used by the Western Other to undermine the Russian Self have become increasingly covert and indirect. That Official Russia explicitly declares its willingness to use asymmetrical measures in response to perceivably hostile actions by the Western Other in FPC-2016 is testimony to the rhetorical intensification generally characterizing the foreign policy documents following the intervention in Ukraine. More importantly, the introduction is indicative of the sense of anxiety arising from insecurity about how to manage a threat assessment becoming increasingly clear in terms of the Western Other as adversary, but simultaneously unclear in terms of the types of means and amount

of resources devoted to containing Official Russia and gradually engulfing the Russian Self; in short, the anxiety arising from *whom* but not knowing *what* to fear.

Contributions

Having answered the three key research questions above, I now turn to outlining the most significant substantial, theoretical, and methodical contributions offered by my dissertation.

What do we learn by reconstructing the polyphony of Russian voices heard in 1999 and 2014? The indeterminacy of social dynamics. What do we learn from mapping the contestations and commonplaces among these voices and how they evolve in these critical moments of crisis? The process of the agents at work exploiting these bursts of creativity influenced by their status, accessible resources, know-how, and idiosyncrasies.

Substantial

I want to highlight three substantial contributions. First, my in-depth studies of Kosovo and Ukraine demonstrate that two otherwise seemingly similar episodes of military intervention in post-Soviet Russian foreign policy are not as determined and straightforward as they seem from a distance and in hindsight. By delving into the relationalist soup constituting the polyphony of Russian voices before, during, and after the intervention, important ideational and overseen ontological concerns are elucidated. Significant Russian voices uttering ontological insecurity, doubt, hope, regret, and vengeance, to name but a few, are present both before and after the military intervention.

This might come across as a trivial contribution. After all, when focusing analytical attention to particularities between two seemingly similar cases, differences emerge. However, the identification of particularities in configurations constituting processes leading to specific outcomes in the form of concrete actions and consequences offers an important reminder about how idiosyncratic, complex, and—most essentially—*human* foreign policy decisions and consequences are. If wanting to understand why and how an outcome came about as it did, there is no way around emerging oneself into the polyphony of human voices in dialogue about *if at all* and *how to proceed* in a given spatiotemporal context. In short, a general substantial contribution of my dissertation is a *Sartrean reminder* that existence precedes essence. No action is meaning or leads to something in itself. Echoing Valerie Hudson, foreign policy is like any other social phenomenon, human all the way down (2014, p. 12).

In addition to the implications for the substantial analysis of foreign policy, the Sartrean reminder contributes to ongoing theoretical debates about if

and to what extent certain structural configurations at an international and/or regional level of analysis (e.g., distributions of material power capabilities) cause certain foreign political behavior (e.g., Mearsheimer, 2001; Waltz, 1979). Given the structural make-up, deviations from expected behavior have increasingly been accounted for by involving moderating domestic conditions in the explanations of states' foreign policy (e.g., Götz, 2013; Walt, 2014b).

Coming to the second substantial contribution, I want to flag how materialist concerns about military security are almost completely absent in the gathered body of sources. In both Kosovo and Ukraine, I observe significant voices being uttered with respect to the expected adverse economic impacts of escalating the ongoing Russo–Western encounter. One of the few but particularly explicit testimonies to the military materialist concern is Gennady Zyuganov applauding the Federation Council's decision to ensure the Russian presence in Kosovo having concluded the Helsinki Agreement. On June 25, Zyuganov is pleased to see the Federation Council make the right decision by approving a Russian peacekeeping operation and prevent potentially losing “the Balkans [and] protect, among others, Russia's geopolitical interests.”⁶⁴³ What exactly constitutes Russia's geopolitical interests remains unspecified in both Kosovo and Ukraine. A conceptual historical study taking upon it the task of mapping and tracing the different meanings attached to Russian uses of geopolitical interests in the post-Soviet era would be a significant contribution. In this dissertation, the use of geopolitical interests resembles what Jacques Derrida defines as a floating signifier (e.g., 2001); that is, a signifier with no concrete object or agreed upon commonplace about its meaning.

This finding—or non-finding—challenges the growing number of materialist studies of Russian geopolitics in the wake of the Ukraine crisis (e.g., Götz, 2015, 2016a, 2016b; Mead, 2014). With the central reservation that my case studies are based on the same publicly available source as material studies have access to, I find little evidence to suggest that materialist concerns—originating from a survival logic—solely rendered military intervention meaningful in contemporary inner Russian dialogue. Instead, I find ontological and ideational concerns about, respectively, that the authenticity and international status of the Russian Self are frequently mentioned in the inner Russian dialogues before, during, and after the military intervention in Kosovo and Ukraine.

I am fully aware that the contemporary testimonies to ontological and ideational concerns do not rule out the influence and importance of materialist

⁶⁴³ “Russian Communist leader welcomes decision to send troops to Kosovo,” *ITAR-TASS*, June 25, 1999.

concerns. Additionally, it is not my aim to undermine the relevance of an idealized materialist perspective on Russian foreign policy. Rather, I want to contribute to the ongoing debate about the role of exogenous materialist explanations with an appeal to cautiously proceed on the parsimonious endeavor toward explaining as much as possible about state foreign policy solely by adopting survival-logical reasoning.

Any idealized depiction and ordering of worldly facts in an analytical narrative entails the inescapable reduction and oversimplification of the complexity and idiosyncrasy constituting the social world. Realizing, first, that knowledge is produced using ideal types and, second, remains reflective of the limitations of idealized knowledge claims is pivotal to avoid shutting down in-depth case-based research and preventing conclusions based on idealizations that are translated directly 1:1 into policy recommendations. Avoiding the shutdown of in-depth case-based research and preventing unnuanced policy recommendations is particularly urgent regarding Russo–Western foreign policy sharing a problematic and unresolved past, which makes resorting to prefabricated analogies and stereotypes tempting. If we fail to pay attention to the particularities and simply follow the existing paths, we end up where we started. I will elaborate on the policy implications below.

Having offered substantial contributions that challenge the essentialist and materialist conceptions of state foreign policy, my third substantial contribution plays into the debate about the extent to which Vladimir Putin is the cause or main driver behind what I define as the introduction and continuation of disruptive Russian foreign policy. Challenging the structuralist accounts of Russian foreign policy above, scholars have argued that Vladimir Putin’s personal intentions on behalf of his regime, the Russian state, and people manifest influential guidelines for the actual conduct of what is defined as an increasingly assertive foreign policy against the West and near abroad (e.g., Dawisha, 2015; Gel’man, 2016; Gessen, 2012; Hill & Gaddy, 2015; Kuzio, 2017; B. D. Taylor, 2018; Van Herpen, 2015b; Zygur, 2016). Having challenged the structuralist accounts of Russian foreign policy inferring their conclusions from the relative distribution of power and bedrock assumptions of universal survival logics exogenous to the states acting in accordance to these, I challenge the aforementioned accounts that are based on a premise about the importance of Putin for the conduct of Russian foreign policy.

Neither in relation to Kosovo nor Ukraine did Vladimir Putin play a central role in the domestic Russian debate preceding intervention. One of my most significant substantial findings is that the military intervention in Kosovo established a precedent for the disruptive foreign policy that has continued until today. In short, I argue that Putin’s speech at the Munich Security Conference (2007), the Russo–Georgian War (2008), and intervention in Ukraine (2014),

which are identified as the origins of assertive Russian foreign policy, represent the continuation of the Russian dash to Slatina Airbase on June 12, 1999.

Putin's exact role in the decision to militarily intervene and the subsequent reconstruction and translation of the Russian Self is pending further research. Putin was the Secretary of The Security Council of the Russian Federation from March until August 1999, when he became the First Deputy Prime Minister of Russia and later Prime Minister of Russia on August 16 of the same year. Putin did not participate in the inner Russian dialogues before, during, or after intervention. However, from Talbott's meeting with Putin on June 11 (2002, pp. 335-337) and Robert H. Donaldson and Joseph L. Noguee's research about Russian foreign policy (2009, pp. 117-121), we know that Putin participated in meetings with senior representatives of the Western Other and later in the drafting of the 2000 Foreign Policy Doctrine. That said, Talbott notes that Putin had been "keeping his head down, avoiding controversy and [therefore] figured only slightly in our peripheral vision" of contemporary Russian politics (2002, p. 335). In short, Putin was not a central figure from the outside perspective of Talbott, nor did he figure in the Russian source material.

