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**Russia's Syria policy: geopolitical interests or  
defense of great power identity?**

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## **Abstract**

Russia has been the dominating actor in Syria since the outbreak of the civil war in 2011. Researchers disagree what Russia motivates to block UN resolutions, support Assad, and intervene militarily in 2015. Academics have mainly focused on neorealist explanations. Constructivist arguments have been shortcoming so far as they miss a detailed theoretical justification and empirical evidence. This thesis aims to fill this gap by arguing that the objective utility of Syria is marginal. Instead, Syria provided Russia the opportunity to present itself as a global power, able to shape world affairs on eye level with the US. Therefore, this paper conducts a congruence analysis, which evaluates each theory's explanatory power. The analytical section is split into three parts. The first shows that events before Syria did not make a Russian intervention in Syria necessary, but that recognition of Russia's global power identity has been denied. That Russia's actions in Syria are not entirely congruent with neorealist expectations is shown by the second part. Finally, by conducting a content-analysis, several Russian narratives are evaluated that support the argument that Russia seeks recognition as a global power and intervenes in Syria to defend its identity and not its interests.

## **Keywords**

**Russia, Syria, constructivism, neorealism, identity, military intervention**

**Range of thesis: [191.232 symbols; 29.835 words; 74 pages]**

## **Declaration of Authorship**

1. The author hereby declares that he compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.
2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.
3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

Prague, 24.07.2020

**Marcel Hirling**



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# 1 Introduction

At the beginning of March 2020, there had been a new ceasefire for Syria's Idlib province. It is particularly noteworthy that the agreement was not made between Syria's President Bashar al-Assad and opposition forces, but between Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Russia's President Vladimir Putin (Roth 2020). The new agreement solidifies the territorial gains made by Assad and supporting Russian forces. In July, Russia – along with China – forced the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) members to accept a reduction from two to only one cross-border access point for humanitarian aid (The Guardian 2020). Russia made clear that if its demands were not accepted, it would even risk accepting an end for humanitarian assistance for the northern Syrian region (Lynch and Gramer 2020). A majority of the Council has argued that at least three cross-border points are necessary to ensure humanitarian aid (DeYoung 2020).

These examples symbolize who is in charge of deciding about Syria's fate. Without any doubt, there is no way to ignore Moscow concerning Syria. Russia's supported the Syrian regime from the beginning of the civil war. In the early years of the conflict, support was mainly diplomatically as Russia used its formal power in the UNSC – together with China – to block several UN resolutions (Nichols 2019). Additional support was provided by Russian arms deliveries (Kenner 2012). In September 2015, Russia extended its influence by a direct military campaign in Syria after Assad has officially requested military assistance against terrorists (Roth et al. 2015). The determined Russian engagement for the Syrian regime and thus against the West and several regional states has raised the question about Russian motives and interests. Researchers have discussed this question in detail but failed to agree on a clear consensus. Whereas some scholars have highlighted the strategic importance of Russia's naval port in Syria, others have highlighted the threat of Islamic jihadism towards the Russian Federation.

Further arguments see Russia's behavior as a balancing act against the United States or as a mean to defend international law. Only a few authors have argued that Syria itself provides no utility for Russia, but instead serves as a mean to present itself as an influential global power. In this thesis, it is argued that this argument has been shortcoming so far, missing a detailed theoretical basis and systematic analysis.

Answering the main research question – why Russia intervened in Syria – is essential because the Syrian case self socially already matters. It has been one of the greatest humanitarian disasters during the last decade. By answering this question, this paper also contributes to the theoretical question, which theory explains the case better or, respectively,



more complete. Previous arguments can be roughly summarized under neorealism, whereas I will rely on a constructivist theory by Erik Ringmar (2007). Based on this, it is argued that Russia used Syria to convince others about its global power identity. This explanation will be checked against neorealist arguments that highlight Syria's objective utility concerning the security of the Russian Federation.

When comparing each theory's theoretical expectations with empirical evidence, this paper relies on the analytical approach by Blatter and Haverland (2012), known as congruence analysis. In particular, the empirical part of this section is split into three parts. First, by analyzing the political context in which the Syrian case occurs, it is aimed to rule out or respectively include neorealist or constructivist explanations that have their roots in events before Syria. Second, by looking at the concrete process, which means Russia's actual policy behavior during the Syrian civil war, the explanatory power of the utility-driven arguments are evaluated. Whereas the second analytical part will primarily ignore Russian officials' rhetorical statements, they will be crucial for the last analytical section. As narratives are given a particularly important role in identity building and promotion, I conduct a qualitative content-analysis based on Schreier's approach (2012) to work out and evaluate Russia's Syria narratives. In particular, Russia's statements during 50 United Nations Security Council's meetings are evaluated. To answer if these narratives are limited to the UNSC or if they significantly represent Russia's pretended point of view, further data has been collected, including press statements of the Russian President and the Russian Foreign Ministry and additionally by considering Sputnik News articles.

Before heading to the analysis, the theoretical and methodological bases will be described. Therefore, the thesis starts with a short and very general literature review about third-party intervention. Hence, the literature review becomes more concrete by highlighting the current findings concerning why Russia intervened in Syria. The third section of this work provides the theoretical ground by highlighting the assumptions of utility-driven neorealism and identity-driven constructivism. These assumptions are then transferred to the case of Syria by deriving concrete theoretical expectations. What follows in the fourth section is a detailed description and justification of the applied research strategy. In particular, the qualitative content-analysis approach, the data-selection process, and the actual coding procedure will be explained. After the tripartite analysis, the thesis ends with a summary, a discussion to what degree the results support the theoretical expectations, highlights of the limitations, and suggestions and opportunities for future research.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Why do third parties intervene in conflicts?

The end of the Cold War in 1990 shifted not only the political but also the academic focus from major war conflicts towards civil wars (Lacina 2004). Consequently, much research has dealt with the nature of civil wars in the last 30 years. Not rarely, third-parties intervened from outside to manipulate the outcome of the civil war (Regan 2000). Regan defines a third-party intervention as "convention breaking military [...] activity in the internal affairs of a foreign country targeted at the authority structures of the government with the aim of affecting the balance of power between government and opposition forces" (ibid., p. 10). In simple words, that means that intervention can either take place on behalf of the government or the opposition forces (Regan 1996, p. 339). That third-parties are intervening in conflicts on the territory of another country raises the question of why they do so? In this section, the main findings of scholars who dealt with the question of why and when states are intervening in armed conflicts will be summarized.

Direct-militarily factors:

One factor explains third-party intervention as a direct-militarily threat towards the third-country through the conflict itself. Kathman (2011) argues that intervention can be a useful tool for threat reduction. That becomes especially true for neighboring countries, as disputes do not necessarily stop at borders (ibid.). For example, if a civil war in a neighboring country appears, and the insurgent group is hostile towards the third-country, it might turn against them after they have overthrown their government. Additionally, assume that a terror organization such as the Islamic State for whom state borders do not exist does not only fight the government of their located country but also conducting terror attacks across the borders. As Kathman (2011) argues, that gives the third-party an obvious incentive to intervene in the conflict to prevent that one conflict party will or continue to attack them. In the literature, this effect is called "conflict spillover" (ibid., p. 851).

### Geopolitical and strategic factors:

To intervene in a third-country to reach geopolitical and strategic goals has been the major explanatory factor for superpower involvement in another country during the Cold War (Findley and Teo 2006). Here, intervention is seen as a tool to respond to divergent or common interests of other states. Findley and Teo (2006) claim that interveners act together with others to reach common interests or against others to prevent the opposite side from reaching their goals. Even though the US did not directly intervene in Afghanistan during the Soviet intervention of Afghanistan, the US support for the mujahideen can be seen as an intervention motivated by geopolitical thoughts (Findley and Teo 2006, p. 828). Great power rivalries present some stability over a period, which means no side can really reach victory and will – most likely – not attack the other side. Some scholars argue that extending the classic balance of power theory explains why states support different sides in an internal conflict (Saideman 2002). Thus, a third-party intervention can either be seen as an attempt to gain an advantage over the rival or as an attempt to prevent the other side from gaining such a position. The latter might influence the overall balance of power in the long-run and will thus result in somewhere in a direct-military severe threat of the rival itself (Aydin 2012; Fordham 2008; Gent 2007; Snidal 1991). The balance of power can be shaped in different ways. If the side supported by the third-power wins the civil war, the third-party, for example, wins or keeps its influence, gets or keeps access to (new) markets (ibid.). It can be summarized that the conflict only becomes interesting for third-parties if they perceive it as a tool to shape the balance of power towards their rival.

### Economic factors:

Another factor that can be found in the literature to explain third-party intervention are economic factors. Findley and Marineau (2015) showed statistically that lootable resources increase the likelihood of a third-party intervention significantly by over 70 percent, controlling for strategic factors. The economic factor can explain several third-party interventions in diamond-rich countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Findley and Marineau 2015, p. 478). Third-parties are even more likely to intervene if the opposition forces control the lootable resources. However, Koga (2011) could show that the third-party's political institution matters as well. Whereas an autocratic regime is more likely to intervene to access

natural resources, a democratic state is less likely to do so. If a third-party has access to natural resources already before the outbreak of a conflict, it will likely intervene on that side, which will guarantee them continuous access (Aydin 2012). As plundering the resources in some cases might only be possible during the civil war, there is again an incentive for the third-party to prolong the ongoing conflict (Balch-Lindsay and Enterline 2000).

Humanitarian factors:

In contrast to economic or geostrategic motivated interventions, humanitarian motivated interventions aim to end civil wars rapidly to stop the violence (Balch-Lindsay and Enterline 2000, p. 637). Humanitarian interventions can be defined as "coercive action by one or more states involving the use of force in another state without the consent of its authorities, and to prevent widespread suffering or death among its inhabitants" (Weiss 2007, as cited in Varwick 2009). Such intervention conflicts with the principle of national sovereignty (Atack 2002). However, since 2005 humanitarian intervention has been institutionalized through the United Nations (UN) known as the "responsibility to protect" (United Nations 2005). This concept is rooted in the idea that every human being possesses fundamental human rights, independently of its citizenship (Magnuson 2010).

Contrary to the previously mentioned factors, a third-party intervention to protect human rights and the lives of innocent individuals is – ideally – not aiming in favor of the third itself, but in support of individuals who are usually not citizens of the intervening country. Third-party interventions serving a humanitarian purpose are so to say selfless. Consequently, critics – especially realists – have argued that pure humanitarian interventions do not exist and that the responsibility to protect only serves as a pretext for war (Bellamy 2004; Magnuson 2010; Smith 1998). However, others argued that there had been quite a few cases, especially during the 1990s, where (Western) states did not intervene for profit or their security, but in purpose to stop the violence against innocent people (Bellamy 2004; Junk 2011; Nolte 1999; Varwick 2009). Cases named by these authors are, for example, the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, the US intervention in Somalia, and the UN response to Darfur.

### Ethnic ties and affinities:

The fifth factor, which can be found in the literature, is ethnic ties or affinities on third-party interventions. This argument is built on the constructivist assumption that people act due to standards and can form a shared identity with others (Allahar 2001; Jepperson et al. 1996; Wendt 1992, 1999). A shared identity can be ethnic, which has been indeed one of the most researched factors to explain the link between identities and third-party interventions or civil wars (Austvoll 2006; Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Fearon and Laitin 2000, 2003; Gleditsch 2007; Humphreys and Weinstein 2008; Khosla 1999; Koga 2011; Lemke and Regan 2004; Saideman 1997).

Scholars have argued that ethnic ties do not stop at borders and that third-parties intervene in favor of a group with which they share an ethnic identity. Following the argument of Saideman (1997), political leaders need to consider the preferences of their supporters. So, their supporters will most likely favor the state's support of a group in a conflict with which they share a collective identity or an ethnic tie, making them care about their group members (Koga 2011). That ethnic ties do explain third-party intervention find support within the literature (Gleditsch 2007; Khosla 1999; Lemke and Regan 2004). Nevertheless, critiques argue – similar to the humanitarian factor – that ethnic ties only serve as a pretext for the intervention (Lake and Rothchild 1998, p. 31).

### Identity:

Like the ethnic factor, the identity-driven explanation is based on the constructive school of thought. Challenging the realist school of thought, constructivists argue that states do not act because of rational interests. Interests can only be formulated if an identity of oneself is already defined (Ringmar 2007). Consequently, self-description can only come to exist through social interaction (*ibid.*). That means that a sense of self can be only developed if others see ourselves as we do. Following this logic, states rather act in defense of their identity or, in other words: to be recognized as they wish to be recognized by others. A state which subjectively feels inferior to another country may try to catch up to the other superior state, either by military or by peaceful means (Ringmar 2002, 2007). Hence, states may not intervene militarily in different states to gain strategic benefits or economic profits, but instead to show other states, that they want to be recognized under a specific description (*ibid.*). For example, scholars have argued that Sweden intervened in the Thirty Years War and France in Libya to defend or establish their

identity (Moisi 2011; Ringmar 2007). Also, the Russian intervention in Ukraine in 2014 can be explained by an identity-driven approach (Kazharski 2019).

As this explanation will be used to explain the Syrian case, a more detailed description of this argument will follow in the theoretical section of this thesis.

## **2.2 Why did Russia intervene in Syria?**

The presentation of these explanatory factors behind interventions leads automatically to the question of which of these approaches explains Russia's behavior in Syria the best? Indeed, a variety of scholars have already dealt with this question. As a result, many different explanations exist, which can roughly be assigned to the general reasons listed above (Oligie 2019). In the following, the main explanatory approaches will be presented.

### **Fear of Jihadism:**

As Russia has its own history concerning jihadism and Islamist terrorism, during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the two Chechen Wars (Goldman 1984; Speckhard and Akhmedova 2006), some scholars argue that the rise radical Islamists in Syria caused the Russian intervention, or at least the diplomatic support of Assad, in order to prevent spillovers which could potentially lead to new insurgencies in North Caucasus and suicide attacks in Russian metropolises (Baev 2011; Kofman and Rojansky 2018; Mankoff 2012b; Plakoudas 2015). Indeed, up to a thousand fighters from the North Caucasus joined the so-called Islamic State to establish a caliphate in Iraq and Syria (Vysotsky 2014). Insurgencies in the North Caucasus lacked a new generation of powerful leaders after previous ones have been liquidated. Caucasians, who returned home from Syria could posit a direct military threat for the Russian Federation as they could establish new transregional insurgency networks (Souleimanov 2014, p. 8). The fact that at least a part of the opposition in several Arab Spring countries consisted of radical jihadists leads to high Russian skeptics about the Western support of opposition forces (Vysotsky 2014, p. 45). Consequently, it is argued that Assad's downfall would have resulted in a takeover of radical Islamists, which does explain Russia's support of Damascus as Assad is perceived as the only guarantor for stability (Kofman and Rojansky 2018, p. 8).

Syria as a strategic foothold in the Middle East:

Other arguments highlight Syria's geostrategic importance for Russia's foreign policy, especially concerning its rivalry towards the US. However, within the geostrategic argument, different opinions exist about how Syria serves Russia's strategic interests.

Some scholars and Western thinkers argue that the Russian naval base in Tartus has been a factor that had an impact on Russia's decision to intervene in Syria (Grygiel 2020; Khatib 2014; Martini et al. 2013; Rafizadeh 2014; Zulfqar 2018). The naval presence of Tartus has been established in the 1970s. It is highlighted that Tartus is necessary on the road to develop a commercial and powerful navy. Furthermore, the Mediterranean Sea domination is rather about the control of landlines and ports than about the number of ships. Such control allows Russia enormous leverage over Europe (Grygiel 2020; Valenta and Valenta 2016). Consequently, Assad's fall could have led to the result that the new government would not allow Russia to use the port of Tartus anymore.

In contrast, other scholars have argued that Tartus's port is in terrible shape and, consequently, does not explain Russia's behavior and has, at most, a symbolic meaning (Allison 2013a; Mankoff 2012b; Pukhov 2012; Ziadeh et al. 2012). It has to be mentioned that these articles were written before Moscow announced to update the Tartus base (Grygiel 2020).

Nevertheless, other geostrategic factors besides the port are highlighted. Allison (2013) argues that Russian leaders perceive the Western approach of toppling Assad as a broader strategy towards destabilizing Iran, with which Russia has quite an essential relationship. Others claim that Russian leaders assume that the American "regime change strategy" has its goal to weaken Russia's global position, as the US can always return home. In contrast, the Russian's are living in the direct neighborhood of those states in which the US only brought chaos (Ziadeh et al. 2012, 7 f.).

Another prominent explanation is that Russia wants to keep a foothold in the Middle East. By holding Assad in power, which is Russia's last faithful ally within the region, Russia keeps at least a chance to influence Middle Eastern politics (Plakoudas 2015; Pukhov 2012). In line with this argument, realists have argued that Syria is a typical example of "hard balancing," which aims to weaken or push back the US and NATO's influence. In particular, Korolev (2017) argued that Syria's events do not pose any direct threat to Russia. However, their engagement can be seen as long-term attempts to shift the balance of power within the region against the US. He further claims that Russia is leading the anti-US coalition of Iraq, Iran, and Syria. Scholars have also argued that oil and gas could be transferred to Europe via Syria, which gives

Syria even more geostrategic significance. Russia is highly attempting to prevent Europe from gaining a diversity of energy sources, as Russia provides around 80 percent of Europe's gas imports. By keeping Europe dependent on Russia's gas, Moscow is weakening the US's most important ally (Güner and Koç 2017, p. 2; Zulfqar 2018, p. 131). In short, realists argue that by keeping Assad in power, Russia prevents the US from gaining even more influence within the Middle East.

Another argument that can be assigned to geostrategic thinking is the "Ukrainian factor". Some authors see a direct connection between the Russian military intervention in Syria in 2015 and the annexation of Ukraine's Crimea in the previous year. As a consequence, western states imposed sanctions against Moscow and were trying to isolate Russia politically. By intervening in Syria, Russia attempt to gain bargain leverage to break out of isolation (Affentranger 2016; Bodner 2015; Kofman and Rojansky 2018; MacFarquhar 2016; Souleimanov 2016; Souleimanov and Dzutsati 2018).

Syria as a trade partner:

According to Zifcak (2012) and Zulfqar (2018), the Middle East is the biggest export market for Russia after the Asia Pacific. In particular, Syria is one of Russia's major purchaser of arms and defense equipment. The two states agreed on a future contract of 4 billion US-dollar about war systems. Furthermore, Russian's industry invested in gas and oil extraction in Syria. Overall, gas and oil exports make 70 percent of Russia's total foreign income (Valenta and Valenta 2016, p. 7).

However, pure economic ambitions are not very prominent within the existing literature to serve as an explanatory driver behind Russia's Syrian policy. Critiques of this argument have highlighted that Syria's oil production declined for years and that it is unlikely that Syria can pay for the Russian arms supply at all. It is argued that Russia has no stake in Syria's oil supplies and is not economically interested in Syria (Allison 2013a; Baev 2011).

Russia's intervention as a humanitarian act:

Regarding the classic understanding of humanitarian intervention as a "selfless" action to prevent the suffering or deaths of inhabitants of a country, there is no article that sees this argument as a factor for Russia's Syrian intervention. However, the "humanitarian" argument



goes in another direction. Thus, Russia is acting selflessly because it wants to defend the international legal law of state sovereignty. Hence, Russia's legitimacy is based on traditional moral and spiritual values, which is challenged by the Western liberal ideology. Non-intervention into others' internal affairs is seen as a moral principle (Averre and Davies 2015, p. 828; Ramani 2015). Therefore, Russia's diplomatic blockade over Syria to prevent another Western intervention is seen in line with this argument.

Even if other authors have accepted the argument that Russia has strong reservations against humanitarian interventions, they argue that Russia acts not selfless at all. Russia indeed fears that a permanent implementation of humanitarian interventions could one day serve to justify a humanitarian intervention targeting Russia itself (Allison 2013b; Charap 2013).