Despite the uncertainties surrounding Putin's exact role in reconstructing and translating the Russian Self in Kosovo, my dissertation offers evidence based on testimony from the inner Russian dialogue and central foreign policy documents suggesting the tipping point toward the formation of current disruptive Russian foreign policy should be moved back from after the millennium to the military intervention in Kosovo. A central, substantial contribution of my dissertation is the identification of the reconstruction and translation processes before, during, and after Russia militarily intervened in Kosovo. In short, the increasingly disruptive Russian foreign policy currently unfolding on the world political scene is contingent on the Russian dash to Slatina Airbase more than it is on Putin's presidency.⁶⁴⁴

⁶⁴⁴ The Kosovo crisis and the Russian dash to Slatina Airbase remain to this day a central point of reference in speeches and documents about Russian foreign policy. Recently, both President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov have made reference to the Kosovo crisis when accusing the Western Other of using double standards of international law in relation to the Catalan independence referendum (2017), the ongoing Belgrade–Pristina Dialogue, and the American unilateral use of force to mention some. For instance, "Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club," *The Kremlin*, October 19, 2017: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/55882>; "Statement by H.E. Mr. Sergey V. Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, at the 73rd session of the UN General Assembly," September 28, 2018: https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/73/ru_en.pdf (both accessed November 15, 2018).

Theoretical

The retranslation of ontological security into International Relations (IR) constitutes the most significant overall theoretical contribution of my dissertation. My conceptual retranslation offers three answers to three key points of criticism raised against the growing ontological security literature.

Having reviewed a comprehensive number of conceptions of ontological security rooted in Anthony Giddens' definitions hereof in IR, I revisited the conceptual origin in Ronald D. Laing's writings and started retranslating ontological security from its original roots in existentialism; particularly, the perpetual insecurity of humankind and the quest for meaningfulness as basic existential experiences together with the derived emphasis of authenticity are essential components from existentialist thought mediating my retranslation.

First, I retranslate the concept of "Self" away from a dialectical and toward a dialogical understanding. The theoretical and analytical implication is a fundamental shift away from focusing on Self–Other relations between imagined communities toward focusing on the Self–Self relations between the custodians of imagined communities. This reorientation from Self–Other to Self–Self relations constitutes the most significant change from the dominating Giddensian understanding of ontological security by rejecting the underlying existential ideal and theoretical premise regarding the existence of "Core Self."

Consequently, imagined communities are "coreless" and constantly reconstructing their understandings of the National Self. National Self is reconstructed when the discrepancy between the envisioned and experienced National Selves are widening and custodians are unwilling or unable to authentically bridge the gap. A sense of ontological insecurity arises simultaneously with the discrepancy between the envisioned and experienced National Selves increasing to the point of realized meaninglessness and the existing vision of the National Self collapses. Senses of ontological insecurity are not caused by the encounter with a Foreign Other, but rather by custodians becoming anxious about losing the dominance or being unable to realize their respective ideal vision for the National Self. This is an important difference between a Giddensian understanding and my retranslation of ontological security.

Retranslating ontological security along the lines of a coreless and dialogical Self addresses the conceptual criticisms of ontological security essentializing the foreign policy of states and anthropomorphizing the state. First, state foreign policy actions are not reduced to ontological needs to maintain and augment a Core Self, but may be rendered meaningful by certain agents within a state which interpret certain foreign policy actions by the "Official Self" or Foreign Others as more or less in alignment with their idealized vision for the National Self. Thus, identifying and interpreting if and how certain actions

cause senses of ontological insecurity or security among different individual and collective actors within the confines of a state becomes an empirical-analytical task. In short, my retranslation of ontological security redirects the attention away from *if* to *how* senses of ontological insecurity and security arise among certain human agents in specific settings.

This leads to the next significant points of difference between the existing and retranslated understandings of ontological security. The reorientation toward a dialogical coreless National Self also implies a shift away from assuming human agents to be ontologically secure from the outset or able to become completely ontological secure. The implication is that it becomes futile to examine how states maintain and augment ontological security, focusing instead on how individual and collective agents manage in settings of heightened ontological insecurity about the realization and sustainability of their respective ideal National Self envisioned.

Retranslating ontological security along the assumptions of a dialogical coreless National Self and departing from a premise of managing instead of bracketing out ontological insecurity, the third and final point of retranslation relates to foreign policy crisis. Whereas a Giddensian understanding of ontological security assumes foreign policy crisis as a one-dimensional, negative phenomenon threatening the Core Self, retranslated ontological security interprets crises two-dimensionally, as simultaneously manifesting breakdown and breakthrough for the National Self. On the one hand, a foreign policy crisis might provoke an inner dialogue resulting in the breakdown of the existing ideal vision for the National Self, because the custodians primarily representing it are unable to authentically bridge the discrepancy experienced and the envisioned National Self. On the other hand, the unsettledness caused by the breakdown of the existing vision for the National Self manifests a unique window of opportunity for aspiring custodians to breakthrough by authentically bridging experience with their vision for the National Self.

I believe that the retranslation of ontological insecurity into IR contributes a promising, alternative means by which to theorize and analyze ontological insecurity and security in a way that avoids theoretically short-circuiting ontological security into the same essentialist IR theories originally challenged by the research program, but identify a conceptual path demarcating it from existing material and ideational perspectives on security by devoting the ontological perspective to a focus on fundamental dialogical Self–Self relations—supplementing the exogenous and endogenous dialectical Self–Other relations, respectively—and focus on yet-neglected meaning-seeking logics influencing foreign policy by rooting ontological security firmly in its existentialist origin.

Methodical

Methodically, my dissertation offers two contributions. First, a dissertation based on a rich body of primary Russian sources. Owing to helpful colleagues and talented research assistants, I present an analytical narrative consisting of interpretations embedded in a comprehensive body of Russian primary sources gathered and read conducting this inquiry. Taking the inner Russian dialogue among a polyphony of voices about what meaningfully defines the authentic Russian Self as the theoretical point of departure for my substantial in-depth studies of Official Russian military interventions, gathering and analyzing contemporary Russian primary sources has been pivotal to the trustworthiness of my interpretations.

Second, my dissertation offers a transparent four-step hermeneutical process consisting of four interconnected interpretivist movements to generate and analyze data in a historical interpretivist manner. Repeatedly going through the four-step process of gathering, reading, writing, and presenting data, I have aspired to present a trustworthy analytical narrative about how the sense of ontological insecurity among the Russian custodianship rendered military intervention meaningful as well as how the Russian Self was reconstructed and subsequently translated into Official Russian foreign policy in Kosovo and Ukraine.

Such four-step processes toward trustworthily contextualizing the Russian custodians' meaning-making processes belonging in the past in their own terms is in principle infinite. Recapping Hans-George Gadamer's thoughts on the fusion of horizons, the researcher can keep gathering, reading, writing, and presenting all of the accessible material from researched past, but the horizon between researcher and researched will never fuse completely (Gadamer, 2013). However, by repetitively gathering, reading, writing, and presenting about meaning-making processes from the researched past, the researcher gradually brings the researched past closer to contemporary audiences.

Paradoxically—and this might represent the most frustrating part of going about interpretivist research—the more primary sources gathered, read, written, and presented about Russian intervention in Kosovo and Ukraine, the less I realized I knew about the relevant settings and agents in these two important episodes in post-Soviet Russian foreign policy. In a nutshell, the interpretivist research process is neatly summarized by a quote widely attributed to Albert Einstein: “The more I learn, the more I realize how much I don't know.”

In the next section, I elaborate on the implications of conducting historical interpretivist inquiry about Russian foreign policy and suggestions for improving the trustworthiness of future interpretivist studies.

Implications

Having enumerated the answers and contributions my dissertation offers above, I now turn to suggest four promising avenues for future research and foreign policy below.

Future research

My initial suggestion for future research is general and manifested by an insistence on bringing the perpetual human quest for meaningfulness and authenticity back into the study of the political. Beyond my retranslation of ontological security, the fundamental existentialist premise about the basic existential human anxiety relating to meaninglessness and the perpetual quest for a meaningful existence are already diffusing into different realms of scientific inquiry about the political.

Drawing on existentialist thinkers such as Søren Kierkegaard and Paul Tillich, while maintaining a Giddensian understanding of ontological security, Bahar Rumelili's scholarship exemplifies a voyage of discovery into the role of meaningfulness (and anxiety for meaninglessness) in ontological security studies. Rumelili's *Conflict Resolution and Ontological Security* (2015) is a recent anthology enhancing our existing knowledge of the interconnectedness of existential anxiety and foreign policy. More generally, *Politics of Anxiety* (Eklundh, Zevnik, & Guittet, 2017) examines different manifestations of anxiety in relation to various political topics (e.g., global migration) and how anxiety is used to control and mobilize political support. A final example of tentative steps into existentialist aspects of the political (coming from evolutionary political psychology) Michael B. Petersen et al. are developing an explanation for the human need for chaos by examining the meaningfulness of seeming meaninglessness—denoting what is commonly referred to as wanting to watch the world burn—by circulating hostile political rumors (2018).

Going from exploration into the role of the anxiety of meaninglessness—and tentative inquiry about what is found meaningful in doing something seemingly meaningless—to taking the role of agents' differing individual and collective ontologies seriously as a basis for analysis, an *ontological turn* within anthropology is currently underway. Similar to my retranslation of ontological security taking ideal visions of an authentic National Self based on what human agents understand as meaningful within their respective ontologies as the main point of departure, the ontological turn argues in favor of taking the role of different lifeworld outlooks—hence, different ontologies—seriously in anthropological studies of human meaning-making in the past and

present (e.g., Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017; Kelly, 2014b, 2014a; Woolgar & Lezaun, 2013).⁶⁴⁵

Second—and coming from a general suggestion to keep venturing into the existentialist dimension of the political—I urge future ontological security studies to conduct in-depth case-specific inquiries.⁶⁴⁶ Focusing on how senses of ontological security emerge among agents in specific settings, key conceptual criticisms of ontological security studies—particularly for essentializing and anthropomorphizing state foreign policy—are turned into concrete questions to be examined and for which empirical evidence must be provided. By singling out whose senses of ontological insecurity and security proliferated to other agents in concrete settings and rendered certain actions meaningful and reconstructed these agents' understandings of foreign policy and senses of national belonging, it becomes possible to analytically demarcate the ontological dimension of security by supplementing material as well as ideational ones. Increasingly conducting case-based inquiry, the theoretical and analytical usefulness of adopting an ontological perspective focusing on the dialogical Self–Self relations as the point of departure for the examination of the mutually constitutive relationship between foreign policy and national identity can more concretely be demonstrated and assessed with reference to case-specific evidence.

Following the second suggestion, to conduct more case-based ontological security studies, the third suggestion is a call for further interdisciplinary inquiry into Russian foreign policy. Writing this dissertation with a focus on the foreign political aspect of the post-Soviet Russian quest for ontological security in relation to its military interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine, I have benefitted enormously from multiple encounters between colleagues having received formal training as political scientists, Russianists, anthropologists, historians, and in IR. Thanks to these encounters, I have been able to produce a more contextualized—hence, trustworthy—analytical narrative about the Russian quest for ontological security.

However, more systematic research collaboration between a Russianist and political scientist than was the case with the present inquiry would have

⁶⁴⁵ For a critical take on the ontological turn, see “Ontological anthropology and the deferral of critique,” by David Bond and Lucas Bessire (2014). For a more recent criticism of the ontological turn, see “We Have Never Been Pluralist” (Candea, 2017).

⁶⁴⁶ For an example of a recent case study of ontological insecurity, see “Critical situations, fundamental questions and ontological insecurity in world politics,” where Filip Ejdus examines the emergence of ontological insecurity in relation to Kosovo's secession from Serbia (2018).

produced even more nuanced interpretations. Particularly, my limited Russian language proficiency and knowledge of Russian culture could have benefited from working with a colleague trained in Russian studies. Likewise, a Russianist having conducted an inquiry with identical research questions would have benefitted from my expertise in foreign political theory and analysis.

As mentioned above, the main source of frustration when conducting case-based historical interpretivist inquiry is—paraphrasing Einstein—the more I learn, the more I realize I don’t know. Agents’ senses of ontological in- and security as well as their ideal visions regarding the authentic Russian Self and aligning the foreign political representation of Official Russia are formulated in and from lifeworlds mirroring different ontological outlooks. Thus, agents voice their national senses of belonging and foreign policy of belonging using sayings and doings that are meaningful to insiders but require considerably more time and knowledge for outsiders to decipher and contextualize to be able to interpret them trustworthily. In my two in-depth case studies, the inner dialogue proceeded across various topics ranging from the Russian economy, history, culture, religion, and interpretations of international law to dynamics in Russian domestic politics, national security, and defense spending, just to mention some of the topics touched upon. In addition to collecting background information regarding the vast gallery of custodians participating in this dialogue about the Russian Self and Official Russia in Kosovo and Ukraine, contextualizing inner Russian dialogue involved extensive background reading to be able to contextualize and assess its significance. Indeed, as Patrick T. Jackson once advised me, “read everything” and at some point patterns of key contestations and commonplaces emerge across the different aspects of the inner Russian dialogue.

Whereas George F. Kennan had time to learn Russian during numerous boat and train journeys, advanced foreign language training is not feasible within the structure of most doctoral programs. Extending doctoral programs to accommodate language training, extended stays abroad, or prolonged train journeys are not feasible for most. I therefore suggest interdisciplinary research collaboration as a less demanding improvement to future research on Russian foreign policy.

Ending where I started, meaning-seeking logics central to the ontological perspective are applicable beyond critical episodes of post-Soviet Russian foreign policy. The past, present, and future are all full of concrete events and trends where a supplementary ontological perspective offers useful insights into otherwise puzzling phenomena in world politics. Take the US–Soviet space race, for instance. In 1969, the US beat the Soviets in the race to the moon when the Eagle landed there. This represented a major Soviet setback.

However, the initiation of the Apollo program in 1961 grew out of a distinctly different feeling than the euphoria surrounding Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin's moon walk. In April 1961, Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first man to fly in space. Successfully sending the first man into space infused a number of material, ideational, and ontological concerns among the custodians of the American imagined community. Materially, was the US falling behind the Soviets in the development of intercontinental missile technology? Ideationally, Gagarin becoming the first man in space came on top of the first successful launches of artificial satellites into space—Sputnik 1 and 2—in October and November 1957. According to a contemporary statement by Hans Morgenthau, the success of the Soviet Sputnik program—and failure of US satellite programs—represented a

dramatic demonstration of the decline of American power, a decline which started in September, 1949 [successful Soviet detonation of a nuclear bomb] and proceeded at an ever accelerated speed, unbeknown to ourselves but not to our friends and enemies (Morgenthau, 1958).

The American failure to match Soviet space innovation negatively influenced the international status of the US in the eyes of friends and enemies alike in the increasingly tense context of an ever-colder Cold War.

From the ontological perspective, exposing the American space technological inadequacies fundamentally challenged the existing visions of the “American Self”—hence, space technological insufficiency became a source of a fundamental American sense of ontological insecurity. Outmatching the Soviet Union within missile technology and winning the space race became two central issues in the 1960 US Presidential Election. John F. Kennedy won the election on promises to regain American superiority in space. Winning superiority in the space race became symptomatic of the revival of the American Self and its superiority to the ontology of the Soviet Self. On May 25, 1961, in his “Address Before a Joint Session of Congress,” Kennedy announced that if

we are to win the battle that is now going on around the world between freedom and tyranny, the dramatic achievements in space which occurred in recent weeks should have made clear to us all, as did the Sputnik in 1957, the impact of this adventure on the minds of men everywhere, who are attempting to make a determination of which road they should take. [Now] it is time to take longer strides—time for a great new American enterprise—time for this nation to take a clearly leading role in space achievement, which in many ways may hold the key to our future on earth. [I] believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth. No single space project in this period will be

more impressive to mankind, or more important for the long-range exploration of space; and none will be so difficult or expensive to accomplish.⁶⁴⁷

The Apollo program would be immensely costly in material terms—better spent on developing intercontinental ballistic missile technology from a materialist exogenous survival logic alone—but the potential ideational and ontological gains in the form of a boost to the American Self vis-à-vis the USSR and American voices with an alternative vision for National Self were significant.