Syria as a mean for recognition:

Even though that affinities between Russia and Syria were mentioned in the literature, such as Putin as a defender of the Orthodox church and therefore of Christian minorities in Syria or an affinity based on the collective value of territorial sovereignty (Allison 2013a; Valenta and Valenta 2016), they play no significant role within the literature aiming to explain Russia's policy.

Constructivist arguments seem to be more appropriate to explain Moscow's behavior as an urge for recognition. By blocking UN resolutions and by intervening in Syria militarily, Russia is trying to restore its status as an international great power (Lukyanov 2016; Majumdar 2018; Ramani 2015). Hence, Russia is in an identity crisis, as it never fully "integrated into the liberal order nor built its viable alternative" (Lukyanov 2016, p. 5). As a mean for building a new identity, Russia relied on its old model of presenting themselves as a challenge to the West and the US in particular (ibid.). Furthermore, Russia's behavior is seen as an irrational emotional response to previous (perceived) humiliations by the West. For example, it is argued that the Russians felt disrespected about Western intervention in Libya as the no-fly zone turned de-facto immediately into the rebel's airpower without the approval of the Russians (Ziadeh et al. 2012).

In sum, it can be said that these constructivists are making some good points, but remain a bit short. That means a theoretical basis and supporting empiric evidence is lacking. Many other scholars – including realists – mentioned that Russia perceives itself as a global power or wants to restore its previous status as a dominating power (Khatib 2014; Machnikowski

2015; Mankoff 2012b; Plakoudas 2015; Stent 2016). However, often it remains as a side note only. In the following section, it is argued that more attention should be paid towards Russia's identity and self-perception to get a more profound knowledge about Russia's behavior towards the Syrian conflict and understand how identity shapes Russia's interest. Hence, I do not refuse other explanations about Russia's interests in Syria a priori but argue that such explanations are incomplete and need an analysis that goes another step backward before the formulation of interests. Ringmar (2002) correctly notes that interests can only be settled after questions concerning identities have been answered. Therefore, in the following section, a theoretical framework as a basis for the subsequent analysis of Russia's own identity will be built.

### **3 Theory**

After studying the literature, it can be said that five possible explanations of Russia's intervention in Syria do exist.

Most of the explaining factors can be broadly summarized under two major international relations theories: neorealism and constructivism. The first two explanatory factors, which are the fear of jihadism and geostrategic goals, can be assigned to neorealist theory. In favor of these arguments, the authors see the physical security of Russia – in short, or in the long term – threatened through either the jihadists or the USA and their allies. Therefore, Russia's military intervention can be interpreted as an act of balancing. Either, within the state of Syria, against the jihadists who almost gained the upper hand in the civil war, or, within the anarchic world system, against the United States which were – in the eyes of Moscow – about to conduct another regime change to install a pro-Western government. That could possibly lead to the loss of Russia's influence and the last strategic position within the Middle East.

As already indicated, the argument made about the intervention as a mean for recognition and defense of Russia's own identity has its theoretical roots in constructivism. It will be explained more detailed in this section. Furthermore, the "humanitarian act" argument, which sees Russia's intervention as an attempt to prevent another blurring alteration of the principle of state-sovereignty, can be assigned to constructivism as it is seen as a moral principle challenged by Western liberal ideology (Averre and Davies 2015). Hence, Russia wants to be recognized as a guarantor of classic international law.

Finally, it can be said that the struggle of schools of thought, which has been a never-

ending debate within international relations theory, does not stop at the Syrian case. To evaluate their explanatory power, the main features and differences between neorealism and constructivism will be described now.

### **3.1 Neorealism – anarchy, interests, and power**

When it comes to neorealism, one should start with its theoretical roots stemming from classic realist theory. In this context, Morgenthau is mostly mentioned as the formative theorist (Waltz 1990). By explaining historical cases, Morgenthau claims that politics have their roots in human nature, characterized by the constant desire to gain more power. Therefore, all attempts to attain more power are a rational act and of "political nature." As a consequence, all states are aiming to maximize their amount of power (Morgenthau 1948).

In contrast to classic realist theory, Kenneth Waltz, the most prominent neorealist, argues that it is not human nature which determines state behavior, but anarchic world order. Whereas domestic politics are hierarchically ordered and structured, international politics lack a parent instance, respectively, a government that could structure and order the states' behavior. Hence, Waltz argues that the global system is characterized by anarchy (Waltz 2010). In this context, the concept of anarchy is often referred to Thomas Hobbes's famous state of nature (Williams 1996). In the state of nature, men are living without a universal power in the condition of every man against every man (Hobbes 2016, p. 109). However, contrary to Morgenthau and Hobbes, Waltz argues that men or rather states are not primarily seeking power, but survival and thus, security (Waltz 1988, 2010). Hence, survival is seen as a prerequisite before achieving any other goals (Waltz 2010, p. 91). The conceptual focus on survival and security comes from the assumption that none state can fully know other states' real intentions in the anarchic world order and should, therefore, be always prepared for the worst-case. The anarchic system is also labeled as a self-help system. That implies that states are on their own. Waltz phrase it as follows: "because states may at any time use force, all states must be prepared to do so" (ibid., p. 102). What follows is that all states, which seek to survive, are busy identifying dangers and counteracting them. However, that leads to a security dilemma as, by the increase of one's security, others' security will decrease. Arms race and alliances will follow (Waltz 1988, p. 619). Even though Waltz acknowledges that some states may seek power for power's sake in Morgenthau's sense, he claims that it is not necessary for the competitive nature of international

politics. The anarchic world order will be competitive if all states would seek for power, but it will also be competitive if they just seek to secure their survival (ibid., p. 620). Hence, Waltz's neorealism is also known as "defensive realism" (Mearsheimer 2001, p. 99).

Whereas Morgenthau sees power as an end, Waltz sees it only as a useful mean to gain security. Nevertheless, statesmen try to gain an appropriate amount of power, as not enough power may risk an adversary's attack. In contrast, too much power might provoke adversaries' reactions and may lead to an alliance against the dominant state (Waltz 1988, p. 616). The latter process is called balancing, which also makes up a large part of the neorealist theory. It assumes that states form an alliance against a dominant power until the power is "balanced," which means none of the two, or respectively more poles are entirely superior in power capabilities. Waltz concludes, if states sought to maximize their power, they would not join the weaker party but rather join the superior one. The softer side provides the joining states more security and more appreciation (Waltz 2010, 126 f.). Other neorealists such as Mearsheimer, are not fully convinced by this assumption. He agrees that states act in order to ensure survival, but states are not satisfied with equal power distribution, and thus prefer to achieve hegemonic power. Mearsheimer's interpretation of neorealism is also known as "offensive realism" (Mearsheimer 2001). Nevertheless, both theorists emphasize that cooperation between states is possible, but only a useful self-interested mean to seek gains.

It is important to note that, in neorealist theory, power is understood in real material power as the "ultimate measure of influence" (Telbami 2002, p. 163). It might be the case that power may be misunderstood; however, the inference is always drawn from material power (ibid., p. 163). What follows is that the greater the military capabilities, such as more tanks, more strategic bases, more allies etc., the more powerful a state is. That leads to the conclusion that neorealists assume that power can be mainly measured by evaluating the (military) material capabilities of a state (Mearsheimer 2001, p. 97).

### **3.2 The flawed neorealist concept of threats and security**

After studying neorealist theory, it can be concluded that security is at the center of the concept. However, critiques have argued that, even though neorealism has such a strong focus on security, neorealists did not sufficiently try to explain what security actually means (Huysmans 1998). Waltz's main argument is that states are seeking safety to survive. That makes basically

an equation of security with survival. Does it mean survival of values, or does it mean survival of the essential functions a state usually provides (Baldwin 1997, p. 21)? Traditional, rooted in the Cold War, and the associated nuclear arms race, survival and thus security was mainly understood in military terms (Buzan 1997, p. 6; Baldwin 1997, p. 9; Ullman 1983, p. 129). In this tradition security, and the academic discipline of Security Studies, in general, are dealing with the phenomenon of war and are limited to military issues (Buzan 1997, p. 10; Walt 1991, p. 212). What follows is that if an army of another state threatens a specific army, state survival is at stake. If military opportunities are eliminated by defeating the army and destroying military equipment, the defeated state runs the risk of losing sovereignty. Thus, their adversary is now determining the lives of the citizens within the defeated land. Consequently, by analyzing the Syrian case through a neorealist perspective, I will apply this traditional view of security.

However, this traditional military thinking has been challenged by academics since the late phase of the Cold War through the promotion of a broader definition of security to adopt issues and threats beside military ones. However, a broader definition of security makes it more difficult for academics to identify threats objectively, especially compared to the classic neorealist definition where the power distribution between states measures threats and power. Consequently, subjective assessments become more important. The Copenhagen school addresses this problem by arguing that when political leaders are talking about an issue, it becomes securitized, making them a real existential threat and thus legitimizing emergency measures such as the legitimate use of force. Through the speech-act – declaring something an issue a threat – it becomes a real threat. Hence, basically, everything can become a threat. States such as Iran, for example, even securitize mini-skirts or pop music as a threat to their national security or quality of life (Buzan 1997, p. 21). Consequently, the definition of threats is highly dependent on the way people make sense of the world and themselves. Therefore, the theory of constructivism might offer additional or alternative insights to understand state behavior, especially with regard to the question why states use violence.

### **3.3 Constructivism and state identity**

As already described in the previous section, there has been critique of neorealism concerning the definition of its core element, namely security. The underlying assumption of neorealists that all states seek to gain security in an anarchic world order has been criticized and challenged.

One of the strongest and probably best-known critics is Alexander Wendt, whose aim it has been to explain international politics by treating states as basic units, as Waltz did (Ringmar 1997, p. 291). However, the two theories differ in many aspects, which will be described in this section.

One reason why realist theory has been criticized after the Cold War has been the fact that neorealists made some claims about the future of Europe and the world order, which did not come true. Predictions in social sciences should always be treated with caution. However, neorealism mainly failed to explain the order that emerged in Europe after the fall of the Iron Curtain. As Williams and Neumann mentioned, neorealists predicted the dissolution of NATO after the Cold War (Williams and Neumann 2000, p. 357). Indeed, Mearsheimer argued that NATO will dissolve and that the emerged power vacuum in Europe, caused by the end of the bipolar superpower competition, will increase the likelihood of a major European war. Mearsheimer assumes that Europe's power system will emerge similar to the one before the Second and First World War. How Mearsheimer is stuck in traditional realist thinking, becomes apparent as he proposes nuclear weapons proliferation to Germany to keep the power balanced between the major European powers. He supports and justifies his claims and predictions by stating that states are characterized by competing ambitions, aiming to maximize their power (Mearsheimer 1990). Such a description of state behavior is very similar to the one of Morgenthau described above, which is mostly derived from actual state behavior before the Second World War. By referring to Waltz's power-of-balance theory, one could even argue that states should have balanced against the US, which remained the only superpower after the Soviet Union's collapse. Therefore, Europeans might have balanced against the US, as – according to Waltz – states should join the weaker side to gain security. However, today, 30 years after the end of the Cold War, NATO is still there, even enlarged, no major European war emerged, and states did not balance against the United States.

The insufficiency of neorealism, to describe the events after the Cold War, was one of the main reasons why Wendt came up with constructivism theory, where he argues, "anarchy is what states make of it." In particular, his primary claim aims at the starting point of neorealism, which takes the self-help system, due to anarchy, as given. According to Wendt, self-help is caused by process and not by structure (Wendt 1992). The process, a fundamental principle of the theory, implies that people, and therefore states, act towards others or objects based on the meanings that the others or objects have for them. In practice, that means that states can distinguish between enemies and friends. Wendt acknowledges that the distribution

of material power will affect the state's calculations, but how they will do it, depends highly on the intersubjective understanding of themselves and others. As an example, Wendt is using the meaning of US military power towards Canada and Cuba, to show how power distribution can have different meanings for different states. Where Canada is probably not very concerned about its militarily powerful neighbor, Cuba will be most likely more concerned because they interpret the United States differently (ibid., p. 397). Different interpretations and thus, different understandings are the results of interactions between individuals or in this case between states. What follows is another mind game, assuming that two individuals are meeting for the first time in the state of nature. As it is their first interaction, they have no understanding of power and no history of security and insecurity do exist. Here, Wendt asks the question of what they should do. Whereas realists would argue that the individuals should be prepared for the worst-case scenario, which is an attack by the opponent, Wendt argues that what to do depends on the interaction. The opponent's first gesture might consist of an attack or could also consist of laying down arms. What individuals will do then; does depend on the way they interpret the gesture of the other without having any prior experience of interaction. Based on the first interpretation of the other's action, expectations about further steps will be derived. Based on the additional knowledge, new gestures are made, which will be interpreted again. This process will repeat a few times until stable concepts of self and other are created. Wendt argues that there is "no reasons to assume a priori – before the gesture – that the" opponent is threatening. Hence, he concludes that social threats are not natural but socially constructed (ibid., p. 404 f.).

As already indicated, not only threats emerge from social interaction, but the whole social understanding of the world, including norms and especially identities, get formed (Wendt 1992). According to Hopf, identities do perform three functions: First, they tell who you are. Second, they tell others who you are, and third, they tell you who others are (Hopf 1998, 175 f.). Whereas neorealists assume that international actors have only one identity, that of self-interested states, constructivists argue that identities can be variable and depend on the context. Identities are always defined to others. If there would not be any students, teachers could not exist (ibid.). The same counts for international politics: without non-great powers, great powers cannot come to exist (Murray 2012, p. 135). That identities depend on the context means that toward a student, a particular person takes the identity as a teacher, whereas the same person takes the identity as a family father when interacting with his son. Thus, identities are linked to different roles (Wendt 1992, p. 398).

In contrast to neorealists, who argue that state interests are given *a priori*, are consistent

and that states are usually self-interested and therefore acting to gain benefits, constructivists assume that state interests are dependent on the state's identity and role, which can also change over time. Consequently, that means, only through identities, interests can be formulated, and if identities change, interests will do so as well (Hopf 1998; Ringmar 2002). Thus, identities serve as a necessary precondition for interests. It might be rational to invest in a nuclear second-strike capability to seek its security, but that does not explain why the Soviet Union and the US spent further into nuclear weapons, once a sufficient number of missiles was reached (Ringmar 2002, p. 128). Such behavior can only be explained by the intersubjective understanding of having a great power identity, which was, at these times, mainly characterized by having a massive number of nuclear weapons and a substantial second-strike capability. This example shows how identities can materialize.

### **3.4 The struggle for recognition**

In the last section, I have described how threats, identities and interests are socially constructed as they emerge from social interaction. Hence, a self is created through interaction.

The concept of self is based on sociological theory, which describes it as "reflexive in that it can take itself as an object and categorize, classify, or name itself in particular ways concerning other social categories or classifications" (Stets and Burke 2000, p. 224). That means that persons are acting within a social structure and recognize themselves and others as occupants of roles. Hence, expectations about others and their behavior are directly connected to these roles. These expectations finally guide individual behavior (*ibid.*, p. 225).

However, based on these sociological assumptions, a complete sense of self can only be developed if we see ourselves as others do. Consequently, others need to describe us and recognize us under a specific description or role. Being recognized means receiving an identity (Ringmar 2002). That can be transferred to international politics: A state can only become a great power if others perceive it as a great power. Without recognition, a particular identity will not come into play.

As a consequence, humans fight for recognition because it is not automatically guaranteed. This assumption is mainly based on Hegel, who interpreted the life in the state of nature as a "struggle for recognition" (Ringmar 2002, p. 120). So, how to fight for recognition? The easiest way to get recognition is by telling stories about yourself. In other words: presenting



self-descriptions to a specific audience how one wants to be recognized by them. These stories are also known as narratives. What is crucial here is that the audience depends on the desired identity. The audience will be someone who already has the targeted role identity and whose identity is thus recognized and respected by the storyteller (Ringmar 2007, p. 81). However, if the audience does not grant recognition, different opportunities emerge: First, one could make no further efforts to reach a specific identity and just accept others' descriptions about oneself. The second option consists of the possibility to come up with another self-description, a story that might rather convince the audience compared to the previous one. Finally, one could stick to the current story and try to convince the audience that they were wrong until they accept the presented self-description. As role identities are often related to a specific behavior, such a conviction will most likely happen through concrete action (ibid., p. 82).

How action can result from denied recognition will be illustrated by an example: World politics before the First World War were most prominently used by neorealists to show how the anarchic world system drove the security-seeking states into a competition and finally into war. Murray gives an alternative explanation. At these times, the identity of great powers was strongly characterized by having large colonies worldwide. Consequently, states that understood themselves as great powers and wanted to be recognized as one by others were interested in conquering and establishing colonies. Hence, Germany sought recognition as a world power by the states that already had world power status, namely France and Britain. Therefore, they tried to gain colonies and instigated a crisis over Morocco's status even though it was of little material value for Germany. As recognition was denied, it resulted in social insecurity, which led to an arms race and finally World War I (Murray 2012).

While neorealists argue that states act to seek security, constructivists argue that states act to gain recognition. One thing which classical realists and constructivists have in common is their claim that action is the result of basic human desires. Whereas Morgenthau (1948) claim that this human desire consists of the desire for power, Ringmar assumes that it is indeed the desire for recognition and defense of identity which drive people's actions (Ringmar 2002, p. 119). Actions in defense of identity, do not seek to maximize utility or minimize loss, which could eventually influence the state's security or balance of power, and are thus not "rational actions" in the traditional sense (Ringmar 2007, p. 83).

Based on the knowledge about constructivism and neorealism, it becomes clear what Ringmar means when he claims that states are not (always) acting because of rational interests and are instead acting to defend national identity (ibid.). In other words: it is clear how the

concepts of identity and interests differ. Mainly in the way that interests are understood in materials ways. It is assumed that specific objects, such as weapons, colonies, military bases, have specific utility for the state, mainly concerning security and threats. In contrast, identity is seen as a precondition for interests. Interests depend on identity. What is crucial here is that the materialized interests resulting from identity are somewhat symbolic than objectively useful. When they are symbolic, they can still be useful simultaneously; however, gaining material objects is often rooted in the desire to get recognition, get social security, and not in the desire for material utility. This assumption is supported by psychological research, which concludes that materialism is a mean through which individuals construct or maintain their self (Shrum et al. 2013). Hence, I conclude that the concepts of identity and interests can overlap to a certain degree as the effects of material objects can be useful and symbolic at the same time. What finally matters are the intentions behind gaining the objects. For example, do I buy a new iPhone because I want to use the versatile possibilities of it or because it is socially understood as a symbol for social wealth and high class?

### **3.5 Russia's Syrian War, an act to get recognition? Theoretical expectations**

In social sciences and especially with regard to the grand theories of international relations, it is rarely the case that one theory can explain everything and make other theories meaningless. Some cases might be better explained by one theory than by another, and with another case, it might be the other way around. To explain the case of Russia's Syrian intervention, two possible theories broadly described and illustrated in this section, exist. Thus, the question is, which theory does explain Russia's behavior better, or does the constructivist recognition theory provide additional insights to the dominant but diverse findings of neorealism?

These questions serve as a good starting point for a congruence analysis (Blatter and Haverland 2012, pp. 144–204). For evaluating each concept's explanatory powers, theoretical expectations need to be deductively derived and finally compared to empirical findings in the analysis section. That means, to think about what we would expect to find in the real world according to these two theories. Some of the expectations will be formulated in this section. In line with Blatter and Haverland's congruence approach, the expectations will be formulated without operationalizing the concrete concepts as observable indicators, which is a method usually used by statistical researchers. Consequently, interpretation of the findings concerning

the theories will be of particular importance in the analytical section (Blatter and Haverland 2012, p. 165).