The US–Soviet space race provides an example of where the ontological perspective emphasizing meaning-seeking enhances our understanding of specific processes and outcomes otherwise remaining puzzling from an isolated materialist or ideational perspective. The US–USSR space race is one of several interesting areas of foreign policy that could potentially benefit from a supplementary ontological perspective going beyond Self–Other relations and logics and focusing on the foundational—yet neglected—Self–Self relation and emphasizing the role played by the meaning-seeking logics of individual and collective agents.

Future foreign policy

Returning to the quote from Winston Churchill in the Introduction, I must also admit that “I cannot forecast to you the action of Russia.” In this dissertation, I have suggested ontological security as a useful key to partially solving the riddle surrounding Russian foreign policy actions, which is “wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.” My dissertation contributes with another key to an ever-growing bunch of keys; but unlike most of the existing keys attempting to enable the forecasting of the Russian foreign policy actions, I do not share the ambition to forecast Russian foreign policy. Quite contrarily, throughout this dissertation, I have argued that the Russian decisions to militarily intervene in Kosovo and Ukraine are embedded in context-sensitive inner Russian dialogues about what constitutes and threatens existentially meaningful visions of the Russian Self and how to augment and maintain these visions authentically in terms of Official Russian foreign policy.

The inner dialogues about the Russian Self and Official Russian foreign policy in Kosovo and Ukraine were provoked by heightened senses of ontological insecurity. Heightened, because the post-Soviet Russian Self was not—and

⁶⁴⁷ “Address Before a Joint Session of Congress,” *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum*, May 25, 1961: <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/historic-speeches/address-to-joint-session-of-congress-may-25-1961> (accessed November 3, 2018).

has never been—ontologically secure from the outset. In the Epilogue, I speculatively discuss the extent to which the Russian custodianship reconstructing the Russian Self has become increasingly ontologically secure across the military interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine. Disregarding what I find in the Epilogue, a completely ontologically secure Russian Self will not be one of them. Neither Russian nor any other imagined community can become completely ontologically secure and achieve a completely authentic and meaningful existence.

Where and how Russia will next intervene militarily is uncertain. The more embedded I became in the spatiotemporal contexts surrounding the Russian military interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine, the more I realized the pathways to and from otherwise similar foreign policy actions were quite particular. As mentioned above, this is a highly frustrating feature of historical interpretivist inquiry. Particularly when fellow researchers employing general theories claim to produce explanations and even predictions about the episodes of Russian—but also most other states—foreign policy studied here. These episodes, the generalists so claim, are cases of the same underlying phenomena about which certain generalizable traits can be identified and inferred to similar cases.

Paradoxically, it seems as though the more general theories about international relations are, the easier it is to explain and predict specific outcomes of otherwise very complex and contingent processes involving numerous agents (e.g., Keohane, 1984; Mearsheimer, 2001; Waltz, 1979). Ironically, the IR scholars who have constructed these general theories, enabling them to explain and predict otherwise socially complex phenomena, would unfortunately seem best at explaining and predicting specific outcomes in world politics *after* they have occurred. Scholars before me have already pointed out these paradoxical and ironic features of general theories arguing for their scientific relevance based on an alleged capacity to explain and predict outcomes in world politics (e.g., Gaddis, 1992; Kirshner, 2012; Schroeder, 1994) as well as the potentially tragic political consequences of sloppy case comparisons and uncritical uses of historical analogies (e.g., Beach, Pedersen, & Siewert, 2019; Jervis, 1976; Khong, 1992; Tetlock, 2017). In short, it is hardly a coincidence why and how processes and outcomes occur as they do; but believing that tidy and neat general theories of international relations can outweigh the lack of information and knowledge while at the same time compensating for the human capacity to comprehend, explain, and even predict concrete occurrences in a socially complex world is a potentially fatal conceit.

Having issued a warning that the use of general knowledge claims to explain and predict concrete foreign policy actions in a socially complex world is at best misleading and at worst potentially fatal when translated into political

recommendations, I will cautiously identify where future Russo–Western encounters could be rendered meaningful by Russian custodians. Based on some of the similarities elucidated by perspectively contrasting the preludes to the respective interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine (while keeping the particularities in mind), I believe that future Russo–Western encounters in Belarus, Kazakhstan, and the Arctic hold the potential to heighten the Russian custodianship’s sense of ontological security. Even more than Ukraine, in terms of a sense and policy of belonging, Belarus is perceived as an integral part of the Russian Self by the Russian custodianship. Among the nationalist-looking Russian custodians, the future involvement of the Western Other in the political affairs of Belarus—particularly during unsettled times in Belarus—will manifest a much more explicit Western attempt to engulf the Russian Self than did the previous Western involvement in Ukraine. Similarly—but less significantly—the Arctic is considered an integral part of the Russian Self, as reflected in how Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin labeled the Arctic a “Russian Mecca” on Twitter on April 19, 2015.⁶⁴⁸ Another is the aforementioned *Valdai* report, which concludes that the development of the Arctic—alongside Siberia and the Far East—is not merely a mega-, but a “meta-project:”

[F]ulfilling Russia’s historic mission as a bridge between Europe and Asia, which our country has long considered itself—just take a look at our national symbol, the two-headed eagle.⁶⁴⁹

Less significantly—and often overseen—I single out Kazakhstan as a state where the involvement of Foreign Others holds the potential to render military intervention meaningful due to ontological concerns. Kazakhstan is definitely not perceived to be as an integral part of the Russian Self as are Belarus and the Arctic, but the sizeable Russian diaspora currently living in Kazakhstan and the relatively high number of so-called Russophones (a non-Russian titular who prefers speaking Russian to the native tongue) means Russian custodianship is expected to keep an eye on the involvement of Foreign Others (e.g., Grigas, 2017, Chapter 6; Kolstø, 1995, pp. 244-258; Melvin, 1995, Chapter 6;

⁶⁴⁸ “Арктика - русская Мекка [Arctic is the Mecca of Russia],” *Twitter*, Dmitry Rogozin, April 19, 2015: <https://twitter.com/Rogozin/status/589822033955028992> (accessed October 4, 2018).

⁶⁴⁹ “National Identity and the Future of Russia,” *Valdai Discussion Club*, Sergey Karaganov et al., February 2014: http://vid-1.rian.ru/ig/valdai/Identity_eng.pdf (accessed November 26, 2018), p. 60.

Zevelev, 2000, p. 95). According to Igor Zevelev, up to 40 percent of the titular population in Kazakhstan are Russophones (2000, p. 95).

Instead of the Western Other, I intentionally write Foreign Others here due to Kazakhstan's location in Central Asia. Sharing borders with both China and Russia, Kazakhstan is positioned to play a key role in the future Russo–Chinese encounter. It is beyond the task of this dissertation to examine the attitudes of those in the Russian custodianship toward the “Chinese Other” in detail. Instead, I leave the topic noting that existing studies frequently conclude that Russo–Chinese relations are still—and have historically been—ambiguous (e.g., Donaldson & Noguee, 2009, pp. 284-285; Lo, 2015, pp. 141-150 & 162-163; Mankoff, 2012, Chapter 5).

In combination with the significance of supplementary ideational and material concerns—in terms of the international status and military importance—asccribed to Belarus and the Arctic, I believe that military intervention will come across as a particularly meaningful response to existential dilemmas imposed on the Russian custodianship by the Russo–Western encounters in these two settings. For the same reasons, I do not consider a future Russian military intervention targeting Scandinavian, Baltic, or Eastern European states as a meaningful Russian response. Considering the expected significant material and ideationally adverse implications for Russian well-being and international status; but more importantly, the modest ontological security threat that the aforementioned states pose to the Russian Self. Territorially, the Baltics may have been part of Official Russia but never constituted a central component in the authentic Russian Self. Rather than being considered an authentic part of the Russian Self, the Baltics served more as a display window to impress the Western Other with a Russified mirror image.