According to neorealist theory, it is expected that Russia intervened in Syria because Syria itself provides Russia material utility concerning its security and geostrategic position. Therefore, the benefits of the Syrian intervention would outweigh the costs. The alliance with Assad would serve a balancing act, either against the jihadists, the West or both, which poses a threat to Russia's physical security. That would imply that through Russia's actions, the jihadists or especially the West, were weakened or at least that their position was not strengthened. A weakening could, for example, be characterized by driving a wedge between NATO members. A weakening of the jihadist would be more obviously characterized by eliminating the jihadist threat through capture or killings. To deny the West getting further power could imply that Russia's action hindered the West from gaining another ally in the Middle East or gaining access to essential resources, which would further strengthen the US and its allies' economic power. Another argument that would be in line with an interest-driven concept is that Syria provided Russia utility by using Syria as a leverage tool to break out of isolation caused by the annexation of Crimea. That was an argument mentioned by other scholars presented in the literature review. The central question is if an intervention in Syria was necessary for Russia to ensure its security in the short-, or long-term. All these considerations, automatically, lead to mind games about the counterfactual: What would have happened if Russia would not have intervened? Even though it is impossible to fully predict what would have happened if a specific event did not occur, these kinds of thoughts might help to weight final observations and their explanatory power and thus the explanatory power of neorealism (Goertz and Levy 2007).

Concerning the constructivist recognition theory, we would, in general, expect that Syria did not provide material utility for Russia and was thus somewhat of symbolic importance. According to the theory, Russia acted to get recognition for a specific type of identity. As mentioned before, recognition can only be granted by someone who is respected by oneself and who already posits the desired status (Ringmar 2007, p. 81). Russian expert Jeffrey Mankoff wrote: "while the United States remains the central reference point for Russian foreign policy, Russia is no longer the main preoccupation of US policy makers and diplomats. The collapse of the Soviet Union, along with the emergence of [...] terrorism and an increasingly powerful China, have all contributed to Russia's eclipse as the United States top foreign policy priority" (Mankoff 2012a, p. 92).

Based on this, it can be said that Russia felt comfortable during the Cold War when it

has been America's central reference point. However, the respect and primary reference of the US, is what Moscow is missing now. Consequently, I assume that it is mainly the United States from which Russia is trying to regain recognition. That implicates that, in Moscow's eyes, the US already has an individual identity. In international politics, the US is usually named the only remaining "super-" or "great power." Indeed, different labels have been used. What matters, is that US influence is not limited to their regional sphere, as they can influence politics all around the globe that makes them a global power. Hence, the terms super-, great-, world- or global power should be in the following understood synonymously. No matter which label is finally used, there is no doubt that the US is the most powerful country that mainly dominates the global system, at least since the end of the Cold War (Huntington 1999; Hurrell 2006; Lukyanov 2016). If Russia can be defined as such, a similar dominating power is more debatable. Mankoff (2009) has argued that Russia never gave up its claim for great power status. Putin's famous quote that the collapse of the Soviet Union has been "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe" of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, support this claim (Osborn 2005).

Formally considered, one could argue that Russia can already influence world politics as Moscow posits a veto at the Security Council. However, if other states do not care about Russia's veto, it is meaningless. Hurrell argues in line with this argument that being a great power is not a question of material capability but a social one. A matter of recognition by others (Hurrell 2006, p. 4). Also, in line with that is a statement by Putin's former advisor and supporter, Gleb Pawlowski. He argued that Russia's foreign policy is about hiding that Russia is a really weak state. However, Russia would force other states to constantly speak about them and recognize them as stronger as they are (Pawlowski 2020). That led me to conclude that if Russia wants to be a global power, it needs recognition by other powerful states, particularly by America, who already possess such a status. That does not imply that the Russians want to become like the US, but they want to be recognized and respected like them.

Hence, what kind of evidence would imply that Russia acted to get recognition? According to the recognition theory by Ringmar, actors are trying to convince others about their identity through the promotion of certain narratives (Ringmar 2007, p. 81). Thus, we would expect to find evidence in Russia's narratives. If the assumption about Russia's desired global power identity is true, we would expect to find stories where Russia emphasizes to influence world politics as the Americans do. That means Russia claims a similar amount of power for itself, which is possibly rooted in the Cold War experience, where the block-leaders shaped world politics and negotiated on eye level with each other. This would also imply that Russia

stands in contrast to other powers, or to be more specific stands above them, cause without non-great powers there can't be great powers (Murray 2012, p. 135). Thus, it is expected to find at least two othering-processes. The first one is aiming at other non-great-powers, whereas Russia is trying to highlight "special rights or influence" of world powers. The second and most crucial othering-process aims at the United States and is in contrast not aiming to emphasize "special rights or influence" but aiming at different values and a different interpretation of the world order to present themselves as an alternative to the United States. Finally and most important for the recognition theory, is to find evidence that – at least in the eyes of Moscow – recognition by others and especially by the US, has been previously denied about Russia's desired identity (Ringmar 2007, p. 91).

To sum up, I have now deductively derived some theoretical expectations of the interest-driven neorealist approach and of the identity-driven constructivist approach. How observations will be analyzed, interpreted and compared to these expectations, is part of the following section.

## **4 Research Design**

This master-thesis has two main goals, which are described here. First, it aims to reveal why Russia intervened in Syria. This question is important for several reasons. Without any doubt, Russia became the key player in the Syrian civil war. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, up to 384.000 people have been killed since the civil war outbreak in 2011. Millions of people have been displaced, which also caused the so-called refugee crisis, the European Union's biggest crisis during the last decade (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights 2020). In other words: Syria has become the biggest humanitarian crisis in the Twenty-First Century (Amnesty International). Until now, a real political solution to the conflict was not possible. Indeed, Russia has created facts on the ground without paying much attention to the wishes and ideas of other actors such as the US, Turkey, the Kurdish forces, and Saudi-Arabia. Many authors have viewed Russia's intervention in Syria and its aggressive policy in Ukraine as a comeback in the international arena by a powerful global actor. Thus, Syria might not have been Russia's last coup (Trenin 2019). To prevent similar cases, an investigation of Russia's motives is urgently necessary. Hence, the Syrian case socially matters in the real world, which was the main reason why I selected the case.

This paper relies on the two theories to explain and understand the concrete case of Syria. That is in general terms neorealism and constructivism. However, whereas description, interpretation, and understanding of single events is usually rather the primary goal of historians, this case study thus serves another purpose, which is more typical for political scientists: generalizable conclusions (Lynn-jones and Miller 2001). In contrast to co-variational studies, which aim to generalize their findings to a broader set of similar cases, a congruence analysis aims to draw generalizable conclusions about applied theories' explanatory power. Hence, I am using the congruence analysis approach formulated by Blatter and Blume (2008), respectively, Blatter and Haverland (2012). Even though a congruence analysis can be in principle conducted by using only one theory, the use of two or more theories is more common and more valid to draw conclusions. By establishing a "three-cornered fight," the explanatory power of each approach can be better evaluated as empirical observations are compared to the expectations of each theory. If the empirical result would only be compared to one theory, we would not know how substantial the contribution of the finding is, as we don't know if the theory is better than their alternatives (Blatter and Haverland 2012, p. 161 f.; Hall 2006, p. 27). Thus, in a broader sense, a second theory has the function of a "control variable" for the explanatory power of the first theory. In this study, the focus is clearly on the identity-driven constructivist approach, whereas the interest-driven theory serves as a control. I mainly decided to choose a constructivist approach because – as mentioned in the literature review – in contrast to realistic approaches, it has not been applied sufficiently and adequately theory-orientated to analyze the Syrian case from Russia's perspective. The thesis fills this gap to get additional insights by analyzing the explanatory power of constructivism and neorealism concerning the Syrian case.

Even though I did not mainly choose the case based on the theories, but the theories based on the cases, I still argue that my thesis has a robust theory-centered character because the focus is primarily on the theories and, consequently, the case serves mainly a diagnostic function. However, the thesis also contains case-centered characteristics because it aims to reveal insights within the Syrian case and not only towards the theory (Blatter and Blume 2008; Gerring 2017). Furthermore, applying Bayesian logic, the case takes the form of a "most-likely" neorealist case (Blatter and Haverland 2012, 176 f.). Based on *a priori* knowledge of the case, many background assumptions are speaking for the neorealist theory. For example, that Russia formed an alliance with Assad, which is hostile towards the US. They share common interests, and it seems that Syria is from strategic importance for Russia because of its only naval base

within the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Furthermore, currently, the theory is dominant in explaining the case within the scientific discourse.

## 4.1 Research Strategy

At the end of the theoretical section, I derived some expectations based on the two applied neorealism and constructivism theories. This part of this paper, describes how the empirical observations are analyzed and compared to the formulated expectations. Overall, the analysis is divided into three parts:

First, the contextual setting in which the Syrian case occurs will be described. That is important for several reasons. Most important, it does not make sense to look at the case by ignoring the historical and political context. Therefore, previous events need to be taken into consideration. As this thesis's length is limited, the first part will limit its analysis on the developments following the Cold War's end. The events and the consequences during this time are then analyzed through both the neorealist and constructivist lens. As the analytical focus of the utility-based neorealist theory lays on physical state capabilities and their actions (Zverev 2015, p. 4), an overview of the developments concerning Russia's security and foreign policy situation, including their own military capabilities, alliances and a comparison with the capabilities of the West will be provided. In contrast to the neorealist analytical lens, constructivists do less focus on objective criteria, but they focus on discourse to understand the actor's point of view (ibid.). Specifically, two factors would usually speak for the identity-driven approach. First, it is evaluated if the Syrian case took place in the context of a "formative moment," which is a moment when new stories were told and "new sets of rules emerged through which identities could be classified" (Ringmar 2007, p. 91). The second factor, which – according to Ringmar – supports the identity-driven theory, is "an occasion, or a series of occasions, on which recognition was denied under humiliating circumstances" (ibid.). If Russia's intervention was the result of denied recognition, the denied recognition needs to be found before Russia's Syrian intervention and thus in the contextual setting. Therefore, it is checked whether the West met Russia's foreign policy ideas, wishes, and preferences. Thus, I rely on secondary literature, including academic papers, newspapers, and grey literature.

The second analytical part focuses on actual events during Russia's actual military and diplomatic intervention in Syria. Hence, this part is mainly viewed through the neorealist lens

as it focuses on concrete process-observations, which means objective viewable facts and actions. The final aim of this part is to compare observations with the derived expectations of neorealism. That means, results of the actor's actions are evaluated through mind games about counterfactuals. That is to get an idea about what would have happened if Russia would not have intervened (Goertz and Levy 2007). Hence, it will help to conclude if a Russia's Syria policy was necessary to protect Russia's security and utility-based interests. Actions of non-Russian actors are always analyzed under the aspect and question to which degree it affected Russia and its security interests, as Russia is the actor under study in this paper. Finally, I conclude how keen Russia's material interest in Syria really is. Like the first analytical part, the analysis is based on secondary literature.

While the second part focuses on physical capabilities and viewable actions of the main actors concerning the Syrian conflict and thus primarily evaluate the explanatory power of the utility-driven neorealist approach, the last analytical part deals with the identity-driven theory through analyzing Russia's narratives which were used during the civil war and the Russian military intervention. As Ringmar notes, a necessary precondition for concluding that actors acted in order to get recognition for the desired identity, is to find evidence for the actor's "engagement in a process of identity creation. It must be someone who tells constitutive stories and tries to establish a presence in both time and space; someone who constructs an affective geography of friends and enemies; someone who pays careful attention to the rules of the social system to which he or she or it seeks to belong" (Ringmar 2007, p. 91). The main idea behind conducting a narrative analysis is the assumption that through analyzing the stories of an actor, we can get access to actor's identity and thus to the way he or she makes sense of the world, which is the core point for constructivist theory (Lieblich et al. 1998). In particular, a gap may emerge between the objective reality and the story the narrator tells. What is essential here is to analyze what kind of stories are told and how they are told, which reveals the speaker's mind and thus the concept of the speaker's self, which is located at the center of the narrative (Patterson and Monroe 1998, p. 316). Hence, the narrative analysis should reveal how Russia perceives itself and how they want to be perceived by the international community and especially by the US. Therefore, this third analytical part analyzes if the expectations about Russia's desired global power status are congruent with empirical findings.



## 4.2 Categorical-content analysis

To analyze Russia's narratives systematically, the narrative analysis is built mainly based on the methodological approach by Schreier (2012) and additionally on Lieblich et al. (1998), Marying (2014). The data which is used to analyze Russian narratives consists of Russian UN speeches, publications of the Russian President, the Russian Foreign Ministry, and Sputnik News.

Content analysis is characterized by separating a text's utterances in different pieces and assigning them to different categories (Lieblich et al. 1998, p. 13). Historically this approach has its roots in quantitative research. However, nowadays, it is also used regularly in a qualitative manner (Schreier 2012, 13 f.). Whereas quantitative content-analysis focuses mainly on the frequency of certain keywords or elements, a qualitative approach has a stronger focus on the context and allows a larger scope for interpretations (Lieblich et al. 1998; Mayring 2014; Schreier 2012). As interpretative techniques form the core of congruence analysis research, a purely quantitative content-analysis would be inappropriate (Blatter and Blume 2008, p. 327). Furthermore, to understand how Russia makes sense of the world, a static listing of keywords without putting them into context would do little to reach this goal. Therefore, the content-analysis is mainly qualitative as it provides a systematic description and summary of the contents of interest. By applying a congruence analysis approach, observations are compared to theoretical expectations (Blatter and Haverland 2012, p. 162). The formulation of different coding frames and categories makes it easier to compare these two parts. In practice, that means Russian narratives found in the data are assigned to different sets of categories. Some of the main coding frames are derived based on the expectations deductively formulated in this paper's theoretical part. Other coding frames, as well as the subcategories, emerge from the observed data. Hence, it can be said that I work partly concept-driven – which is appropriate in the case of a theory-oriented case study that relies on previous theoretical knowledge (Schreier 2012, 84 f.) – as well as data-driven.

Besides the practical advantages of using coded categories, it provides another advantage, which relates to general scientific criteria: reliability, replicability and transparency (Gerring 2017, p. 196; Mayring 2014, p. 40). That means that the use of categories allows other researchers to retrace the category assignment of concrete observations and allow them to reconstruct and repeat the analysis and ideally come to the same conclusions.

### 4.3 Data

What kind of sources are best suited to evaluate Russia's narratives? The theory implies that Russia wants to convince the audience – other states – about its identity. Usually, states communicate via diplomatic channels via ambassadors or foreign ministries. However, what kind of narratives they promote within these diplomatic talks usually stays in secret and can thus not be used for the narrative analysis. Consequently, I rely on public sources.

The most important forum, where states publicly interact with each other, is the Security Council of the United Nations (UNSC). As the focus is on Russian narratives regarding the Syrian civil war, the Security Council's meeting protocols were selected, where they have dealt with the "Syrian Arab Republic Situation." Only speeches where the Russian Federation appeared as an author were considered. Thus, between 2011 and 2020, 140 records were found fulfilling these conditions. During the analysis of a protocol, I only considered the speeches of the Russian representative.

Besides Russian speeches at the UNSC, further data has been considered. Press statements of the Russian President and the Russian Foreign Ministry are regularly released on their websites. There, statements were selected under the tag "Syria", respectively, "the Syrian Arab Republic." As these websites are official pages of the Kremlin, the promoted narratives are expected to be in line with the opinion of the Russian government.

Narrative researchers have indicated to consider "semi-official" narratives, besides "official" narratives (Kazharski 2019, p. 44). That is especially important concerning Russia, as Laruelle has demonstrated that Russian identity creation has also been outsourced to close institutions but not directly linked to the Kremlin (Laruelle 2009). Therefore, I also considered articles of Sputnik News, which has been characterized by promoting a positive image of Russia (Helmus et al. 2018). Sputnik was launched by the Russian media group Rossiya Segodnya, which is owned by the Russian state and can thus be seen as Russian public diplomacy or even propaganda-tool (Groll 2014; Kragh and Åsberg 2017; Paul and Matthews 2016; Sputnik News 2020; Tota 2015). According to Reporters Without Borders (2013), Russia uses its vast influence and control over the media to present an alternative Russian political point of view. Thus, Moscow let others know how it makes sense of the world. Hence, it can be said that non-Russian speaking versions of Sputnik News are mainly targeting other states or, in particular, their societies to promote the notion that there is no objective truth (Boksa 2019). As societies are an integral part of a state, through Sputnik News, the promotion of Russian identity is indirectly targeting other states. Quotes of Russian officials concerning Syria are reported in

Sputnik too and thus complement the selected statements from other sources. Only text articles that had "Russia Syria" and "Russian Syria" in their headlines were considered.

Why selecting four different sources for the analysis? Mainly because, in the sense of triangulation, to minimize inaccuracy due to systematic error and enhance the validity of measurement (Marks 2007, p. 3). In particular triangulation means that data should be gathered by different sources, increasing the amount of information to evaluate the explanatory power of a theory or test a hypothesis (King et al. 1995, 479 f.). Through speeches at the UNSC, I get direct statements by Russia about its narratives within the Syrian crisis, aiming at the state community and especially at other members in the Security Council. To control the significance of the Russian narratives promoted in the UNSC, the three other sources are considered. Consequently, additional official statements that might be not covered within the Security Council's speeches, but are still part of Russia's Syrian narrative can be gathered. Additionally, by considering Sputnik News, it is ensured that also "semi-official" narratives are integrated into the analysis. Through the triangulation, it is aimed to guarantee that Russian narratives are genuinely fully covered.

#### **4.4 Sample**

As the length and number of the different sources sharply differ, the sample selection has been sophisticated. However, the covered period of the narrative analysis starts with the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2011 and ends with the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2020. The starting point was chosen as around that time, first protests against Assad emerged. The endpoint of the covered period was chosen for the simple reasons that I started writing on this thesis in the middle of March 2020. Considering all released UN protocols that fall under the criteria mentioned above and publications of the President and Foreign Ministry and Sputnik News articles, would go far beyond the scope of this thesis (Sputnik News, for example, released 5320 articles which fulfill the search criteria). Consequently, I decided to rely on stratified sampling. That means that the population is split into groups. Within these groups, every unit of the group has the same chance to appear in the final sample (Riffe et al. 2005, p. 109). The groups consist of UN speeches, publications of the President and Foreign Ministry, and Sputnik News Articles (further these sources are also simply referred as documents). Stratified sampling technique is usually more prevalent in quantitative research; however, the aim is to get representative insights into

Russia's narratives by applying this technique. Furthermore, through randomization, selection bias is being reduced, as only selecting articles or statements which would ideally support the theoretical argument of identity-theory, would lead to very biased results. For practical reasons, not the documents itself were randomized, but 35 different dates within the examined time.

In practice, all speeches from Sputnik News, all documents by the President and the Foreign Ministry, and all documents by the UNSC, which were released on the randomized dates have been selected. Since documents were not published every day, the next available day on which documents were published was considered in cases when the randomized date did not contain a release by the specific source. In rare cases where the next possible day has also been the next case for another random date at the same time, I additionally selected the day after next with at least one article. Detailed tables of the randomly picked days and the days on which the documents were actually selected can be found in the Appendices. That finally led to a sample size of 76 Sputnik News articles, 42 publications of the President, and 42 publications of the Foreign Ministry. As 35 speeches at the UNSC were selected, and far fewer codes have been identified than a combination of the three other sources, I later decided to select 15 additional UN speeches. These speeches were chosen based on years that were underrepresented in the sample. Consequently, 210 documents have been analyzed in total.

## **4.5 Coding Procedure**

Because of the intense focus on theories within this study, I started to work with a concept-driven approach, which means that some coding frames have been deductively formulated (Schreier 2012, 84 f.).

By considering the theoretical expectations, it is expected that Russia would use the Syrian case to present itself as powerful and strong. Therefore, two, respectively, four coding frames that capture these narratives have been formulated. The coding frame "influential" aims to include all text segments in which Russia is presented as an influential state, which means that Russia is actually a relevant player, able to influence the events in Syria and the positions of other important players who are involved in the Syrian crisis. However, this influence should be mainly understood as diplomatic influence, which means military influence and measures should not be assigned to categories under this coding frame. For cases where Russia's military power and influence are highlighted, the coding frame "military relevant" has been formulated.