Where and how Russia militarily intervenes next remains uncertain. That which is important to take away from this dissertation is that the next time Russia intervenes militarily somewhere, it simultaneously presents opportunity for a breakdown and breakthrough in relation to the reconstruction of the Russian Self *and* the reconstruction of Russo–Western relations. After the latest intervention in Ukraine, reconstructed visions of a meaningful Russian Self are defined antagonistically to the Western Other and translated into an increasingly disruptive Official Russian foreign policy.

I would argue, however, that while the next Russo–Western encounter may potentially cause a complete breakdown in Russo–Western relations, military intervention may also provide an opportunity for a breakthrough in the tainted relations between Russia and the West. Importantly—and in contrast to Self–Other perspectives, a breakthrough in terms of less antagonistic

Russo–Western relations relies primarily on the inner dialogue about the Russian Self and Official Russia among the Russian custodians; not actions by the Western Other.

Consequently, Western Others acknowledging and encouraging certain Russian voices and interpretations in dialogue from the sideline are not necessarily conducive to the desired outcome of the specific reconstruction and translation process in context. Given the assumed dialogical foundation for reconstruction and the translation of the Russian Self in context, the three most general recommendations for practitioners representing—from the Russian perspective—Western Others are:

- (I) Develop capacities monitoring the development of contestations and commonplaces about the Russian Self and Official Russia.

Developing these capacities to trustworthily interpret inner dialogues is necessary to be able to assess what the Russian custodians are saying and doing, are they actually targeting Foreign Others or using Foreign Others as a frame of reference to discuss ideal visions along which the Russian Self and Official Russia can develop. While the actions of the Russian custodians aimed at targeting Western Others may require the respective Western Others to respond—out of legitimate material, ideational, and ontological concerns—the custodians using the Western Other as a frame of reference for something ultimately about the Russian Self do not require one. Responding to a negative or provocative use of the Western Other as the frame of reference in inner dialogue about the Russian Self might support—rather than undermine—the position by custodians uttering the unwanted frame of reference and unintentionally manifesting the premise (e.g., Russo–Western antagonism) for the custodians’ claim. Responding to the negative or provocative use of the Western Other as a frame of reference can therefore easily trigger counterproductive outcomes for responding to the Western Other.

Generally, I recommend abstaining from commenting on negative or provocative uses of Western Others as a frame of reference in inner Russian dialogues. Whether to respond to the positive frames of reference used by the Russian custodians depends on a concrete assessment of the custodian using such. For instance, acknowledging and encouraging Aleksey Navalny’s positive use of the Western Other as a frame of reference might undermine his position within the Russian opposition, as he could then be framed as a “mail-man” serving the Western Other rather than the voice of an authentic alternative vision for the Russian Self. Moreover, is Navalny a good representative of the ideal Russian Self as envisioned by Western custodians, or is he simply preferred because of his criticism of President Putin? Concrete answers to

these two questions require developed capacities to monitor how contestations and commonplaces about the Russian Self and Official Russia have developed to respond expediently.

Besides developing capacities to monitor how commonplaces and contestations about Russian Self and Official Russia develop, I recommend practitioners representing Western Others should:

- (II) Increasingly focus on what constitutes a meaningful vision for the “Western Self” and how to authentically represent this vision in “Official Western” foreign policy.

As I demonstrate in my in-depth case studies above, concrete Russian foreign political action emanates out of a complex configuration of specific custodians’ material, ideational, and more fundamental ontological concerns in Kosovo and Ukraine. Why and how specific foreign political actions are rendered meaningful to undertake—while other actions come across as unappealing—is riddled with multiple unacknowledged and acknowledged intentions within lifeworlds neither completely known to the researcher nor researched agents in specific settings. Consequently, instead of trying to predict the Russian Other’s next disruptive foreign political move, I recommend focusing on the inner dialogue about what constitutes a meaningful Western Self and how to authentically represent this vision of in Official Western foreign policy.

Simultaneously with the reconstruction and translation of the Russian Self in the context of the Russo–Western encounter, the Western Self also underwent reconstruction and translation processes while encountering the Russian Other in Kosovo and Ukraine. The inner dialogue provoked by the latest Russo–Western encounter in Ukraine not only elucidates the significant contestations among the Russian custodians but also within the Western custodianship. Whereas the military intervention in Ukraine elucidates a nationalist split within Russia, the dilemma of *if* and *how* to respond to the intervention and subsequent annexation undertaken by the Russian Other discloses significant contestations between and within the community of states representing the Western Self. In that sense, the Russo–Western encounter in Ukraine highlighted the existing contestations about if and how to respond to the Russian Other between the communities of states representing the Western Self in the wake of the Russo–Georgian War in August 2008.

Whereas Robert Kagan already wanted to break with the conception of “Europeans and Americans share a common view of the world, or even that they occupy the same world” years before the Russo–Georgian War (2003, p. 3), Russo–Western encounters seem interconnected with a general weakening of a collectively shared sense of belonging to a unified Western Self among the

states traditionally identifying as Western. The dilemma of if and how to respond to Russian aggression in Ukraine not only strengthens an existing split between the states constituting the Western Self about which foreign policy actions authentically represent these ideal visions, but more fundamentally provokes inner dialogues about *if* and *how* an authentic foreign political response from a meaningful vision of American Self, Danish Self, German Self, British Self, French Self, Italian Self, Norwegian Self etc. should be. The otherwise unified Official West response to Russian intervention and annexation in the form of several rounds of sanctions and the suspension of G8 membership seems to cause a heightened sense of ontological insecurity about visions of the Western Self among its custodians. Paradoxically, Russia's quest for post-Soviet ontological security elucidates a heightened sense of ontological insecurity about the visions of the Western Self—and how to authentically represent itself to Foreign Others—in world politics between and within the imagined national communities constituting it.

- (III) Neither Western Others nor the Russian Self should focus on preventing but rather learning how to manage foreign policy crises that hold the potential for a complete breakdown of the status quo—but also breakthrough for what otherwise only remains a more meaningful vision of the National Self.

Finally, I recommend that Western and Russian practitioners and custodians remember that while the inner dialogues provoked by the heightened sense of ontological insecurity in Russo–Western foreign policy crises hold the potential for the complete breakdown of the existing meaningful lifeworld, they also present opportunity for breakthrough for what otherwise would remain a more meaningful vision of National Self. The focus should not be on forecasting and preventing foreign policy crises, but rather on managing them. As Rahm Emanuel famously commented, one should never “let a serious crisis go to waste.”

With the retranslation of ontological security in mind, remember that Russia's post-Soviet quest for ontological security holds the potential for the complete breakdown of the Russian and Western Selves as well as opportunity for breaking through to a more authentic sense of Self and “Self-contained” Russo–Western relations. The ontological perspective offers no guarantees against breakdowns or assurances for breakthroughs, but accepts that existential being is a daring venture requiring aplenty courage.

Epilogue: An Ontologically Secure “Russian Self”?

The Russian people are not optimistic about Russia’s economic prospects, but never since the collapse of the Soviet Union have they been so proud of Russia’s military might and global influence.
—*Maria Lipman, Foreign Affairs (2016).*

No, nobody really wanted to talk to us about the core of the problem, and nobody wanted to listen to us. So listen now.
—*Vladimir V. Putin, March 1, 2018.*⁶⁵⁰

My inquiry started and ended with the Russian quest for ontological security in two of the most critical episodes. The aim of the Epilogue is of a more speculative nature than the previous chapters. Here, I discuss *if* and *how* the “Russian Self” has become more ontologically secure having intervened militarily in Kosovo and Ukraine.

Despite the material and ideational costs associated with Russia’s disruptive foreign policy—as demonstrated by the interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine—Flemming S. Hansen notes that the imagined Russian community now has a

more well-defined identity—or stronger sense of being or, to use the key term of this study, greater ontological security. Much more so now than in earlier phases of the post-Soviet development may the Russians now provide relatively clear answers to the questions asked earlier: “Who are we?”, “where are we going?” and “in what kind of society do we want to live?” (F. S. Hansen, 2016, p. 369).