To have a comparison value, two frames, each of which should measure the opposite have been created. Thus, these two frames are labeled as "non-influential" and "military non-relevant."

As said in the theoretical section, it is expected that Russia would especially compare itself with other states. In other words, Russia would promote an othering-process in order to highlight differences between Russia and other states concerning power and values and interpretations of world affairs. Consequently, four more coding frames which should capture, how Russia speaks about other states have been formulated. The frame "negative role of others" aims to capture states which are perceived or framed as negative by Russia. Thus, the frame "reasons why other actors are negative" should collect all justifications why others are negative. The opposite should be captured with the frames "positive role of others" and "reasons why other states are positive."

This othering process potentially includes Russian norms and values about world affairs and the ideal international system, so the coding frame "international system" has been formulated, which should capture that.

Another expectation that has been also derived by the theory of neorealism is that "terrorism," which has been Russia's official justification for the intervention, will play a significant role within Russia's narrative.

Indeed, it is rarely the case that a content-analysis researcher works purely concept-driven (Schreier 2012, p. 25). Thus, all categories, respectively subcategories, under the formulated coding frames emerge from the data. For the purpose that important segments emerge, which have not been captured by my theoretical expectations, I let further coding frames emerge from the data. Consequently, one more coding frame has been formulated. Russia often highlights that they are on the right sight of history and are the "good" ones. Thus, many other labels could be used for this category. However, this coding frame is being finally called "Russia as the helpful actor."

All categories which emerged under the different coding frames are listed in detail in the codebook (Appendix 22). Along the lines of Schreier (2012, p. 95) each category was given a name and a definition, as well as at least one real example from the documents. Additionally, and if necessary, under "note," a decision rule was formulated, which should help the coder to make a final decision to which category a specific segment needs to be assigned. The codebook should help others to retrace the coding process and potentially allow others to replicate the research results.

For the actual coding process, the computer software MAXQDA has been used.

Concerning the unit of analysis, one document forms one unit. In contrast, one unit of coding consists of one argument (further also referred as a segment) made within a specific document. That can include only one sentence but also three or four sentences if they are still part of one argument. Suppose the author turns to another argument or topic and then returns to the first argument this repetition is coded separately and thus multiple times. In the final analysis part, the results were first evaluated at the original level of the coding units, which means repetitions were taken into account (Schreier 2012, 155 f.). Additionally, the level of the unit of coding has been extended to the level of the unit of analysis. Consequently, repetitions were eliminated, and one category has been only counted once within one document (ibid.). To consider both approaches is because by first considering repetitions, we can get an idea about how *much* the author speaks about a particular topic. By second ignoring repetitions, we can evaluate how *often* a particular topic is being addressed. The level of the unit of coding is always marked in the associated Graphs.

In cases where it remained unclear about whom or about what a specific segment is referred to, the whole document was intuitively considered to understand the isolated argument. In some cases where understanding from the context was not possible, short research via google helped to put the segments better into context and thus to assign them to a specified category.

## **5 Analysis**

### **5.1 The Setting**

The collapse of the Soviet Union and thus, the end of the Cold War had a significant impact on world affairs and the international system. In this first analytical section, the most critical aspects of the relationship between the West, respectively, the US and Russia, since the end of the Cold War are highlighted. In sum, six crucial characteristics could have been identified. These characteristics will be described in more detail, before evaluating if they are congruent with the theoretical expectations of the interest-driven neorealist approach and the identity-driven constructivist approach's expectations. Finally, the implications of these events for the case of Syria will be highlighted. I want to note that the following setting should rather serve as a rough overview than as a full-fledged analysis considering all nuances.

### **5.1.1 End of the Cold War – a power shift**

Between 1945 and 1990, world politics was dominated by the two superpowers USA and the Soviet Union. In principle, that meant that the Cold War shaped all interstate relations, and the two superpowers maintained the internal order within their blocs (Wallerstein 1993). Resulting from the Soviet collapse, the US became the first world power ever, which took decisive preponderance in the areas of military, economic, technology, and geopolitics (Wohlforth 1999). Neorealists would argue that one side's superiority will not be long-lasting, and states would align with the weaker side until both poles are balanced again (Waltz 2010, 126 f.). That would be the result of material superiority by one side, which is assumed to decrease the other side's security automatically. However, this approach fails to explain the persistence of NATO and, in general, the uneven distribution of material power. We did not see a new block that built a counterweight against Western dominance. In contrast, even former adversaries joined the Western alliance during the NATO enlargement process.

Furthermore, the fact that Russia withdrew its forces from former Warsaw Pact states (Cox 1996) can also hardly be explained by the neorealist approach. In the early 90s the United Nations' Russian voting behavior was characterized by voting mostly in line with the United States (Grossman 2005). Hence, during this time, many in the West believed that Russia would integrate into the Western camp and become a democratic state (Deudney and Ikenberry 2009, p. 54; Trenin 2006). Such foreign policy behavior does not fit to neorealist expectations.

Here constructivism provides a better approach. At least at this point, Russia simply did not perceive NATO as a real threat to its security. From the other former Warsaw Pact member's point of view, the West – despite its material superiority – was also not interpreted as a threat to their security and interests.

### **5.1.2 NATO enlargement**

From a neorealist point of view, it needs to be considered what new capabilities the NATO gained by inviting the new eastern states to join the alliance. The integration of more countries and thus more armies and military equipment further strengthens the material number of the alliance's military power. Furthermore, NATO enlargement allows the alliance to build strategic military bases, reducing military options of Russia. For instance, deploying nuclear weapons in the Baltic States would reduce the warning times of these weapons as they would reach St. Petersburg, for example, within minutes. Thus, it would raise their effectiveness and, at the

same time, reduce the land-based second-strike capability of the Russians. As NATO troops could be deployed directly on the Russian border, an attack could be carried out much earlier without conquering the "buffer zone" between Russia and central Europe. The Russians quite often presented these arguments during the NATO enlargement process (Sergounin 1997, p. 56).

Additionally, one could add that through the integration of the eastern states into the West; the West denies Russia the opportunity to build strong partnerships with these countries, which could be economically, militarily, or political. That seems a valid argument under the neorealist point of view as for none of these countries we can nowadays say that they have a tight relationship with Moscow. Furthermore, that Russia could not do much to stop NATO enlargement, can be theoretically explained by neorealism as it just lacked the capabilities to do so. During the first round of NATO enlargement, Russia was dealing with its own problems, characterized by an economic crisis, crime, and a high homicide rate (Walberg et al. 1998).

However, neorealism fails to explain why Russia was trying to get some guarantees by NATO to minimize the alliance's enlargement (Trenin-Straussov 1999). These guarantees should be manifested by the founding act between NATO and Russia, signed in 1997 and served as a guideline and basis for interaction and cooperation between these two parties. Two crucial points within the founding act were the promise of NATO not to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new member states and not to deploy new permanent combat troops within "the current and foreseeable security environment" (NATO 1997). Furthermore, a permanent joint council – also known as the NATO-Russia Council – was established to increase trust (ibid.). However, no veto right over the other side's action was granted, which underlines that the council was not established as an institution – preferred by Russia (Trenin-Straussov 1999, p. 2) – where binding decisions were made but rather as a forum where cooperation was possible but not necessary. An establishment of treaties and forums does not make much sense from a neorealist point of view, as treaties and even laws have no impact as the "rules of anarchy" will always trump them (Finnemore 2004, p. 23).

Here, constructivism provides a better explanation as establishing this founding act agreement did guarantee that until today NATO did not employ nuclear forces on the territory of new member states. Only a small number of troops were deployed after Russia intervened in Ukraine. Even here, the material implications were marginal as this small number of NATO troops, deployed in the Baltics and Poland has rather a symbolic character than posits a severe military threat towards Russia. That is underlined by the result of a think-tank simulation,



which argues that Russia could still overrun the Baltics within hours (Withnall 2016). In general, the material implications by integrating the eastern states into NATO were minimal. Most of the new member's military equipment was – at least at the beginning – not compatible with NATO equipment and also from less military quality. Indeed, it was clear for NATO that new members such as the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary would bring little military capabilities (Moller 2020). The incorporation of the Baltic States brought even less as these countries do not even posit the capabilities to conduct air policing of their own airspace. Since 2004 these operations are conducted by NATO member states (ibid.). That Russia further reduced its military presence in northwest Russia and Kaliningrad after NATO enlargement of the Baltic States occurred (Karabeshkin and Spechler 2007, p. 315), also runs contradictory the neorealist arguments and implies that the material implications of NATO enlargement were much less than expressed by Moscow. Here, I agree with Kissinger – traditionally not known as a constructivist – that NATO enlargement was rather driven by spreading democracy than by real security concerns (Kissinger 2014, p. 106). The German defense minister Volker R  he stated once with regard to NATO enlargement that he was rather interested in the "mindset" of new member states than in the quality of their tanks (Moller 2020). Therefore, NATO enlargement served rather as a "socializer" to create shared values, and similar political systems as Western integration of West-Germany did after World War II (Wallander 2000, p. 720). Thus, it can be concluded that the enlargement process can be better explained by constructivism than by neorealism.

### **5.1.3 Western interventions in Kosovo, Iraq and Libya**

Concerning the NATO/US operations in Kosovo, Iraq, and Libya, Moscow criticized that the US and its allies are acting without UN authorization or at least are abusing the given authorization (Antonenko 1999; Ditych 2014; Mankoff 2009).

In general, Moscow feared that these operations would undermine the principle of state sovereignty as Western democracy promotion was seen as a plot to overthrow Moscow (Mankoff 2007, p. 128; Tsygankov 2018, p. 105). In contrast to the West, Russia argued that the Kosovo Conflict should be treated as an internal conflict within Serbia's sovereign state (Hughes 2013, p. 998). Hence, Russia feared that these interventions and support of the separatist movement in Kosovo might serve as a precedent to intervene in Russia or to support the separatist movement in Chechnya. The slogan "today Yugoslavia – tomorrow Russia"

expresses the perceived threat by many Russians (Antonenko 1999; Arbatov 2000; Mankoff 2007). As a consequence of Kosovo, Russia reformulated its military doctrine, which again considered high-technology warfare between Russia and NATO (Antonenko 1999; Arbatov 2000; Hughes 2013). The Western intervention in Iraq against Russia's veto strengthened the perception. It proved that the US is making use of its "preemptive intervention doctrine," which was introduced between the intervention of Afghanistan and Iraq and should justify preemptive interventions by the US in case of threats toward their national security (Kennedy-Pipe and Rengger 2006; Ottaway and Lacina 2003).

Russian arguments are in line with realists' arguments who argue that the force of law is being trumped by the "rules" of anarchy, which means that states only act when they have the capabilities and when it is in their (security) interest (Finnemore 2004, p. 23). Concerning this assumption, diplomatic efforts for UN authorization would be invalid. Nevertheless, this fails to explain why then states such as Russia and the US are continually spending efforts for UN authorizations (ibid. p. 23). From a neorealist point of view, the West would intervene in Chechnya or Russia whenever it has a real security interest and the necessary capabilities. However, as long as Russia has nuclear weapons and a powerful conventional army, the costs of such an intervention would be a way too high and thus irrational. That explains why the West did indeed – despite some slight very carefully public critique (Cornell 1999) – not react towards Russia's human rights violations in Chechnya as they did in other cases.

From a neorealist perspective, intervention is only dependent on utility-driven interests and physical capabilities. From a constructivist point of view, an intervention can also be possible when no material gains are in prospect, but moral aspects cause the intervention, such as, human rights violations. Here, it is the way states make sense of right or wrong, which causes the intervention. After the end of the Cold War, a post-Westphalian understanding of security was forthcoming, which prioritizes security over non-interference and sovereignty (Butler 2009, p. 97). Hence, that explains why Russia might fears that its own sovereignty could be one day undermined, justified by an intersubjective set of values that prioritize human rights over state sovereignty, even though it would be not "rational" in a neorealist sense. Here constructivism and neorealism are complementary as constructivism explains why states care about UN-mandates and norms, and neorealism explains why states do not intervene even though the moral conditions and justifications – as in Chechnya – would be given.

Consequently, if both are given – moral justification and the necessary capabilities – an intervention would not be inevitable but more likely. Therefore, Russia is trying to keep its

military power at a high level to deny possible adversaries the capabilities for a successful intervention. Russia is trying to prevent a further intersubjective shift in the understanding of state sovereignty while keeping its military power at a high level to deny possible adversaries the capabilities for a successful intervention.

#### **5.1.4 Cooperation between the US and Russia**

From a utility-driven point of view, the cooperation in the early 2000s and also in the early phase of Obama's presidency was possible because both actors had the same interest (Mankoff 2009, p. 114). Both Russia and the US were not interested in a North Korean and Iranian nuclear program, and both were opposed to the Taliban because of their relationship to terror organizations (Snetkov 2012). Even though cooperation is difficult in a self-help system, it is not impossible when other powers need to be opposed, or potential gains will be distributed fairly (Mearsheimer 2001; Waltz 2010). The Taliban and al-Qaida did already undermine the security of both countries, and nuclear programs of Iran and North Korea would undermine their security or their allies' security. Furthermore, as arms raises and the maintenance of arms are connected to economic costs, both had an interest in reducing the number of nuclear weapons as long as the second-strike capability is still warranted and the nuclear balance is kept in place. Therefore the US and Russia agreed to decrease their nuclear weapons (Trenin 2014, p. 3).

From an identity-driven point of view, Russian support for US-intervention in Afghanistan was also seen as a chance to present Russia as an indispensable and crucial actor in world politics, as Russia realized that the US needed their help (Mankoff 2012b, 111 f.). Consequently, Russia immediately supported the US against international terrorism and the resulting intervention in Afghanistan. The terror attacks from the 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001, were seen as evidence that Russia had been right about the threat of terrorism from which they have warned previously (ibid.). For instance, the Russian defense minister Ivanov stated that "the world will now understand what Russia has been up against in Chechnya" (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 2001). That provided the Russians the option to get recognized as an equal partner from the US, at least for a short time. Whereas the US prior 9/11 has criticized Russia for its war against Chechnya, US officials now – at least in the immediate aftermath – stated that they would understand and support Russia's war against Chechen jihadi terrorists (Notte 2016, p. 67). The same can be said about cooperation within the field of nuclear

proliferation. In this particular field, Russia did not lack behind with the numbers of nuclear weapons, which symbolizes equality – at least in this field – with the US. Here the US recognizes Russia as an equal partner, which explains the cooperation in the fields of arms control and nuclear disarmament (Stent 2016, p. 107).

### **5.1.5 Ignoring Russian interests and the interventions of Georgia and Ukraine**

In line with Ringmar's constructivist argument – that a series of events where recognition has been denied needs to be identified to conclude that Russia acted in order to get recognition (Ringmar 2007, p. 91) – a large number of cases where such recognition has been denied can be identified in the post-Cold War era. For instance, against Russia's opposition, NATO enlargement was enforced. Russia has warned the West previously and several times that incorporation of the Baltic states into NATO would be seen as an intolerable affront and as a severe threat towards Russia's military security (Karabeshkin and Spechler 2007, p. 314; Ratti 2009, p. 402). Even more critical, the NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1999 was perceived as a "spit in Russia's face," as the former member of Russian State Duma and Russian analyst, Arbatov has noted (Arbatov 2000, 10 f.). NATO intervention in Iraq, the plans of an anti-missile defense system in Poland, and the Czech Republic (BBC News 2007) and the Western support of the resolutions in Ukraine and Georgia (Tsygankov 2018) were two more cases where the West acted against Russia's purported interests or ignored them.

Putin undertook a last attempt to create a sustainable foundation for the relationship between the US and Russia in autumn 2003 as he visited Camp David and proposed Bush to build a democratic world order in exchange for an exclusive sphere of influence in Russia's neighborhood. However, Washington was unwilling to concede Russia such an exclusive sphere, so the proposal was rejected (Mankoff 2009, p. 117; Trenin 2006, p. 90). That must have led to Moscow's conclusion that the West under American leadership does not recognize Russia as an equal partner as they did during the Cold War. This impression was confirmed and strengthened by the Western supported regime change in Libya and by Western offers to integrate Georgia and Ukraine into Western institutions for instance through the EU association agreement or NATO membership. Russian's intervention in Georgia can thus be seen as an expression of Russia's urge for recognition which has been previously denied several times. After Russia intervened in Ukraine, US president Obama called Russia a "regional power" aiming to restore its great power status (Borger 2014). Referring to Russia as a "regional power"

was most likely not the way Russia wished to be recognized.

### **5.1.6 Leaving the Western orbit – the formative moment**

A formative moment, when new stories were told and "new sets of rules emerged through which identities could be classified" (Ringmar 2007, p. 91), can be best identified in the mid-2000s. During this time, Putin started to withdraw Russia from the Western political orbit (Trenin 2014, p. 5). Whereas Russia previously sought to integrate into Western institutions, which partly succeed as Russia, for instance, became a formal member of the G8 in 1998 (Lukov 2006; Tsygankov 2018, p. 103), and the two countries have cooperated in the case of Afghanistan, Putin now discarded the idea of integrating further into the West and slightly started to focus on national interests only (Trenin 2014, p.5). Consequently, Putin's pro-US advisers were replaced by Eurasianists (Mankoff 2009, p. 117). As Putin previously prioritized internal security and stability, the focus now shifted towards the securitization of external threats. From now on, Russia presented itself more self-confident or, in other words: more as a great power (Snetkov 2012, p. 531).

That became especially evident with Putin's speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007, where he criticized the unilateral world order and unilateral action by the US and its allies, which did not solve any problems but instead created new and more problems. This is in particular interesting, as a process of othering occurred. In Munich Putin highlighted the differences between Russia and the West, whereas Putin in 2003 has stated that Russia is part of the West (Mankoff 2009, p. 79). He also criticized NATO enlargement as a provocative factor that decreased bilateral trust and did not have any decisive effects on Europe's stability and security (Putin 2007). Putin's speech can be seen as a rhetorical cut, a sign of its "new assertiveness" and as the starting point in Russia's sovereign foreign policy (Kazharski 2019, p. 139; Tsygankov 2010, as cited in Kazharski 2019). In Munich, Putin de-facto declared that Russia was not willing to accept American unilateralism in the long-term. Munich expressed that Russia aimed at a multipolar world-order (Kazharski 2019, p. 138), basically with Russia as one of its core components. Shortly after this rhetorical expression of Russia's assertiveness, Russia reformed its military and invested strongly into new and modern equipment (Klein 2018).

### 5.1.7 Interim Conclusion

By considering the setting, the question emerges, what can be concluded concerning Russia's Syrian policy? In particular, it raises the question to what degree previous events influenced Russia's decision to block UN-resolutions, support Assad, and intervene militarily in Syria?

From a neorealist point of view, it remains questionable to what degree NATO enlargement changed the "balance of power" significantly, making Russian interventions in Georgia and Ukraine necessary to prevent a further shift. In practice, the material effects of NATO enlargement were only marginal. The real shift in the power of balance occurred already previously with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact's dissolution. Inconsequently – concerning neorealism – Russia did not react to the shift of material power, as it reduced its troops within other European countries and did not try to balance against the US. Therefore, it is questionable why Russia did oppose NATO enlargement, which meant marginal material effects, but did – at least in the immediate post-Cold War era – accept US unilateralism and Western superiority. The most plausible explanation therefore, is that NATO enlargement was not an objective threat to Russia's security, but towards Russia's identity.