Based on my conclusions from Chapters 3 and 4, I agree with Hansen that the Russian custodianship—and imagined community more generally—seem to have become more ontologically secure after the military intervention in Kosovo and Ukraine. In short, despite the significant ideational and material costs, these military interventions have increased the sense of ontological security among Russians after the end of the Cold War. As the opening quotes

⁶⁵⁰ “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly,” *The Kremlin*, March 1, 2018: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56957> (accessed October 11, 2018).

by Maria Lipman and Vladimir Putin indicate, Russians now seem to subscribe to a more meaningful vision and authentic representation of the Russian Self in contrast to the pre-Kosovo vision and representation of the Russian Self. In contrast to the intervention in Kosovo, I conclude in Chapter 5 that commonplaces are wider and contestations smaller about what constitutes a meaningful vision for the Russian Self and how to represent such authentically in Official Russian foreign policy among the post-Ukraine Russian custodianship.

However, contestations about the Russian Self have persisted since the Ukraine intervention, and so does the quest for Russian ontological security. Particularly, the split between inward-looking and outward-looking visions for the Russian Self can possibly become an even more significant contestation among different visions for the Russian Self in the future.

For the time being, Putin has successfully managed to balance between these inward-looking and outward-looking visions for the Russian Self while suppressing most of the prominent proponents of nationalist (and to a lesser degree liberal) visions. Favoring a disruptive foreign policy, Putin has avoided controversial concessions to the Western Other in major theaters like Ukraine and Syria—appeasing the outward-looking nationalists—and kept out of new large-scale interventions in the near abroad to appease inward-looking Russian nationalists.

Since the Ukraine crisis, the Putin government has spent significant resources managing the split between inward-looking and outward-looking visions for the Russian Self and delicately balancing in-between them. At the moment, the Kremlin has managed the Russian Self by playing—in the words of Marlene Laruelle—the card of the lowest “common denominators,” offering both Russian custodians and the population aplenty of room to envision a Russian Self that is sympathetic to the Soviet or Tsarist past as well as cherishing a poly-ethnic or mono-ethnic ideal (Laruelle, 2017, pp. 96-97). Russians can freely define their meaningful sense of national belonging as long as such visions for the Russian Self do not undermine the Kremlin’s power-brokering role as balancer between inward-looking and outward-looking visions.⁶⁵¹ Until now, the Kremlin has successfully applied a strategy of “stealing the thunder” by overtaking the message of aspiring nationalist movements⁶⁵²

⁶⁵¹ Building on Harley Balzer’s understanding of “managed pluralism” (2003), Luke March argues that the Kremlin is exercising its own subset version defined as “managed nationalism,” permitting forms of nationalism “that do not fundamentally challenge the authoritarian state” (March, 2012).

⁶⁵² The Immortal Regiment manifests one of the best examples of the Kremlin stealing thunder by simple takeover. In 2011, three local friends in Tomsk coined the idea

and harmonizing these otherwise divergent stolen nationalist visions for the Russian Self via (para-)state individual and collective agents like the Izborsky Club.⁶⁵³ Finally, in varying degrees, the Kremlin has targeted and coerced individual media outlets, grassroots, firms, and political movements challenging the Kremlin's polyphonic Russian Self.

Whether the Kremlin's managed vision of the Russian Self will stand the test of a future Russo–Western foreign policy crisis remains an open question. Thus, in wake of the Russian intervention in Ukraine, a number of initiatives reassuring the Russian population, custodians, and international audiences about unaltered will and capacity to use military power against domestic and foreign enemies may indicate that Putin and the Kremlin do not feel as comfortable with its position in-between these two Russian nationalist factions.

In October 2015 and April 2016, for instance, Putin signed, respectively, the establishment of The Young Army Cadets National Movement and The National Guard of the Russian Federation. On top of that, a steady stream of military innovations have seen the light of day since the fateful March 18, 2014. Similar to the Soviet era military parades, the crown jewels of the Russian military industry are once again showcased on the Red Square.

Establishing new para-military and military branches and publicly showcasing Russia's military pride signal to the world community that Russia is a great power capable of and willing to reclaim its say in important matters in world politics; but maybe more importantly, that the Russian government is willing and capable to defeat so-called subversive national traitors contesting the current *ontological security status quo*; regardless of whether they are liberal, inward-looking or outward looking nationalists.

From the perspective of maintaining the status quo, outward-looking nationalists with a soft spot for imperial nostalgia manifest less of an acute threat to the regime and the vision of Russian Self it promotes. The inward-looking

to what became the Immortal Regiment. Since 2015, Vladimir V. Putin has personally participated in the annual marches on Victory Day. According to *Radio Free Europe*, the Kremlin's takeover has caused a steep incline in public display of Stalinist and militaristic symbols (e.g., the orange-and-black St. George's ribbon) ("Russia's Immortal Regiment: From Grassroots To 'Quasi-Religious Cult'," *Radio Free Europe*, Svetlana Prokopeva, May 12, 2017: <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-immortal-regiment-grassroots-to-quasi-religious-cult/28482905.html> (accessed June 8, 2018)).

⁶⁵³ The Izborsky Club was founded in 2012 and features several prominent Russian nationalists. Marlene Laruelle shows how several of the members in the Izborsky Club are directly or indirectly linked to the Russian military-industrial complex, government, and presidential administration (Laruelle, 2016a).

ethno-nationalists manifest a considerable threat to Putin's status quo position by provoking dissent among the hundreds of different ethnic and religious groups living within the Russian Federation. The Ukraine crisis has increased the awareness of ethnic dividing lines within Russia among ordinary Russians and promoted a gradual replacement of a civic (*russiyskiy*) to an ethnic (*russskiy*) vision for the Russian Self (Laruelle, 2017, p. 95).

In July 2017, aforementioned outward-looking nationalist Igor Strelkov and inward-looking nationalist Aleksey Navalny discussed corruption, Russo–Western relations, and the ongoing fighting in Ukraine on Russian television. Neither Strelkov's outward-looking nor Navalny's inward-looking vision for Russian Self found common ground in the one-and-a-half hour television debate. While Strelkov bragged that he—not Putin—“pulled the trigger of war,” and Navalny replied that Strelkov triggered a war “that destroyed the Russian economy,” both agreed that Putin was the one betraying the Russian nation.⁶⁵⁴ More importantly, while differing on what meaningfully constitutes the Russian Self, both Strelkov and Navalny agreed that Russia needs to change fundamentally. Navalny was ultimately jailed in October 2017 and has been imprisoned on numerous occasions since. I interpret the imprisonment of Navalny as indication of a Kremlin that finds—among other concerns evoked by Navalny—the inward-looking vision for the Russian Self as being the most credible threat to the existing sense of ontological security.

However, it will first be in connection with the next time Official Russia intervenes militarily in a major Russo–Western encounter that we will see how well the Kremlin manages this key contestation between inward-looking and outward-looking visions for the Russian Self currently lurking under the thin veneer of concord among Russian custodianship. Who dares to seize the opportunity to break through with their vision for a meaningful post-Soviet Russian Self—and who ends up successfully breaking through? Only the next major Russo–Western foreign policy crisis will tell.

I hope the arguments and knowledge claims presented have made some initial steps toward convincing scholars, politicians, pundits, and practitioners that nothing about Russia's post-Soviet quest for ontological security—or the reconstruction and translation of the Russian Self unfolding within it—is predetermined; rather, it is subject to the never-ending human quest for existential meaning. Leaving plenty of room behind for further theoretical refinements and the questioning of my interpretations, my retranslation of ontolog-

⁶⁵⁴ “Navalny Clashed with Ex-Commander of Russia-Backed Separatists,” *Radio Free Europe*, Carl Schreck, July 20, 2017: <https://www.rferl.org/a/navalny-girkin-debate/28629308.html> (accessed June 7, 2018).

ical security illuminates *one* useful way of explaining Russia's at times puzzlingly foreign policy and offers but *one* example of how to include the human longing for *existential meaningfulness* and *authentic being* when conducting inquiry in International Relations.

Dansk resumé

Afhandlingens afsæt er en undren, der opstod i kølvandet på Ruslands militære intervention i Ukraine (2014). Hvorfor valgte russiske beslutningstagere trods store sikkerhedsmæssige risici samt forventelige negative konsekvenser for økonomi og international anseelse netop militær intervention—senere aneksion—blandt værktøjerne i den udenrigspolitiske værktøjskasse? Hvordan kunne så drastisk og risikofyldt en handling forekomme at være en *meningsfuld* russisk respons på urolighederne i Ukraine i kølvandet på nu afsatte ukrainske præsident Viktor F. Janukovitjs nej til en EU-associeringsaftale? Senere erfarede jeg, at Rusland også i 1999 gennemførte en lignende militær intervention i Kosovo, hvis risici og omkostninger ikke synes at stå mål med truslerne mod Ruslands sikkerhed og økonomi samt internationale status.