Even though the loss of buffer zones – theoretically – posit security threats as it raises the possibility of dangerous incidents and misunderstandings, it does not explain why Russia had to intervene in Syria to prevent shifts in the "balance of power." Even by assuming the unlikely possibility that a Western regime change in Syria would have led to a Western-allied Syria, there would not have been NATO troops or bases along Russia's borders. That raises the question of which utility-driven security interest Russia has in Syria. Russian fears of a precedent, which could shift the intersubjective understanding of international norms and make a Western intervention in Russia more likely, might be a valid point but cannot be explained by neorealism, as norms do not matter. Hence, why should a regime change in Syria threaten Russia's security?

So far, it seems more likely that Russia acted in order to undermine its global power ambitions. Only in some rare situations, Russia was seen as an equal partner, and thus cooperation worked well. More often, there has been a series of events where Russia has not been recognized as an equal partner. The denied recognition might have led Russia to conclude that it needs to convince the West of its world power identity through concrete action. Russia has reached this conclusion in the mid-2000s, where the discourse shifted towards a more confident self-understanding, not willing to accept American unilateralism (Snetkov 2012). Russia's rhetorical withdrawal from the Western orbit was undermined by its actions in Georgia

and Ukraine, where Russia has left the West no other choice to recognize Russia as an influential and important actor without a solution seems impossible. Still, after these actions, Obama named Russia a weak regional power (Borger 2014). Therefore, it seems likely that Russia had to undermine its global ambitions with actions outside its regional sphere.

## **5.2 The Process**

In the last section, I have mainly argued that NATO enlargement practically did not change much in the balance of power and material capabilities; the effects were only marginal. Therefore, especially the Syrian intervention cannot be viewed as a reaction to a change in power balance. From a neorealist point of view, it is still not entirely clear which strategic value Syria has for Russia. This question is dealt with in this section by evaluating Russian behavior and strategic decisions during the Syrian War.

### **5.2.1 Balancing against the Islamic State?**

The so-called Islamic State (further also referred to as IS, ISIS or Daesh) gained support by foreign fighters from all around the world, including around 2.700 Russian citizens (Notte 2016, p. 65). Concerning previous experience Russia had with Islamic terror, especially with Chechens, Russia had indeed a high interest in preventing Syria from becoming a continuous base for terrorists, which could pose a real security threat for the Russian state. In particular, after Assad requested Russian military assistance in autumn 2015, Russia officially justified its intervention by the threat of the Islamic State towards their own security, but also to the security of the West (Spaulding 2015). The case of a Syrian returnee who conducted a terror attack at the Jewish Museum in Brussels and other examples (Van Zuijdewijn, Jeanine de Roy et al. 2014), shows that a threat by returning foreign fighters does indeed exist. Consequently, Putin stated that "fight them there not here" is the better option (Katz 2015). Therefore, one could argue that a direct-military factor, a potential "conflict-spillover" (Kathman 2011, p. 851), did exist. Considering these security concerns, it seems comprehensible and rational that Russia allied with Assad, a regime with which Russia had traditionally good ties and did not support radical Islamic ideology. At times, when the Syrian regime was under pressure, unable to push back the opposition, including the Islamic State, Russia's intervention shifted the power of balance within Syria. Therefore, one could argue that as Putin and Assad had the same interests

– defeating Islamists – they allied to prevent the Islamic State from becoming too powerful. Even though neorealism traditionally does not consider non-state actors – such as the IS – but only nation-states as relevant actors (Waltz 2010), the underlining principle of balancing comes very close in this case.

Nevertheless, Russia's official – and legitimate – fear from radical Islamists is not fully congruent with Russia's actual behavior. If Russia had aligned its Syrian policy because of the IS and other radical groups, we would expect that Russia would immediately target these groups. In contrast to this expectation, Russia's first operations targeted anti-Assad rebels, including moderates which were supported by the US, based in regions which were not under IS control such as the region of Talbiseh, Rasta, Tatoul Hamr and Aidoun (Antonyan 2017, p. 343; Bino and Krause 2017, p. 71). According to US officials, more than 90 percent of Russian airstrikes have not targeted the Islamic State (The Guardian 2015). Only after ISIS killed over 200 Russians in late October 2015 as they attacked a Russian civil aircraft, the Russian air force also started to flew few more attacks against IS-targets (Bino and Krause 2017, p. 71). According to different reports, Russia did start combating Daesh in 2017, when the Assad regime was more secure, and the US-led coalition already gained some success against the IS (Sagramoso 2020; Walker 2017). That Russia first targeted anti-Assad rebels before targeting the Islamic State shows that Russia was primarily interested in keeping Assad in power.

From a Russian perspective, one could argue that without keeping Assad in power, Daesh could not have been "defeated". But is that true? According to a report by Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center, the US-led anti-ISIS coalition – including Iraqi troops, the Kurds, and Syrian Arab fighters – did most of the work in defeating ISIS as a conventional organization. Russia and its allies – including the Assad regime and Iran/Shia forces – did indeed speed up the defeat of ISIS but, in general, only contributed marginally to the defeat of ISIS (Sagramoso 2020). While the US-coalition focused on IS targets, Russia could focus on Assads enemies (ibid.). In fact, the US-led coalition pursued a goal that was in Russia's interest, defeating the Islamic State. Thus, the coalition provided collective goods to Russia in form of security. Hence, Russia – as well as other countries – benefit from the actions of others, while not taking action by themselves. Freeriding is indeed an issue with which neorealist theory deals. It explains why cooperation is difficult to achieve (Waltz 2010, 196 f.). Consequently, from this perspective, neorealism might explain why Russia did not, or at least lately, target the Islamic State. However, it does not explain why Russia intervened in Syria. Based on the report



mentioned above, it seems likely that the US-led coalition would have defeated Daesh without the help of Russia and its allies in the long-term.

It can be said that keeping Assad in power was not a necessary condition in order to defeat ISIS, even though it is hard to predict how Syria would have looked like without Assad in the long-term. As ISIS was defeated – at least in its conventional form – the potential of spillover and thus the most significant threat for Russia's security has been banned. If Assad would have been toppled, it seems likely that different groups, which previously had opposed Assad but also ISIS – including Kurds, moderate groups, Sunni-Arabs, and more radical groups – would have competed for power, either by violent or by political means. Nevertheless, most-likely none of these groups would have had a serious interest in a recurrence of Daesh as most of them opposed them before and even allied in order to defeat them, such as for the Kurds and some Sunni Arabs. A reoccurrence of a threat comparable to ISIS therefore, seems also unlikely as the international community have shown that it won't accept an aggressive Islamic caliphate and would be prepared to support groups against Daesh. Even if some Chechens would have continued to support Jihadist groups that would have been weaker than ISIS, it is questionable if Russia's resulting security threat would have been worth to oppose the West and worth to risk military confrontations within Syria that could have easily escalated. Therefore, from a neorealist point of view, Russia's military campaign to defeat ISIS was not necessary, nor did its actual behavior fit the expectations derived from neorealist theory. Thus, jihadi terrorism does only provide a feeble explanation for Russia's intervention. The objective value of Syria may be of a different nature.

### **5.2.2 The value of Syria**

First of all, it might be thinkable that the isolation and sanctions caused by the Ukrainian Crisis played a role, as the events just happened around one year previously. However, these arguments remain speculations as no evidence could be found that Russia offered the West a horse trade about Syria and Ukraine. That might have happened behind closed doors, but it does not make sense to consider these arguments further when no evidence exists. We can only observe that the sanctions imposed after the Ukraine Crisis are still intact, and thus a potential Russian offer was most-likely rejected by the West.

That ISIS was not the only theoretical reasons why Russia intervened in Syria, is undermined by the Russian supply of military systems to the Assad regime of radar devices,

the S-400 anti-aircraft missile system and means for electronic combat. These systems are not aiming at ISIS but against other modern military forces by the West. By installing these systems, Russia gained direct leverage about the Syrian airspace, which forces other states to coordinate their operations with Russia (Kaim and Tamminga 2015). Hence, through the defense systems, Russia raised the cost for a potential Western intervention aiming to overthrow Assad. Thus, by raising the costs, potential benefits will decrease. Neorealists assume that international relations are characterized by a zero-sum game, which means that one party's win is the loss of another (Mearsheimer 2001). As indicated in the literature review, during the Cold War, most interventions have been explained by geopolitical and strategic factors (Findley and Teo 2006). Consequently, the question emerges: What would have the West gained by removing Assad from power, and what would have Russia had lost if that would have happened?

#### Oil, Iran, and Israel:

Traditionally, the West has four interests in the Middle East: oil, counterterrorism, containing Iran, and Israel's security (Byman 2013). The issue of terrorism has been evaluated above. Also, oil cannot explain Western – and Russian – interests in removing/keeping Assad as Syria has a 0,1 % share of the world's oil resources. For comparison Iraq has 8,5 %, Saudi-Arabia even 17,2 % (BP 2019). The relation towards Iran and Israel seems thus more interesting, especially as these two factors are interconnected.

Indeed, in Syria's case, Russia stands on one side together with Assad, Iran, and their proxies, such as Hezbollah. While the Russian's mainly conduct airstrikes, Iranian forces complement Damascus's support on the ground (Antonyan 2017). For Iran, Syria is vital as it provides a gateway to Hezbollah and Israel. Furthermore, Iran wants to prevent a regime change because a Sunni-led government supported by Iran's archenemy Saudi-Arabia would decrease Iran's influence within the region (Ahmadian and Mohseni 2019). From a neorealist point of view, one could interpret Russia's alliance with Iran as classic balancing against the West and their allies, including Israel and the Sunni States such as Saudi-Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, and Turkey. By denying the other side to gain control over Syria, one side denies the other more influence within the region and thus more power, which affects the overall balance of power between the two camps. However, it is not that simple as the Russian-Iranian alliance is not that static and instead driven by short-term interests (Antonyan 2017). Several factors indicate that

Russia has no interest in a full-fledged long-term alliance.

First, Russia has no interest in getting involved in the ethnic conflict of Shia's and Sunnis in the long-term. Russia preferably has an interest in balancing these two camps and have stable relations to both sides (Antonyan 2017). That becomes evident as Russia accepts Turkey as a significant player in Syria. That Russia wants Turkey to play a role in Syria can also be seen as balancing against Iran (ibid., p. 345). Second, even though Russia cooperates with Iran in the field of the nuclear industry, Russia has no interest in Iran becoming a nuclear power as Russia fears that this could further de-stabilize the whole region (Paulraj 2016). Third, another factor that speaks against a full-fledged alliance between Russia and Iran is Israel. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has intensified its relations to Israel economically and socially (Katz 2006). However, the Russian intervention and partnership with Iran have increased Israeli concerns (Averbukh and Klein 2018, p. 5). A permanent Iranian presence in Syria is viewed critically as Iran continually supports anti-Israelian movements such as Hamas and Hezbollah (Sadjadpour 2009). Consequently, Russia was very eager to express its understanding of Israeli security concerns, which led to an agreement in which Putin basically accepts Israeli airstrikes against pro-Iranian combatants (Averbukh and Klein 2018). Furthermore, Netanyahu and Putin agreed that Moscow ensures that pro-Iranian forces do not operate close to the Israeli border (Lucas 2015). Through the Israeli-Russian agreement, Israeli security was not more threatened than usual, which rules out Israel as a necessary condition for Western involvement in Syria and thus also as an explanatory factor for Russia's involvement. Consequently, it seems somewhat likely that after Russia and Iran defeated the Assad regime, tensions between Moscow and Teheran will rise, as current reports already indicate (Hermann 2020).

All these factors highlight that Russia was willing to risk much concerning relations towards other states by allying with Iran. As the Kremlin has no long-term interest in taking a confrontational course against traditional Western allies, Russia managed to keep relatively good relations towards those states. The crucial question is then, why Russia was willing to risk that much? One could argue that Russia simply wanted to deny the West the ability to contain Iran. However, it seems questionable how keen Western interest has been to contain Iran through Syria. In 2013, when Syria crossed Obama's "red line," and before Russia got directly involved, the US could have intervened but hesitated. At times when Russia military intervened – in September 2015 – the West did not primarily seek to topple Assad as it concentrated on its war against Daesh (Sagramoso 2020). It seems more plausible from a neorealist point of view

that besides counterterrorism, the West did not have much interest in Syria. Mearsheimer himself has summarized Syria's strategic value as an "insignificant" where the US has basically no interest (Mearsheimer 2015). Consequently, Western demands on Assad to step down in the early stages of the civil war can be rather explained by Western concerns about human rights violations, which can be assigned to constructivist theory.

Following these arguments, it seems clear that the West objectively could not have gained that much by toppling Assad. Thus, objectively there was not much for Russia to deny the West. Nevertheless, what Russia gained or prevented to lose by keeping Assad in power, if oil or a long-term alliance with Iran played no role, needs further evaluation. Two other factors have to be considered: Syria as an opportunity for Russia to divide the West or its allies and the importance of the military bases of Tartus and Hmeimim.

Syria as an opportunity to divide Western allies?

In the early stages of the Syrian civil war, all of the leading NATO member states, including the US, France, UK, Germany, Canada, and Turkey, demanded Assad to step down (Burch 2011; CNN 2011). However, as the civil war dynamics increased as the US hesitated to intervene after chemical weapons were used in 2013 and ISIS declared their caliphate in 2014, the broad consensus became a few cracks. As more refugees traveled to Europe in 2015, German Chancellor Merkel argued that it is time to start diplomatic talks with several actors, including Assad himself, even though France and other Western partners disagreed (Delcker 2015). Almost at the same time, US-backed Kurdish forces of the YPG took over strategic towns close to Turkey's border (BBC News 2015). In principle, Turkey sees YPG as a terror organization, so they focus primarily on fighting the Kurds rather than ISIS in Syria. Putin might have recognized that Syria displays a chance to drive a wedge between NATO allies. Syria would not be the first war, which has led to diplomatic upsets, as the Iraq war and the disagreement mainly between the US and UK on one side and France and Germany on the other side has shown. However, to shape the events in Syria, Russia needed to play a more significant role. Further attempts of Russia to divide the West can be seen after the Paris terror attacks when Russia offered France to join their alternative ISIS coalition and share intelligence information, which was seen as critical, especially in Washington (Spaulding 2015; Tisdall 2015). Also, Russia's willingness for Turkey to play a significant role in post-war Syria, the purchase of the S-400 air defense system, and the offer to sell Turkey Russian warplanes can

be seen as an attempt to pull Turkey away from the West (Antonyan 2017).

Nevertheless, the Russian offer to France appeared after Russia already have intervened in Syria. Furthermore, the Russian-Turkish relations in Syria had a bad start after the Turkish downing of a Russian jet in 2015. Both parties stood basically at odds with each other, as Turkey supported the opposition against Assad. Therefore, it seems unlikely that Russia intended to intervene in order to pull Turkey away from NATO. Most Turkish experts have argued that the current Turkish partnership with Russia was established to gain leverage over its Western partners concerning the Kurdish issue (Ceviköz 2018; Goren 2018; Yegin 2019). Hence, it can be concluded that Syria presented some potential to divide Western allies, however, it seems unlikely that Russia intervened to do so as more significant disagreements only appeared after they have already intervened. It seems rather plausible that opportunities to divide the West were seized and welcomed by Moscow when unpredictable events and changes allowed it.

The importance of Russian military bases in Syria:

As indicated in the literature review, some scholars have highlighted the strategic importance of Tartus. In contrast, other scholars have argued that it has been not that important and in bad shape for years. Indeed, in 2019 Moscow announced that it will invest 500 million US-dollars into the port of Tartus (Foy 2019), which underlines that for Russia, the port will continue to be important in the future. Indeed, by looking at Russia's geopolitical situation and access to the sea, it becomes evident that Russia faces several strategic problems with which Russia is struggling since Peter the Great (Delman 2015). In fact, in comparison to other global powers, Russia lacks easy access to the sea. Russia's ports in the Baltics, in the Caspian Sea, and the Far East, such as Vladivostok freeze in winter (Chauhan 2020). By annexing Crimea in 2014, Russia ensured its access to the Black Sea and the ice-free Sevastopol port. Nevertheless, if Russia wants to enter the Mediterranean Sea, it needs to pass the Bosphorus Strait located in Istanbul, which has been militarized by NATO-member Turkey (Synovitz 2012). NATO can further block the access to the Atlantic from Tartus or Sevastopol at the Street of Gibraltar (Tossini 2019).

However, in peacetime, NATO is not blocking Russian warships, but strategically it provides them some leverage in case of more conflictual situations. Even if the streets of Gibraltar and Bosphorus would be blocked, once a naval presence established in Tartus as it is now the case, the port still provides Russia the opportunity to be present in the Mediterranean

Sea. Hence, it seems likely that the importance of Tartus has less to do with Syria itself or even with access to the Atlantic, but more with the opportunity to keep a military foothold in the Mediterranean Sea and thus in Southern Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. Through this, the uncontested control of NATO in the Mediterranean Sea has been challenged (Chauhan 2020, p. 68). Especially access to North Africa and the Middle East are important because of natural resources such as oil, the connection to the Red Sea through the Suez Canal and the vulnerability for conflicts which provides Russia an opportunity – as world's second biggest arms exporter (Wezeman et al. 2020) – to sale its weaponry. Therefore, the port of Tartus and the near Russian airbase of Hmeimim provide Russia the ability to intervene quickly within the region and secure Russia's interests.

Finally, it can be said that from a strategic point of view, Russia gained some benefits from the military bases in Tartus and Hmeimim. Russian presence at the port of Tartus dates back to the 1970s (Grygiel 2020). In contrast, the Russian presence at the airbase of Hmeimim has been just established recently during the Russian intervention in Syria (Reuters 2015), and thus only the airbase can be seen as a real gain resulting from the Russian intervention. Consequently, the question emerges if Russia would have lost access to the Syrian port of Tartus if Assad would have been overthrown? Some experts have argued that an opposition government would most likely have tried to abandon Russia the right to use Tartus (Synovitz 2012). In 2015, when the Syrian regime came clearly under pressure, Russia might have intervened to prevent the loss of its military base within the Mediterranean Sea. It would have been more complicated to hold the military bases if an opposition government would have taken over. However, there is no guarantee that a new government could have forced Moscow to retreat from Tartus or Hmeimim, as Guantanamo Bay has shown where Cuba unsuccessfully demands the US to give up its base since years (Roberts and Watts 2016).

### **5.2.3 Interim conclusion**

By looking at Russia's actual behavior in Syria and by evaluating the objective value of Syria itself, it becomes clear that not many theoretical expectations derived from neorealism are congruent with the empirical findings. Most likely, without Russia's intervention, the biggest terror threat – ISIS – would have been defeated. The Syrian conflict was also not used by Russia to form a balancing alliance against the West or, respectively, Western allies such as Israel. Indeed, Russia risked a confrontation with several Sunni-states and Israel but somehow

managed to get along with them relatively well. Attempts to drive a wedge between Western allies were made, but this was rather a welcomed side effect of the intervention than Russia's driving intention. It can also be said that Russia did not deny the US a strategic gain by preventing a regime change, as Syria – beside defeating ISIS – is not important for the US. However, by supporting Assad, Russia kept and enlarged its military presence in the Mediterranean Sea and thus close to Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. Even though that it is not guaranteed that Russia would have lost its bases, neorealists do have a point when they argue that a loss of Syria potentially would have meant a loss of military options and, thus, a loss of security.