I afhandlingen argumenterer jeg for, at *ontologisk sikkerhed* er en brugbar teoretisk indgangsvinkel til at forstå den væsentlige—men oversete—*eksistentielle baggrund*, hvorpå russisk udenrigspolitik udspiller sig. Således bidrager afhandlingen med den oversete ontologiske dimension af russisk udenrigspolitik. Kerneargumentet er, at Ruslands risikable og omkostningsfulde militære interventioner i Kosovo og Ukraine ikke lader sig forstå og forklare, hvis man blot ser på konventionelle materielle og immaterielle perspektiver, der tolker udenrigspolitisk handling ud fra trusler mod og gevinster for Ruslands militære og økonomiske sikkerhed samt internationale status og anerkendelse.

Kort fortalt bidrager ontologisk sikkerhed med et perspektiv, der medtænker vigtigheden af at opleve ens eksistens som meningsfuld og væren heri som autentisk. Fundamentale eksistentielle spørgsmål om eksistensens meningsfuldhed og autenticitet vedrører først og fremmest forholdet mellem det oplevede og det forestillede Selv. Hvor materielle og immaterielle perspektiver på udenrigspolitik tager udgangspunkt i *Selvets forhold til Den Anden*, så tager det ontologiske perspektiv udgangspunkt i *Selvets forhold til Selvet*. Oversat til afhandlingens russiske genstandsfelt, så tager jeg udgangspunkt i relationen mellem det russiske oplevede og forestillede Selv. Jo større individuelle og kollektive aktører anser diskrepansen mellem det oplevede og det forestillede russiske Selv for at være, jo mere ontologisk usikker—altså meningsløs og falsk—opleves situationen, de befinder sig i. Jo mere ontologisk usikker situationen opleves, desto mere magtpåliggende bliver det at agere autentisk for at realisere, hvad der ses som en meningsfuld vision for det russiske Selv. Med andre ord bliver det mere magtpåliggende at træde i karakter for at sikre et meningsfyldt Selv, til trods for at sådanne autentiske handlinger kan have betydelige negative konsekvenser for landets sikkerhed, økonomi og status. Så-

ledes argumenterer jeg for, at specifikke russiske aktører så militære interventioner som en autentisk måde at træde i karakter på over for den vestlige Anden, hvis ageren i Kosovo og Ukraine truede det russiske Selvs ontologiske sikkerhed.

Rusland brugte altså interventionerne til at træde i karakter og rekonstruere det oplevede russiske Selv i overensstemmelse med diverse forskellige forestillinger om, hvad der definerer et meningsfyldt russisk Selv. Rekonstruktionen er således baseret på en indre russisk dialog mellem sådanne forestillinger om Selv.

Er det fortænkt at inddrage begreber som ontologi, meningsfyldthed og autenticitet i studiet af russisk udenrigspolitik? Ingenlunde. Tværtimod indfanges en fundamental men overset erfaring, der har præget russiske beslutningstageres—og ikke mindst den russiske befolknings—udsyn efter den kolde krigs ophør. Endvidere gives et bud på, hvordan to udenrigspolitiske kriser med Vesten tilsyneladende har skabt et mere selvsikkert Rusland på den verdenspolitiske scene, hvor den russiske elite og befolkningen mere klart end før kan svare på, hvad der definerer et meningsfyldt russisk Selv.

I 1991 opløses Sovjetunionen endeligt. Sovjetunionens kollaps afføder omfattende politiske, økonomiske og institutionelle forandringer i de nu 15 post-sovjetiske republikker. Sovjetunionens kollaps forandrer også den eksisterende nationale samhørighed. Fra følelsen af samhørighed til et sovjetisk Selv før 1991, står de postsovjetiske republikker overfor at rekonstruere nye meningsfulde visioner for deres respektive nationale Selv. Manglen på et meningsfyldt nationalt Selv sender de tidligere sovjetrepublikker ud på en søgen efter meningsfulde visioner, der kan genskabe en følelse af ontologisk sikkerhed, genetablere en meningsfuld følelse af samhørig til et nationalt Selv samt autentisk udenrigspolitisk repræsentation heraf på den verdenspolitiske scene.

Med udgangspunkt i Ruslands søgen efter ontologisk sikkerhed undersøger jeg tre centrale forskningsspørgsmål: (I) Hvordan Ruslands militære interventioner i Kosovo (1999) og Ukraine (2014) forekom meningsfyldte i udenrigspolitiske konfrontationer med Vesten, der ellers måtte forventes at medføre væsentlige omkostninger for økonomi, sikkerhed og international status. (II) Hvordan Ruslands postsovjetiske russiske Selv rekonstrueres før, under og efter de militære interventioner. (III) Hvordan rekonstruktionen af det russiske Selv forandrede det officielle Ruslands udenrigspolitiske repræsentation heraf efter de to interventioner.

Som svar på forskningsspørgsmålene konkluderer jeg: (I) Ruslands militære interventioner forekom meningsfyldte på baggrund af den ontologiske usikkerhed, som eksempelvis den russiske general Leonid Ivasjov og den na-

tional-konservative intellektuelle Jegor Kholmogorov var centrale eksponenter for før interventionerne i Kosovo og Ukraine. (II) I forbindelse med Kosovointerventionen forandres rekonstruktionen af det forestillede meningsfyldte russiske Selv fra at have den vestlige Anden som *forudsætning* til at være *på trods af*. I forbindelse med Ukraineinterventionen forandres rekonstruktionen af det russiske Selv fra at være *på trods af* til at være *i opposition mod* den vestlige Anden. (III) Efter interventionen i Kosovo introduceres, hvad jeg definerer som Ruslands *forstyrrende udenrigspolitik*. Ruslands forstyrrende udenrigspolitik er en næstbedste strategi, der i fraværet af alternative målsætninger dedikerer udenrigspolitiske midler og ressourcer til at forstyrre—ideelt set forhindre—andre stater i at realisere deres mål. Efter Ruslands militære intervention i Ukraine videreføres de grundlæggende idéer bag den forstyrrende udenrigspolitik, men med en større palet af virkemidler – f.eks. bløde magtmidler som instrumentel brug af humanitære organisationer og information – og flere ressourcer.

Afhandlingens besvarelse er hovedsageligt baseret på kildemateriale fra samtidige centrale russiske aviser, radio, tv, udenrigspolitiske doktriner og officielle taler. Kilderne er levn fra polyfonien af samtidige russiske stemmer i dialoger om, hvad der definerer et meningsfyldt russisk Selv før, under og efter de militære interventioner, og hvordan et meningsfyldt russisk Selv bør agere udenrigspolitisk for at fremstå autentisk over for omverdenen efter interventionerne.

Substantielt bidrager afhandlingen særligt med et dybdegående empirisk studie af Kosovointerventionen, der indikerer, at oprindelsen til Ruslands stadig mere forstyrrende udenrigspolitik snarere skal findes i Kosovointerventionen end i Vladimir Putins præsidentembede. Det teoretiske hovedbidrag er en genoversættelse af ontologisk sikkerhed, der bringer konceptet tættere på Ronald D. Laings oprindelige eksistentiaalistisk inspirerede definition: En dialogisk forståelse af Selvet erstatter den dialektiske; ontologisk usikkerhed—i stedet for sikkerhed—udgør det analytiske udgangspunkt; et endimensionelt syn på udenrigspolitisk krise med fokus på sammenbrud udskiftes med et to-dimensionelt syn, der betoner både sammenbrud og gennembrud. Foruden den omfattende indsamling af samtidigt russisk kildemateriale vil jeg fremhæve den firedele hermeneutiske proces for troværdig dataindsamling og -analyse (indsamling, læsning, nedskrivning og præsentation) som et metodisk bidrag til fremtidige historisk-fortolkende studier af udenrigspolitik.