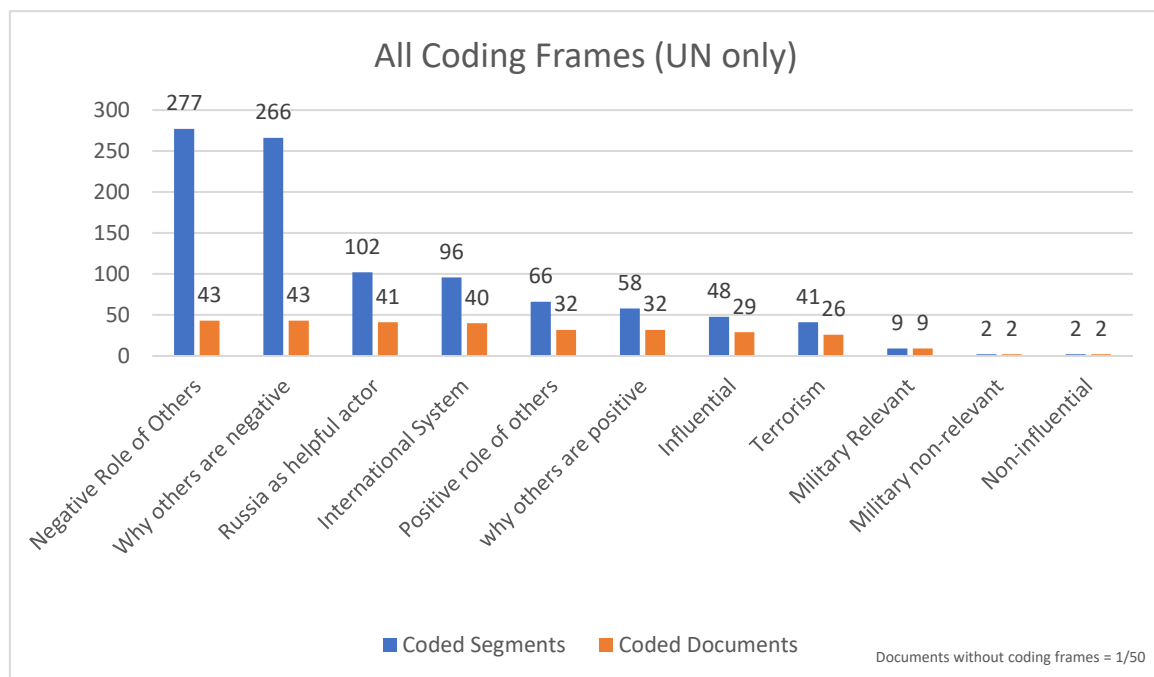
What remains open is why these bases became strategically crucial for Russia during the Syrian crisis. Previously Hmeimim was not used by the Russians, and Tartus was in terrible shape and only very limited used (Allison 2013a, p. 807). In the previous section, it has been argued that from a neorealist point of view concerning the security situation, there were only limited reasons which made a Russian intervention "necessary" and thus would explain why Tartus was not very important for a long time but became important now. Most plausible, the Syrian civil war opened the window of opportunity for Russia to increase its presence or, respectively, to build up a long-term military presence within the region. However, the additional security that Russia gained through Tartus should not be overestimated. It allows Russia a foothold in the Mediterranean Sea, but this is rather useful to protect Russia's pretended interests abroad and less due to secure Russia's national security directly. Chauhan (2020), who analyzed the importance of Tartus in detail, concluded that Tartus's actual maritime function has been more important for other factors such as power projection than for Russia's national security.

Consequently, it remains doubtful that the strategic access to the Mediterranean Sea has been the only- or dominant driver behind Russia's intervention, which was worth to risk a confrontation with the West or regional players. From an identity-driven point of view, it seems plausible that access to the Mediterranean Sea, and thus to a conflict-laden region, is the consequence of a desired world power identity since world powers, by definition, do not limit their influence to their region. Hence, if non-rational factors played a role will be evaluated in the next section.

### 5.3 Russia's Syria narratives

In the last two analytical sections, the political setting and Russia's actual behavior during the Syria crisis have been analyzed. Hence, the final analytical part focuses on Russia's Syrian narratives, which could have been found in Russian UN speeches and additionally in publications from the President, the Foreign Ministry and Sputnik News. Overall, 2.152 different codes could have been identified. 967 of them within UN speeches and 1185 within the three other sources. By analyzing the narratives, conclusions about Russia's identity are derived.

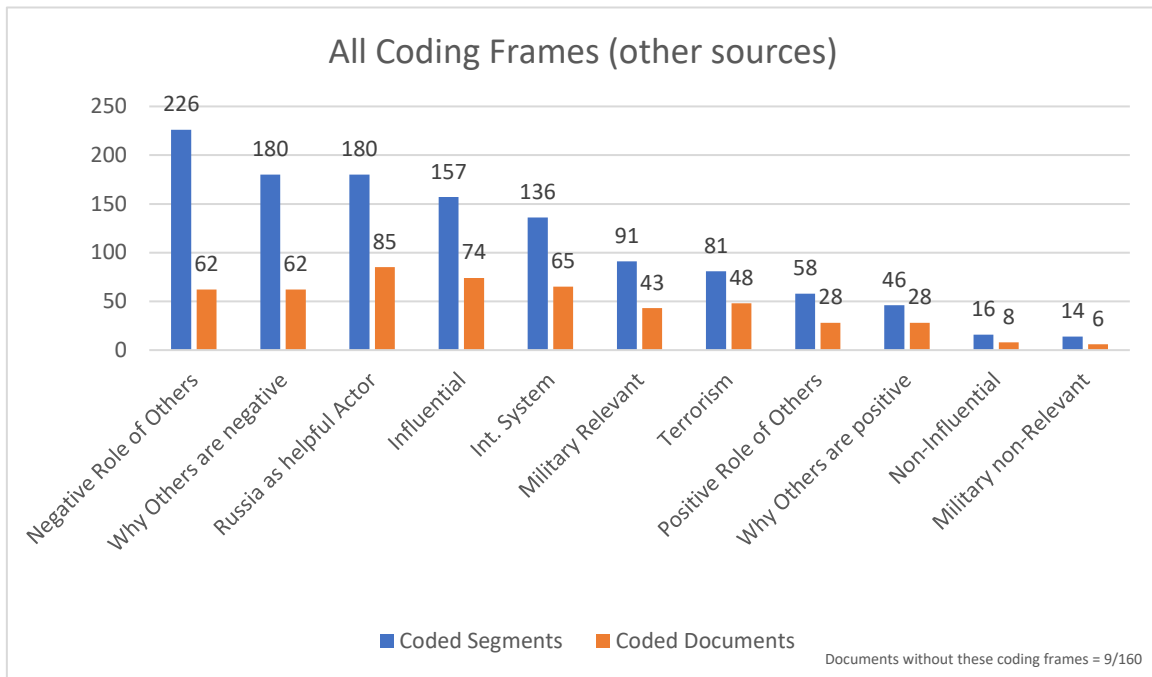
Graph 1



Before going into the details, taking a look at the analyzed coding frames,' general frequencies is worthwhile. Graph 1 shows the frequency of coding frames within Russian UN speeches. The frequency of the coded segments, including repetitions, is shown by the blue bars. The orange bars show the frequency of narratives by extending the coding units to the level of the unit of analysis (= one document). In this way, repetitions within one document have been eliminated (Schreier 2012, p. 156). Consequently, by looking at the Graph, the blue bars should be first compared with each other, whereas the same should be done with the orange bars.



Graph 2



The categories that fall under the coding frame "negative role of others" and "reasons why other actors are negative" appear significantly more often compared to other coding frames. By looking at the other sources, publications of the Russian President, the Russian Foreign Ministry, and Sputnik News, it becomes clear that also there, the "negative role of others" and the related reasons are the most often used narratives (Graph 2). However, in contrast to the UN speeches, these narratives are less dominant compared to other narratives. The narrative "Russia as helpful actor" does appear as often as "reasons why others are negative." Furthermore, framing Russia's role as "influential" also seems to appear more often within other sources. By eliminating repetitions, the orange bars in Graph 1 shows how many UN speeches do contain a specific type of coding frame. What is striking here is that the frequency differences between narratives on the level of coded documents are by far lower than the differences between narratives on the coded segments level. While on the level of the coded segments, the difference between the first two coding frames and the third and fourth coding frames (Russia as the helpful actor and Int. System) was quite huge, this significant difference does not appear when the level of the unit of coding has been extended to the level of the unit of analysis. That can be interpreted in that way that the negative role of other actors and the related reasons, in average, make up the most significant part of a UN speech, but other topics and thus coding frames still do appear within a speech, even if they only play a minor role.

By considering Sputnik, the President, and the Foreign Ministry (Graph 2), the coding

frame "Russia as the helpful actor" becomes the frame that is used in most documents. Nevertheless, by comparing the coded documents of UN speeches with the coded documents of the other sources, it can be said that one UN speech, on average, covers a large part of all different frames. Graph 1 shows that only three coding frames of 50 UN speeches do not appear in every second speech. In contrast, Graph 2 shows that only the frame "Russia as helpful Actor" appears in more than every second speech, whereas other frames appear fewer. Hence, it can be said that the documents of the other sources have a more specific focus on certain topics, especially compared to UN speeches. That finding seems only logic as UN speeches are usually longer than articles by Sputnik or publications of the President or the Russian Foreign Ministry.

Regardless of the coding unit's level or the kind of sources, in none of the two Graphs does "terrorism" appear as a leading coding frame. That is especially striking as Russian officials are officially justifying the intervention by the threat of radical Islamists. At least concerning Russia's Syria narratives, terrorism only plays an average role, compared to other frames. Furthermore, the reasons why some coding frames appear very seldom, in UN speeches as well as in other sources, seems obvious. It would have been astonishing to find Russia continually claiming that it is actually non-influential or military non-relevant.

The frequency distribution of the analyzed coding frames only provided the first overview. Nonetheless, without going deeper into detail, presenting the specific codes within a coding frame, a meaningful conclusion cannot be drawn. In the following, specific coding frames are examined more detailed.

### **5.3.1 Russia as the helpful actor**

By considering all different sources, the coding frame "Russia as the helpful actor" becomes the frame, which can be found in 126 of 210 documents, making 60 %. In particular, this coding frame does consist of five different categories, whereas "Russia as a humanitarian actor" is used most frequently in UN speeches (Appendix 1) and also within other sources (Appendix 2). This category does focus on Russian narratives that present Russia as an actor who provides humanitarian aid or as an actor committing to support human rights in Syria. For instance, in 2015, the UN ambassador highlighted some Russian humanitarian measures:

*"Russia continues to provide the Syrian population with humanitarian aid. Numerous flights of the Russian Ministry for Emergency Situations are delivering basic goods to Syria. Russia has donated 100,000 tons of wheat to Damascus. We are also providing assistance through United*

*Nations organizations, including through the World Food Programme and the United Nations Development Programme" (Safronkov 2015, p. 13).*

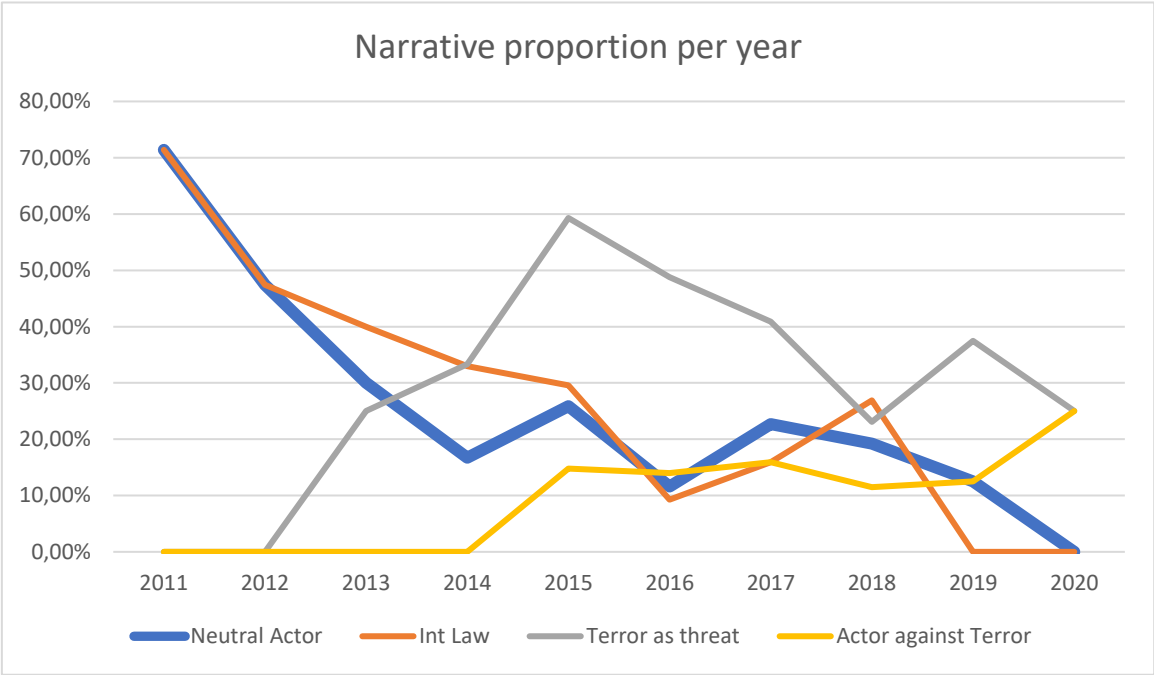
Similar formulations occur several times through different kinds of sources. Here, Russia does present itself as a state who cares about the lives of the Syrian civilians and, consequently, as an actor who is doing much to end suffering.

Russia's narrative that it cares about Syria's humanitarian situation is further undermined by the category "neutral actor/mediator," which captures Russian statements about Russia's neutral character. In particular, that means that Russia claims, that it does neither stand on the side of Assad nor the opposition but acts as a neutral mediator, who has no egoistic interest. In 2013 the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated:

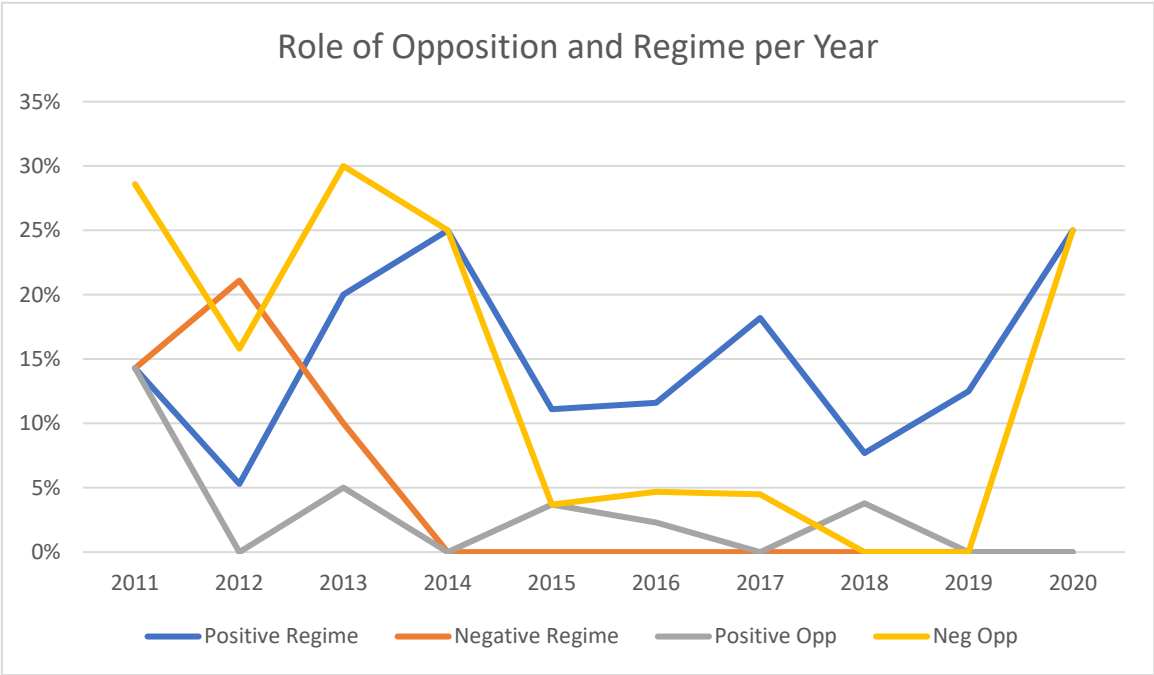
*"This is [...] not because we are protecting Assad from his people. Not at all. We frankly do not care about the personalities. What we care about is the fate of the Syrian people, the fate of Syria as a united sovereign, independent state which is multi-confessional, multiethnic and which has been home for so many religions, for so many ethnic groups. [...] Of course, the political problems which motivated the opposition to protest have been there. We are not denying them. The authorities made many mistakes. They did not respond to the legitimate requests from the opposition for too long. Then the protests degenerated into violence on both sides" (Lavrov 2013).*

Statements like this do highlight Russia's attempts to act neutral, which is indicated by statements where "both sides" are criticized without clearly favoring one side. There are several other examples in which Russia highlights that it is holding constructive talks with both sides with the regime as well as the opposition. Through this, Russia can present itself as a constructive mediator who aims to solve the conflict by mediating non-biased between the two conflicting parties. The finding of the "neutral actor/mediator" narrative within Russian speeches is equivalent to the present narratives within Russian newspapers, where Russia is also not presented as a Syrian ally but rather as an "impartial peacemaker" (Brown 2014, p. 56).

Graph 3



Graph 4



However, Graph 3 shows that the neutral actor narrative declined over the years. For this Graph, the share of documents – including UN speeches, and publications of the Foreign Ministry, the President, and Sputnik News – containing at least one specific narrative in the total number of documents per year was calculated. The same has been done with the Syrian

regime's role and the Syrian opposition in Graph 4. What stands out here is that negative narratives about the Syrian regime soon disappeared, while positive narratives about Damascus remained intact. Positive comments about the Syrian opposition were also partly made, but the frequency remained under those of the Syrian regime. Negative statements about the Syrian opposition also decreased over the years. The decreasing neutral actor narrative and the unbalanced development between positive and negative statements about the Syrian regime and the Syrian opposition indicate that Russia has moved its balanced rhetoric to a more one-sided one over the years. That could be because, at the beginning of the conflict, terror groups such as the so-called Islamic State did not appear in their later size and power. Graph 3 also shows, when ISIS hit the global agenda by the caliphate's declaration in 2014, Russian statements about the threat of Islamic terrorism and narratives that present Russia as an actor against terrorism, which I will come back to later, increased. In 2015, when Russia intervened militarily, the terror narrative reached its peak. Already in 2014, no negative statements about Damascus were made (Graph 4), most likely since Russia now perceived Assad as a partner against Islamic terrorism. However, I would like to highlight that these findings need to be treated with caution as the number and type of documents per year vary widely – for example, 2020 does only contain four documents – and thus the findings are not clearly significant but are supposed to indicate at least a specific trend.

Another narrative which is used by Russia several times, appearing in 19 of 50 UN speeches and in 29 of 160 other sources, is the narrative of Russia as a peaceful nation which is operationalized through Russian statements and calls for a peaceful solution and the rejection of violent means. However, this finding does not seem surprising as it is nowadays common moral sense that violent means are outlawed and only viewed as legitimate as a last resort or for defensive or humanitarian reasons (Finnemore 2004, p. 19). Consequently, Russia does not deviate from this commonly established norm, at least rhetorically, as it highlights "*that the bloody armed conflict in Syria has no forceful solution and can be settled exclusively by political and diplomatic means*" (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2014).

Furthermore, statements that present Russia as an actor who supports Syria by economic means and as a guarantor for Syrian stability have been identified. Nevertheless, these narratives seem to have only a little importance as they do appear relatively seldom and thus should not be seen as very significant Russian narratives during the Syrian civil war.

### 5.3.2 International System

Multilateralism:

One of Russia's Syria narrative's most common topics refers to values and norms regarding the international state system. In 40 of 50 UN speeches (80 %), Russia presents itself as a political actor who stands behind multilateralism (Appendix 3). This narrative has been operationalized through Russia's rhetorical support for cooperation with other nations, for example, through the UN or other multilateral formats. Again, this finding is not really surprising as the Security Council is the most important multilateral forum in international politics. Hence, it has been foreseeable to find Russian rhetorical support for multilateralism within this multilateral forum. Consequently, by looking away from the UN to other sources (Appendix 4), the multilateralism narrative decreases to 32,5 % (52 of 160 documents). However, it remains a relatively often used narrative. Concerning the actual content of the multilateralism narrative, Russia is actively trying to present itself as a partner who rejects unilateralism but supports multilateralism. This can be seen, for instance, through the following example:

*"We are not trying to rule the world or impose our regulations on it, though we are accused regularly of having such ambitions" he [Medvedev] added. "That is not so — we are a pragmatic people who realise that no one can shoulder responsibility for the whole world, not even the United States of America" (Medvedev 2016).*

This quote implicates that Russia indeed dislikes the American dominated unilateral world order, which resulted from the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, the reason for Russia's negative attitude is not justified through the unbalanced power distribution between the US and Russian Federation – as might be expected from a neorealist point of view – but rather through the alleged fact that the US is just not capable of managing the whole world by its own. Consequently, Russia tries to present itself as a partner who is willing to contribute its part in order to manage world affairs at eye level with the US.

Medvedev's statement could also be further interpreted in that way that similar to the US, Russia demands "special rights" towards other non-great powers, which has been one of my formulated theoretical expectations. However, no "smoking gun" evidence has been found which would undoubtedly support this thesis. No direct Russian statements in which Russia is engaged in an othering-process by emphasizing or claiming "special rights" towards non-great power could have been found within the analyzed statements and publications. However, to find such a "smoking-gun" might have been a little naïve and optimistic. Russia seems rather

concerned with promoting equal rights of every state, which can be synonymously understood as multilateralism. For instance, Putin wrote in his New York Times article, which was also published on the Russian President's website:

*"It is extremely dangerous to encourage people to see themselves as exceptional, whatever the motivation. There are big countries and small countries, rich and poor, those with long democratic traditions and those still finding their way to democracy. [...] We are all different, but when we ask for the Lord's blessings, we must not forget that God created us equal."* (Putin 2013).

On the first view and without much interpretation, this statement can be understood as a general statement that presents Russia's point of view, in which all states, no matter their capabilities or political system, have equal rights. By putting this statement more into context, it has to be considered that Putin's article in the New York Times was primarily aimed at the American people. The first sentence of the presented excerpt aims at American foreign policy and thus contains critique on the American unilateralism. Therefore, it seems plausible – at least concerning this statement – that Russia primarily wants the US to end its unilateral driven foreign policy mainly towards Russia than towards any other countries and consequently take in particular Russia's interests and point of view into consideration. It is doubtful that Putin would have formulated a similar statement towards other states, for example, Ukraine. In principle, Russia's commitment to multilateralism can be synonymously understood as a request to the US to respect Russian interests, whatever they may be.

Consequently, the Russian rejection of (American) unilateralism is rooted in the Russian perception that the US does ignore Russia. It is not clear and thus also questionable if Russia really cares about multilateralism, which would actually mean that Russia cares about the equality of all or, respectively, of several states on earth. Nevertheless, what is clear is that Russia wants the US not to be unequal towards Russia by simply ignoring them. As a result, it seems more likely that Russia does not care about the US taking other's interests, but primary Russia's into consideration. Hence, following this argument, as long as Russia's recognition is granted, Russia does not care if a bipolar or multipolar world order characterizes the international system. Nonetheless, rejecting American unilateralism by promoting multilateralism does simply sound better compared to demanding the US to recognize Russia as an important international actor.

In line with this argument is the finding that Russia accuses the US and or the West in

general, quite frequently of undermining multilateral measures (Appendix 5). That can basically be equated with the accusation that the same actors just ignore Russia. It is for example illustrated by the Russian UN ambassador who spoke at the Security Council in 2017 shortly after the US, Great Britain, and France conducted retaliation strikes against the Syrian regime for the use of chemical weapons:

*"They scorn the Charter and the Security Council, which they attempt, shamelessly, to use for their own unscrupulous purposes. They do no serious work in the Council. They refuse to consult with us, while falsely assuring everyone of the opposite. They are undermining the Council's authority."* (Nebenzia 2018, p. 4).

Here, Russia claims again that the West does not even consult them, which is nothing else than ignoring them. In contrast, other actors are framed positively by Russia when they support multilateral measures (Appendix 5). Surprisingly the US is also six times framed positively for supporting multilateralism. In fact, that means whenever the US did not ignore Russia and considered their concerns, the US is basically being praised for supporting multilateral measures and thus raising the efficiency of the Security Council. For example, in 2013, when Obama threatened to intervene in Syria, Russia could prevent this from happening by using its influence on Damascus. Through this, Russia's protected its supposed interest in preventing another regime change by the West. Consequently, the US-Russian cooperation was praised, which is underlined by the following statement in the UNSC:

*"The effective implementation of the decisions of the Security Council [...], on the destruction of Syria's chemical arsenal — adopted at the initiative of Russia and the United States of America — is one of the Council's most significant successes and reaffirms the possibility of engaging in productive joint work on the most urgent problems of our time."* (Churkin 2015a, p. 3).

To avoid an image that would present Russia as egoistic, only caring about itself, Russia cannot just reject everything without making its own proposals for solutions. Consequently, Russia often highlights own resolution drafts and its constructive support for UN missions or UN-based formats, and thus for multilateralism, which can be seen in the following example where Russia made the following statement in the Security Council:



*"I would remind the Council that the Russian initiative on Syria is two-pronged. It proposed closing our ranks for counter-terrorist purposes and, in parallel, the launching of a political process on the basis of Geneva communiqué [...]" (Churkin 2015b, p. 25).*

Other statements or rhetoric moves do even more vigorous attempt to create a constructive multilateral Russian identity by presenting Russia's willingness to compromise and consider others' concerns. In 2012 Sputnik News wrote about Russia's third resolution draft on Syria:

*"The document includes France's call to the Syrian government to 'cease all violence' [...] and also a joint proposal by France and Portugal calling on Syria to let international media and humanitarian organizations into the country" (Sputnik News 2012).*

In sum, and concerning Russia's propagated multilateralism, it can be said that, even though there is no "smoking-gun" evidence, and interpretation is necessary, the theoretical expectation that Russia demands a "special orderly role" similar to the US cannot be falsified. There are hints that suggest that Russia uses the term multilateralism to demand a leading orderly position in world politics for itself. For Russia, much is about the bilateral relationship between the US or, respectively, the West and itself. The term multilateralism is used slightly to disguise selfish desires and ideas under the guise of selflessness.

#### International Law and State Sovereignty:

Besides multilateralism, the promotion of international law and state sovereignty is the second narrative, which can be summarized under the coding frame international system. This narrative does appear in 17 of 50 UN speeches (34 %) and 35 of 160 other publications (22 %) (Appendix 3 and 4). In particular, this category captures Russia's arguments that a foreign intervention – without UN authorization or as a formal request through the ruling government – is against international law and would further undermine the principle of state sovereignty. This interpretation does, in principle, imply that Russia prefers state sovereignty over the responsibility to protect. That is nothing new as the first analytical part of this thesis has shown. The same arguments have been made about NATO/US interventions in Kosovo, Iraq and Libya. Similar to Kosovo, Russia argues that Syria should be treated as an internal conflict. Sputnik News quoted Medvedev:

*"The Russian president also said that the future of the Syrian regime must be decided by the people and leadership of Syria, not NATO or certain European countries" (Sputnik News 2011).*

The Russian argument about state sovereignty perfectly fits into Russia's neutral actor narrative, which is also why the two categories do indeed correlate 18 times within all documents. Through the neutral actor narrative, Russia can claim that it does neither prefer the Syrian regime nor the opposition. Through international law and state sovereignty narrative, Russia does encourage others to do so as well. Otherwise, if internal conflicts serve as a justification for foreign intervention, the whole world would slip into chaos or anarchy. That becomes in particular clear by reading another excerpt of Putin's article in the New York Times from 2013, at times when US-President Obama threatened to intervene in Syria following the use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime:

*"We are not protecting the Syrian government, but international law. We need to use the UN Security Council and believe that preserving law and order in today's complex and turbulent world is one of the few ways to keep international relations from sliding into chaos. The law is still the law, and we must follow it whether we like it or not. Under current international law, force is permitted only in self-defence or by the decision of the Security Council. Anything else is unacceptable under the UN Charter and would constitute an act of aggression" (Putin 2013).*

Here, Putin tries to appeal to the Americans to accept and respect the principle of state sovereignty. As already discussed in the first part of the analysis, from a constructivist perspective, it is most plausible that Russia wants to prevent a further change in the intersubjective understanding of values that prioritize a Western understanding of human rights over state sovereignty. Otherwise, Russia's own sovereignty could be potentially threatened in cases of human rights violations by Russia. That Russia is promoting the values of state sovereignty without ulterior motives seems very unlikely regarding Russia's interference in other countries. The intervention in sovereign Ukraine as the most prominent example stands utterly contrary to the narrative analyzed here. Other examples, such as the interference in the US election campaign 2016, the poisoning of the Skripals in Great Britain, and the Berlin park assassination by Russia, show that the Ukrainian case has not been an exception, even if the dimension has been definitely unique so far. However, besides the annexation of Crimea, Russia denies any interference in eastern Ukraine or the mentioned other cases, as it is vital for Russia to maintain the identity of a value-oriented Russia who respects international law and state

sovereignty for the reasons mentioned above. In fact, It is supposed to be so crucial that Russia currently even justified its decision to block UN humanitarian aid for Syria, which is supposed to be another important factor for which Russia claims to stand up for, arguing that this would undermine Syria's sovereignty (Lynch and Gramer 2020). Thus, it seems that the principle of state sovereignty, at least rhetorically, outweighs any other norm and value.

Russia's narratives do perfectly fit to one of Ringmar's requirements for an identity-driven explanation, namely the fact that Russia "pays careful attention the rules of the social system to which [...] it seeks to belong" (Ringmar 2007, p. 91). It is true that since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the principle of non-interference and sovereignty has become common ground and this principle is still intact (Kissinger 2014), even though other norms such as a prioritization of security – the shift Russia wants to prevent – has been forthcoming (Butler 2009, p. 97). Consequently, at least rhetorically, Russia does pay careful attention to the well-established principle. That becomes particularly clear by looking at the high frequency of this narrative. The fact that the Syrian regime formally requested Moscow to intervene in Syria in order to defeat extremists gave Russia a comfortable position as it could intervene without violating international law (Wissenschaftlicher Dienst des Deutschen Bundestags 2018). That other actors had no official permission from Damascus to act militarily on the territory and thus violate international law is a fact Moscow cleverly used to blame them, a finding that I will come back to in more detail shortly.

Finally, it can be said that the findings of Russia's narratives regarding the international system which present Russia as a supporter of multilateralism and the principle of state sovereignty in line with international law, do confirm previous findings by Plakoudas (2015) and Ramani (2015).

### **5.3.3 The role of others**

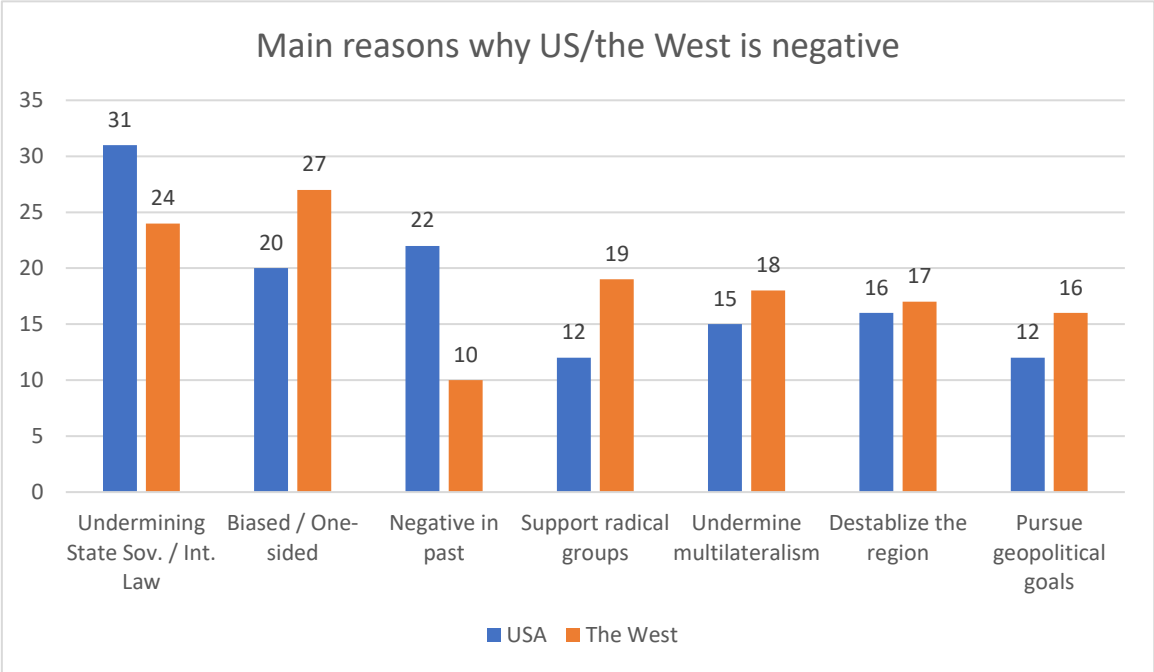
Negative:

As the Syrian civil war presents a conflict, where many different parties are involved, it is not surprising that Russia does spend many statements on other actors' roles. In fact, concerning the coded segments, negative narratives about others and the related reasons take up the majority of the Russian statements both in UN speeches and in other sources (Graph 1 and 2). Russia does speak in 43 of 50 (86 %) UN speeches and 62 of 160 (39 %) other sources at least once harmful about another actor. For comparison, others' positive narratives appear in 32 of

50 UN (64 %) speeches and concerning the other sources, only in 28 of 160 (18 %) documents.

By taking a look at the coded segments (Appendix 6 and 7), it becomes evident that the main target of Russia's rhetoric attacks has been the West in general and the US in particular. The distinction between the West and the US should be understood in that sometimes Russia spoke about "the West" or "Western States," which obviously include the US but does not primarily aim at the US but instead at the Western state community in general. When it was clear that an individual statement was exclusively aimed at the US, the segment was assigned to the category US. Interesting here is that compared to UN speeches, in other sources, Russia more often refers to the US than to the general term "the West." The reasons for Russia's negative rhetoric towards the West or the US specifically widely differ. Indeed, 22 different kind of reasons why, in Moscow's eyes, the West/US take a negative role within the Syrian case could have been identified. Graph 5 presents the seven most frequently used reasons within all four documents. In contrast to the West, the US was clearly more frequently named when Russia connected the Syrian case to previous ones such as Afghanistan, Iraq, or Libya.

Graph 5



As already indicated in the previous section, Russia was in a comfortable position that it did not undermine international law by intervening in Syria. Consequently, it was easy for Moscow to accuse the US and the West that they – contrary to Russia – actually do undermine the principle of state sovereignty and thus international law.

Another justification for the West's negative role has been the accusation that – contrary to Russia – the Western states are not neutral, using double-standards and support one side in the conflict. For instance, about the use of chemical weapons, Russia did accuse the US that *"the United States is not interested in either the lack of evidence or the laughable techniques and methods of the investigation. It has decided on the guilty party, and decided it in advance"* (Nebenzia 2017, p. 4). Also, in line with Russia's self-presentation as a neutral and selfless actor is the accusation towards the Western states, that they would pursue geopolitical goals and are thus not interested in peace for the Syrians.

Furthermore, Russia claims that the West would support radical groups, which did very seldom imply direct support for radical terror groups, but rather that Western actions and support of "moderate groups" indirectly would also strengthen radical groups. As Russia tries to present itself as a representative of multilateralism, it is not surprising to find accuses that Western actions would undermine multilateral approaches. The United States are accused that their actions have led to an *"escalation of the Syrian situation,"* which *"is having a destructive effect on the entire system of international relations"* (Nebenzia 2018, p. 3).

These seven accusations about the US's negative role or, respectively, the West are just the most frequently used ones. Other accusations do, for example, imply that the West has been ineffective against extremists, that their military operations have led to civilian casualties, or that they have been unwilling or unable in order to use their influence on the opposition to push for constructive negotiations between the opposition and Damascus.

Since the US and its Western allies are not the only two framed negatively by Russia, other actors are also less, but still relatively frequently framed negative. Sometimes Russia just mention the term Arab States, but sometimes it is formulated more specific, mostly aiming at Saudi-Arabia and Qatar, which are traditional Western allies in the Middle East. They are frequently accused of destabilizing the region, supporting radical groups, and the unwillingness or inability to use their influence on the Opposition for negotiations (Appendix 8). Turkey faces similar allegations, even though the accusation for destabilizing the region appear fewer. The Syrian Opposition is most frequently accused for their cooperation respectively, support with/for radical groups and that they have faked evidence regarding the use of chemical weapons. Very similar accusations are also made against the White Helmets, which is a volunteering civil organization providing medical evacuation and rescue after bombings (Trew 2019). Especially their credibility is questioned by Russia as they are accused of faking evidence to provoke Western intervention. This finding does indeed support previous

conclusions that described the negative Russian narrative about the White Helmets as a "Russian disinformation campaign" (ibid.). However, this disinformation campaign is not limited to Russian controlled news channels like Sputnik but also appears at the Security Council. The Russian UN ambassador, for example, stated that "*The pseudo-humanitarian White Helmets continue preparing new provocations in order to accuse the legitimate authorities of using toxic agents*" (Safronkov 2019, p. 11).

One more actor worth highlighting is the Syrian regime, who is at least ten times framed negatively. The negative framing reasons are that Damascus acted too late to carry out reforms, that Syrian actions destabilized the region, and led to civilian casualties. They are also accused once for breaking a cease-fire and not acting decisively enough to stop the violence. As already presented previously Graph 4, shows that the negative framing of the Syrian regime did utterly disappear in 2014 when ISIS was at the peak of its power, and thus terrorism appeared within Russia's Syria narrative. The Russian critique on Damascus previous 2014 aimed to undermine Russia's pretended stance as a neutral and balanced actor. However, compared to the negative role of others and the far more frequently used positive narrative of the Syrian regime, the Russian narrative towards the Syrian regime does not seem very balanced and neutral.

Positive:

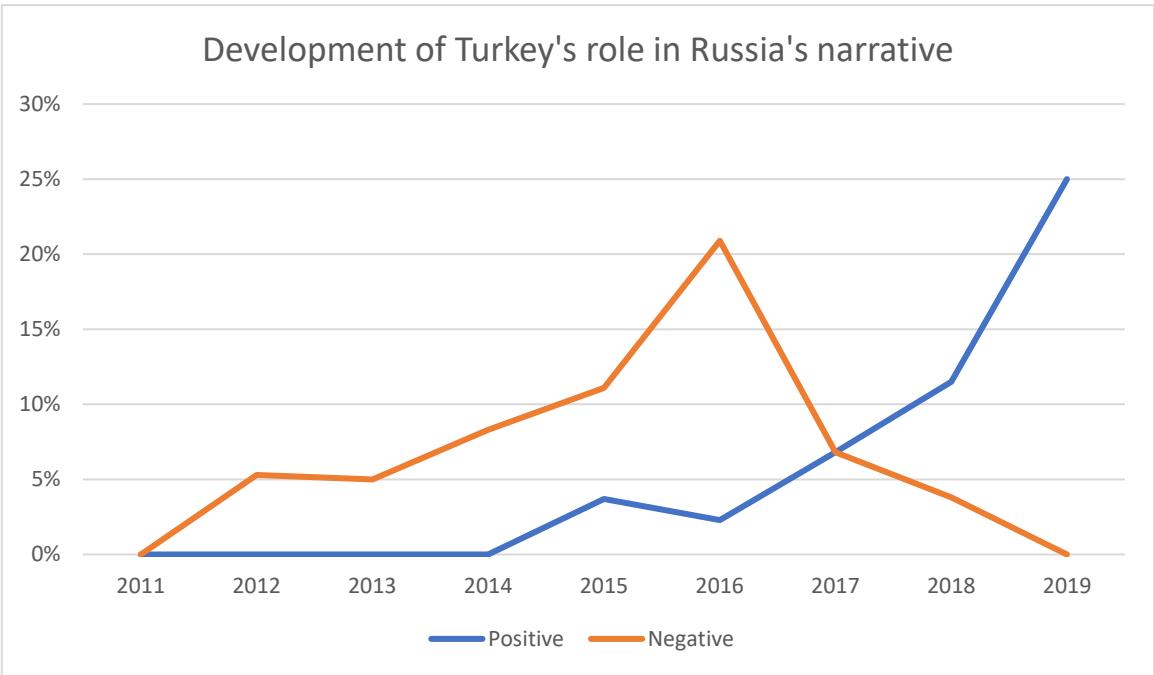
In contrast, to the negative role of others, Russia praises the role of others less frequently. However, at the Security Council, Russia still speaks in 32 of 50 speeches positive about certain other actors. Thereby the Syrian regime is the actor who is most frequently framed positive (Appendix 9). Compared to Russian narratives at the Security Council, other sources do contain even fewer positive roles as only 28 of 160 documents contain such a statement. In contrast, to the UNSC, the Syrian regime is approximately equal, often framed favorable as Turkey or Iran (Appendix 10). That is because publications of the President, and the Foreign Ministry often published the results of the trilateral meetings known as the "Astana process" between Iran, Turkey, and Russia.