På baggrund af afhandlingen anbefaler jeg, at forskere i højere grad bør fokusere på, hvordan individuelle og kollektive aktørers evindelige søgen efter ontologisk sikkerhed—i form af en meningsfuld eksistens og autenticitet—simultant påvirker og påvirkes af *konkrete* udenrigspolitiske handlinger. Derudover anbefaler jeg—vestlige såvel som russiske—politikere og praktikere at

huske på, at fremtidige udenrigspolitiske kriser mellem Vesten og Rusland næppe kan forhindres. I stedet for ensidigt at fokusere på at forhindre de sammenbrud, fremtidige kriser potentielt medfører, så husk på at kriser rummer både potentialet for *sammenbruddet* af det eksisterende og muligheden for *gennembruddet* til realiseringen af det meningsfulde Selv, man indtil krisen kun var i stand til at forestille sig.

Med plads til fortsat teoretisk udvikling og diskussion af mine tolkninger håber jeg, at afhandlingen formår at overbevise forskere, politikere og praktikere om det ontologiske perspektivs brugbarhed til at forklare Ruslands til tider forunderlige udenrigspolitik ud fra hidtil oversete indsigter om den bagvedliggende russiske søgen efter ontologisk sikkerhed.

English Summary

The point of departure for this dissertation is a puzzle that arose in the wake of the Russian military intervention in Ukraine (2014). Upon considering the various tools available in their foreign policy toolbox, why did Russian decision-makers—despite major security risks and the predictable negative consequences for Russia’s economy and international reputation—opt for military intervention and ultimately annexation? How could such drastic and risky action seem to constitute a *meaningful* Russian response to the unrest in Ukraine following former Ukrainian President Viktor F. Yanukovich turning down an EU Association Agreement? I later became aware of how Russia had undertaken similar military intervention in Kosovo in 1999, another case in which the risks and costs did not seem proportional to the threats to Russia’s security, economy, and international status.

In the dissertation, I argue that *ontological security* is a useful theoretical approach to understanding the essential—yet overlooked—*existential background* on which Russian foreign policy unfolds. The dissertation thus contributes with a neglected ontological dimension of Russian foreign policy. The core argument is that Russia’s risky and costly military interventions in Kosovo and Ukraine cannot be understood and explained merely by the conventional material and ideational perspectives interpreting foreign policy action on the basis of gains and threats to Russian military and economic security as well as the international status and recognition of the country.

In short, ontological security contributes with a perspective that includes the importance of experiencing one’s existence as meaningful and being as authentic. Fundamental existential questions about the meaning and authenticity of existence relate primarily to the relationship between the experienced and imagined Selves. Where the material and ideational perspectives on foreign policy depart from the *relationship between Self and Other*, the ontological perspective departs from the *Self’s relation to Self*. Translated into Russia as the subject matter of this dissertation, I start with the relationship between experienced and imagined “Russian Self.” The wider that individual and collective agents perceive the discrepancy between experienced and imagined Russian Self being, the more ontologically insecure (i.e., meaningless and unauthentic) they experience the setting in which they are embedded. The more ontologically insecure a setting is, the more urgent it becomes for agents to act authentically in order to realize what is envisioned as meaningful Russian Self. In other words, it becomes more urgent to rise to the occasion in order to ensure a meaningful vision of Self, despite the fact that such actions found to be authentic can cause significant negative consequences for the state’s security,

economy, and status. Thus, I argue that specific Russian agents viewed military intervention as an authentic way of engaging with the “Western Other,” whose actions in Kosovo and Ukraine threatened the ontological security of Russian Self.

Russia therefore used the interventions as occasions to come through and reconstruct the experienced Russian Self in accordance with various envisioned, meaningful Russian Selves. Reconstruction is thus based on the inner Russian dialogue between different such visions of Self.

Is it strained to include concepts such as ontology, meaningfulness, and authenticity in the study of Russian foreign policy? Not at all. On the contrary, the fundamental—but neglected—experience of the end of the Cold War influencing the views of Russian decision-makers (and not least also the views of the Russian people) is taken into account. These concepts also offer an explanation of how a seemingly more Self-confident Russia, which is characterized by a Russian elite and population who are able to articulate that which defines a meaningful Russian Self more clearly than ever before—has emerged out of these two critical episodes in Russo–Western foreign relations.

In 1991, the Soviet Union finally collapsed, which triggered major political, economic, and institutional upheaval in what are now 15 post-Soviet republics. The collapse of the USSR also had an impact on the existing national sense of belonging. From a sense of belonging to a “Soviet Self” before 1991, the post-Soviet republics had to reconstruct new meaningful visions of their respective national Selves. The lack of a meaningful national Self sent each of the post-Soviet republics on a quest for meaningful visions to restore a sense of ontological security, to restore a meaningful sense of belonging to a national Self, and to develop an authentic foreign policy representation hereof on the world political scene.

Beginning my inquiry with the Russian search for ontological security, I examine three key research questions: (I) How was the Russian military intervention in Kosovo (1999) and Ukraine (2014) rendered meaningful in Russo–Western foreign policy confrontations, considering the significant and predictable adverse impacts on the Russian economy, security, and international status? (II) How was the post-Soviet Russian Self reconstructed before, during, and after the military interventions? (III) How did the reconstruction of the Russian Self change the foreign policy of Official Russia after the two interventions?

Answering the key research questions, I conclude the following: (I) The Russian military interventions were rendered meaningful in light of the senses of ontological insecurity Russian General Leonid Ivashov and national conservative intellectual Yegor Kholmogorov—among others—were key exponents of prior to the intervention in Kosovo and Ukraine. (II) In relation to the

intervention in Kosovo, the reconstruction of a meaningful Russian Self went from being *because of* to *in spite of* the Western Other. In connection with the intervention in Ukraine, the reconstruction of a meaningful Russian Self went from being *in spite of* to *in opposition to* the Western Other. (III) After the intervention in Kosovo, I introduce that which I define as Russia's *disruptive foreign policy*, which is a second-best strategy; due to the lack of alternative goals, Russia has opted to dedicate its foreign policy means and resources to disrupt—ideally to prevent—other states from realizing their respective goals. Following Russia's military intervention in Ukraine, the core ideas in this disruptive foreign policy continued, but with a larger palette of means (e.g., soft power means, such as the instrumental use of humanitarian organizations and information) and more resources.

The dissertation is predominately based on a body of primary sources from contemporary central Russian newspapers, radio, television, foreign policy documents, and official speeches. The sources offer testimony to the contemporary polyphony of Russian voices in inner dialogue about what defines a meaningful Russian Self before, during, and after the military interventions, as well as how such meaningful visions of the Russian Self should represent themselves authentically to the world via foreign policy.

Substantially, the dissertation contributes with an in-depth study of the military intervention in Kosovo, which indicates that the origins of the increasingly disruptive Russian foreign policy are to be found more in Russia's "dash to Slatina Airbase" than in Vladimir Putin's presidency. The main theoretical contribution is a retranslation of ontological security, bringing the concept closer to Ronald D. Laing's original, existentially-inspired definition: A dialogical understanding of Self replaces the dialectic; ontological uncertainty—instead of security—constitutes the analytical starting point; and a one-dimensional view of foreign policy crisis focusing on breakdown is replaced with a two-dimensional view emphasizing both *breakdown* and *breakthrough*. In addition to the comprehensive gathering of the contemporary body of Russian sources, I would like to highlight the four-step hermeneutical process for trustworthily gathering and analyzing data (gathering, reading, writing, and presenting) as a methodical contribution to the future historical-interpretivist conduct of inquiries about foreign policy.

Based on the findings presented in this dissertation, I recommend that scholars should focus more on how the circumstance that individual and collective agents are perpetually searching for ontological security—in terms of meaningful existence and authenticity—both influences and is in turn influenced by *specific* foreign policy actions. I also recommend that Western and Russian politicians and practitioners alike keep in mind that future Russo–Western foreign policy crises can hardly be prevented. Instead of unilaterally

focusing on preventing the breakdowns that future crises potentially hold, remember that crises contain both the potential for the *breakdown* of the existing and the possibility of a *breakthrough* to realize the meaningful vision of Self, which one could only previously imagine.

With aplenty room for continued theoretical refinements and discussion of my interpretations, I hope the dissertation will be able to convince scholars, politicians, and practitioners about the usefulness of the ontological perspective to explain Russia's at times puzzling foreign policy, drawing on hitherto neglected insights about the underlying Russian quest for ontological security.

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