Because Russia has influence over Damascus and presents itself as a multilateral actor, it seems only consequential to frame Russia's protégé as an actor who supports multilateral measures as well (Appendix 11). Otherwise, a negative narrative about Damascus would also cast a bad light on Russia. The same counts for the presentation of Assad as an actor against terrorism and for humanitarian aid. Also, in line with the multilateral narrative is the positive

framing of UN personnel. Russia presents itself as a multilateral actor and thus pretend to support multilateral authorized personnel.

Iran and Turkey are also presented as multilateral actors. This narrative appears in the context of the Astana process, which is a multilateral forum between Iran, Turkey, and Russia established in early 2017. What is especially interesting here is that – in contrast to Iran – Turkey has been criticized by Russia several times (Appendix 6 and 7). That is because Turkey opposed the Assad regime and thus the Russian military intervention in 2015. The contrary position even has led to the downing of a Russian jet by Turkey (Ceviköz 2018). However, because Turkey was unsatisfied with its Western allies regarding the Kurdish issue, it started to establish a strategic partnership with Russia (ibid; Goren 2018; Yegin 2019). This policy change is also reflected in Russia's narrative, as Graph 6 shows. After the beginning of the Astana process in 2017, the proportion of all documents per year that contained a positive frame increased, whereas the negative narrative decreased.

Graph 6



Most interesting is the positive framing of the US. As explained in detail earlier (Appendix 5), whenever the US is framed as a supporter of multilateralism, the US does meet Russian interests or does recognize Russia as an important actor. Similar can be said about the positive framing of the US as an actor against terrorism. That often happens when Russia and the US agreed on a specific issue about the Islamic State or other terror organizations. What is

also striking is that the positive framing does usually aim at the term "US" and not to "the West," especially at the UNSC (Appendix 9). This is another indicator that implies that the positive framing of the US is due to bilateral agreements. In contrast to accusations, which are often formulated very unspecified about the actor, Russia is more specific whenever it praises someone.

Concerning the role of others, it can be said that in line with Ringmar's argument (2007, p. 91), Russia constructs "affective geography of friends and enemies." The othering process does help Russia to undermine its own pretended identity. By highlighting how "bad" the US and the West behave, Russia can highlight the contrast. In particular, that means two things: First, it delegitimizes other's actions, because their actions and motives do have a negative impact. Second, it legitimizes Russia's actions and, even more critically, highlights their more or less unique character. If all other actors behaved like Moscow, a Russian role would not be necessary or unique. Consequently, it would be harder to establish a unique identity, at least not this one. For example, without highlighting that the West is undermining international law and state sovereignty or is biased, Russia's role as the gatekeeper of international law and as a neutral actor would stand out far less and thus would be less significant. Additionally, but less frequently, positive narratives are basically told, whenever Russia's pretended interests are met and thus used indirectly as evidence that others accept or support Russian identity and relevance.

### **5.3.4 Russia as a powerful state**

As just mentioned, an essential component of Russia's identity creation is its attempt to show the World, or particularly those whom they respect, that Russia actually matters. In order to get recognition as a powerful and influential state actor, it is necessary to convince others that this identity is valid. Therefore, in more than half of UN speeches (29) and almost half the other sources (74), Russia does at least highlight once that it is an influential actor (Graph 1 and 2). In particular, that means that Russia highlights its influence on other actors' positions, that others want to cooperate with Russia, or that Russia can influence the events on the ground in Syria. Within all sources, Russia is most frequently presented as influential by Russia itself (Appendix 12). For example, Russia highlights that through its use of influence on other state actors and Damascus, violence has been reduced. That becomes clear while reading the following excerpt of a speech at the Security Council in 2018:



*"No one has done more than Russia and its co-guarantors of the Astana process to bring about a ceasefire and reduce the level of violence [...]." (Safronkov 2018, p. 28).*

Other statements do highlight the positive effect of Russian co-sponsored UN resolutions as the following statement at the UNSC makes clear:

*"[...] the resolution was adopted at almost exactly the same moment as the cessation of hostilities is entering into force in Syria. Many armed groups in Syria have already declared that they are ready to comply with its provisions" (Gatilov 2016).*

These examples show how Russia highlights its influence on other actors and thus Russia's importance in Syria and in world affairs. In contrast and as mentioned in the previous section, other actors are sometimes presented as incapable and thus uninfluential, at least concerning their influence on the opposition.

However, to find Russia highlighting Russia's importance is not surprising as most documents that have been analyzed present Russia's point of view and are released by Russia. UN speeches of other actors were not considered, but everything that Russia released, including statements of other actors, because I assumed that if Russia does release those statements via its platforms, it does fit into their narrative. That other actors do recognize and highlight the critical role of Russia is a narrative which especially appears within Sputnik News articles (Appendix 12). A very frequently used tactic is to quote Western non-official actors, such as experts, journalists, or former intelligence officers. For instance, Robert Baer, a retired CIA officer, is quoted, among other things, by Sputnik with the following sentence:

*"Syria was much too complicated for us to deal with unilaterally. I think it was a great Russian and American victory to get rid of the chemical weapons" (Baer 2014).*

This statement is entirely congruent with Medvedev's comment presented earlier, where he indicates "that no one can shoulder responsibility for the whole world." Furthermore, Western politicians and thus actors – especially Americans – who are still in office are quoted. For example, a heading reads:

*"Kerry Praises US-Russian Cooperation on Chemical Weapons Removal From Syria"* (Sputnik News 2015).

Through the presentation of Western experts and quotes of Western officials, Russia's influential role appears even more reliable than through Russia's self-praise only. However, this can be almost exclusively done by Russian controlled newspapers such as Sputnik. These aim to convince the society of other actors – and thus other states – about the pretended identity. If other actors, possibly even politicians of the targeted society, are quoted, it raises the promoted identity's credibility.

In contrast, to Russia's influential role, narratives that present Russia as non-influential do appear less frequently (Graph 1 and 2). For example, Russia admits that other actors have more influence on the opposition or that it cannot convince other actors to cooperate with Russia or prevent them from limited military strikes against Damascus. However, the Kremlin does sometimes use the non-influential narrative when it does fit into their argumentation. For instance, Lavrov said about a regime change in Damascus that Assad *"is not going to go, not because we don't tell him to, but because he has made his decision"* (Lavrov 2013). That does highlight Russia's tighten hands by indirectly referring to the principle of state sovereignty.

In contrast to the coding frames "influential" and "non-influential," which aimed to capture Russia's diplomatic influence, the coding frames "military relevant" and "military non-relevant," capture the military component of Russia's presentation of a powerful state. The military narrative appears in 9 of 50 (18 %) UN speeches and more frequently in 43 of 160 (27 %) documents of other sources (Graph 1 and 2). The most commonly used military narrative is Russia highlighting its military presence or, respectively, the efficiency of its operations (Appendix 13 and 14). For example, Sputnik wrote about the modern equipment of the Russian military:

*"American and European military officials, who thought that Russia's military capabilities were outdated if not lacking, were in for a rude awakening when Moscow launched its high-tech counterterrorism operation in Syria"* (Sputnik News 2016).

These formulations are in line with previous claims that Russia also uses Syria to present and highlight its military capabilities (MacFarquhar 2016). Another quote does again show how

Sputnik is using quotes by Western actors – specifically by a Western journalist – to undermine the credibility of Russia as an essential and dominant player:

*"[...] Russian warplanes sometimes fly more missions daily than the US-led coalition does in a month. 'This is in marked contrast, Western military planners have noted, to how quickly [NATO] began to feel the strain when bombing Libya and Kosovo,' the Independent asserted"* (Sputnik News 2016).

That the original author of this quote, who writes for the Independent, also wrote that the Kremlin is more "prepared to shrug off collateral damage" than the West" (Sengupta 2016), is a phrase, which is not mentioned by the Sputnik News article. Here, Russia is presented – contrary to the West – as an effective actor against terrorism. Narratives which present Russia as a very efficient military actor are also made by Putin, which can be seen in the following example:

*"[...] operations on the eastern and western banks of the Euphrates River have been completed with the full defeat of the terrorists. Naturally, there still may be some isolated pockets of resistance but let me repeat that on the whole, at this stage and on that territory, combat action has been completed with the full defeat of the terrorists"* (Putin 2017a).

Furthermore, the military bases Tartus and Hmeimim are never mentioned during the UNSC and 14 times in 11 documents labeled as important. In contrast, the importance of military bases is downplayed in three documents (Appendix 15). That does slightly indicate that the only Russian military bases outside the former Soviet Union are from prestige. However, they appear too seldom, especially compared to other narratives, to conclude that they play a significant role in Russia's story.

### **5.3.5 Terrorism**

The official reason why Russia intervened in Syria, appears surprisingly fewer than other narratives. However, Russia is speaking in almost every second meeting of the UNSC about terrorism. In the other sources, it appears in around every third document (48 of 160 documents). Within the terrorism coding-frame, two different patterns could be identified (Appendix 16). First and closely related to the previously mentioned "military efficient

narrative," Russia does present itself as an actor against terrorism, and consequently, second, terrorism is framed as a threat. These two narratives do not exclude each other but are somewhat connected. Without framing terrorism as a threat, it would be less impressive to present itself as an actor against it. In line with that, is the finding that Russia does frame terrorism mainly as a threat for others than for Russia itself. Only twice does Russia speak exclusively about a threat for Russia (Appendix 17). Statements like Putin's "*terrorism is a global problem and the fight against it is, of course, far from over*" (Putin 2017b) are representative for Russia speaking about terrorism as a threat. That is again in line with Russia's neutral actor narrative, which pretends that Russia does not mainly pursue selfish goals, but instead wants to help other actors.

## **6 Conclusion and discussion**

This thesis has provided an academic overview of dominant explanations for Russia's Syria policy. Because alternative identity-driven answers have been underrepresented, this paper aimed to fill this gap by providing a full-fledged theoretical explanation and a systematic analysis. By applying a congruence analysis, I compared the theoretical expectations of two theories with empirical findings.

By putting the results into this thesis's context, it becomes clear that Ringmar's (2007, 90 f.) four requirements for an identity-driven explanation have been fulfilled.

First, I have shown that the traditional interest-driven explanation of neorealism provided contested results. The literature review showed that scholars do not clearly agree which interests Russia pursue in Syria. Even though a shift in the power of balance occurred, Russia did not balance against the US in the aftermath of the Cold War and even reduced its troop number in Eastern Europe. In general, the bilateral relationship in the early phase of the post-Cold War period has been relatively good. Although NATO enlargement theoretically further shifted the power of balance, the effects were rather marginal, as the military capabilities of the new member states were low and strategic advantages such as the deployment of NATO troops or nuclear weapons in the territory of the new member states were not exploited out of consideration for Russia. Even by assuming that further NATO enlargement, such as Ukraine or Georgia, would have objectively threatened Russia's security as neorealists have argued (Mearsheimer 2014), it remains unclear why Syria should be from similar importance. Therefore, and in practice, it remains very doubtful from a neorealist point of view, that the

post-Cold War developments forced Russia to intervene in Syria to regain security. The second analytical part has shown that many theoretical expectations of neorealism are not congruent with reality. In fact, only the Russian military bases of Tartus and Hmeimim provide Russia relative objective utility as it kept and even increased its foothold in the Mediterranean region. However, if the base of Tartus would be from irreplaceable importance to guarantee Russia's security, then the port would not have stayed in bad shape for years as it already has been under Russian administration before the conflict. Hence, the objective utility of the military bases alone cannot explain Russia's interest in Syria, which implies that they have rather a symbolic meaning to undermine Russia's global power.

Second, I could identify a series of occasions prior to the Syrian civil war. In Moscow's eyes, serious recognition of Russia has been denied by the Americans and its allies. In particular, Moscow interpreted NATO intervention in Kosovo as a "spit in Russia's face" (Arbatov 2000, 10 f.). Furthermore, Moscow opposed NATO enlargement, Western political support for the former Soviet States, and Western interventions in Iraq and Libya. Notably, Russia's demands for an exclusive sphere of influence was denied by the US, which must have led Moscow to conclude that equal partnership on eye level with Washington will not be granted by sticking to the status quo. Statements like Obama's claim that Russia is acting out of weakness and is a regional power will only have increased this impression.

Third, after Russia has realized that the recognition, they granted Washington was not being returned by cooperating with them and framing Russia as part of the West, Putin decided to leave the Western orbit. That became particularly clear in 2007 by Putin's Munich speech, where he promoted a new Russian assertiveness and announced to oppose American world dominance. Consequently, it can be said that this marked a formative moment in Russia's post-Cold war policy, where new stories were told. Russia undermined its willingness to oppose US dominance by intervening in Georgia and Ukraine. Both former Soviet states are countries that fall into Russia's demanded sphere of influence. However, to prove that Russia is indeed not only a regional power, Russia had to convince other authorities that it is willing to act on the global level. Therefore, Russia took the chance to intervene in Syria.

Fourth and most important, the qualitative content-analysis has shown that Russian narratives found in Russian UN speeches, publications by the Russian President, the Foreign Ministry and Sputnik News, indicate that the Syrian civil war served Russia to solidify its global power identity. Through Syria, Russia could project its power on the diplomatic and military level, which left the US and its allies no other choice than to deal with Russia and recognize

them as the powerful actor who shapes world politics together with the Americans. That Russia mainly demands recognition becomes particularly evident as they pretend to promote multilateralism, which is nothing more than a cover for Russian demands that other states have to accept their "interests" and thus recognize them. As a consequence, the geography of friends and enemies has been created. In fact, when Russia's power is recognized, and at least compromises are reached, Russia frames other states as supporters of multilateralism. In contrast, and more often, Russia's interests are not met. Consequently, the US, respectively, the West are framed negatively by accusing them that they would undermine multilateralism. Other accuses include that they would also undermine Syria's state sovereignty. This principle is indeed fundamental in Russia's narrative and pretended to be so important that it outweighs any other norms even human rights and humanitarian aid. It might be argued that Russia fears that an intersubjective shift, which would put human rights over state sovereignty, takes a foothold in international politics. However, it cannot be ruled out that Russia promotes this alleged value somewhat out of opportunism, which should delegitimize Western actions and legitimizes Russia's actions, as Moscow itself in reality often does not take the principle of sovereignty too seriously. The creation of friends and enemies found in Russia's narratives serves to bolster Russian identity production, as it highlights the contrast between Russia and especially the US, and thus justifies why a powerful Russia taking an orderly role within the world affairs is necessary. That Russia should take such an orderly role is further justified by the claim that Russia acts selfless and neutral. Additionally, through the promotion of certain narratives, for instance, the rejection of violence, neutrality, multilateralism, and humanitarian aid, Russia rhetorically pretends that it pays attention to rules and values of the international system, which are nowadays generally accepted and desirable. The analysis has shown that Russian narratives run consistently through different sources, including "official" and "semi-official" sources. It can be said that the results are also congruent with previous analysis of Russian newspapers, where Russia is presented as the savior of the world (Brown 2014, p. 56).

Finally, it can be concluded that the evidence presented in this thesis supports Ringmar's general claim that states do not (always) act to gain useful objects but in order to defend or establish their identity. In particular, by participating in the conflict of Syria, Russia could assume the role of a powerful global actor, which can play a dominating role in world politics and thus presents an alternative to the United States. Material interests such as a foothold in the Middle East and, in particular military bases in the region are, in fact, a consequence of Russia's promoted identity as these interests symbolize global power and thus can be seen as a

materialization of Russia's global power identity. Russia did not intervene to gain physical security but social security. Consequently, this paper's main research question – why Russia intervened in Syria – could be answered.

It does not remain easy to draw generalizations by a single case study to a broader set of cases. Therefore, it would be problematic to conclude that states always act to defend their identity. This thesis instead aimed to provide complementary or alternative insights to dominating explanations of Russia's Syrian policy. Hence, generalizations should be rather drawn about the applied theories (Blatter and Haverland 2012). By comparing different empirical observations to the theoretical expectations of a utility-driven neorealist theory and an identity-driven constructivist theory, it can be concluded that the latter provides a more complementary explanation than the former approach. That means that neorealism does not entirely fail to explain the Syrian case. Indeed, *a priori* quite a few factors spoke for a neorealist explanation, but only a small part of empirical evidence is congruent with neorealism's theoretical expectations. In contrast, constructivism can explain more empirical observations and nuances of the empirical case. Hence, it can be said that constructivism matters and, in particular, that the identity-driven approach is not limited to explain historical circumstances but also very recent ones. Therefore, students of security studies should consider that when analyzing current conflicts, and in particular, when traditional theories only provide limited explanations.

This paper's strengths lie in the competitive character between the two theories and the resulting tripartite analysis. First, I did not look at the case in isolation by considering the Syrian case's political and historical context. Second, I have evaluated the utility-driven theory's explanatory power by looking at Russia's concrete behavior. Because the argument could only explain small parts of the empirical evidence, the likelihood that another approach provides a better explanation increased. Therefore, Russia's narratives from different sources have been systematically analyzed to draw conclusions about Russia's identity and the identity-driven theory's explanatory power. Consequently, it can be said that the methodological approaches used in this paper are appropriate to answer the research question. Through a transparent research process, including the coding process, other researchers should be able to replicate my findings, even by analyzing other documents from the same sources, which is due to stratified sampling.

Although the theories and methods have been used suitable and perhaps there are not many alternatives to this, they also have some weaknesses. Most obvious, by applying a

qualitative approach and using constructivism, much space is given to interpretation compared to quantitative methods and other theoretical approaches. By definition, constructivism is already an interpretive approach to research, as it negates the existence of objective reality (Schwandt 1994). Also, because of that, drawing clear causal inference remains problematic, as we cannot definitely know what Russian leaders such as Putin think and feel even by ruling out alternative explanations. Thus, some degree of uncertainty about Russia's motives remains. Qualitative congruence analysis also highlights the importance of interpreting empirical findings. Similar can be said about qualitative content analysis. Whereas quantitative content-analysis mainly counts the frequency of specific keywords, a qualitative approach instead explains certain statements and puts them into context (Schreier 2012). It was not always clear to whom Russia referred in its statements as some statements were formulated quite general and imprecise. I tried to counteract the problem by conducting research, putting statements into context, and considering previous events or speeches. However, it cannot be completely ruled out that some segments were assigned to a specific category by misinterpretations. An intercoder reliability check, which means coding the data again by a second researcher or by the author weeks after it has been coded first, is usually conducted when applying a qualitative content analysis (Schreier 2012). However, such a reliability check has not been done, only since this would have been quite time consuming for this thesis's scope. As a consequence of this thesis's interpretative character, the results depend to a certain degree on my subjective interpretations. Furthermore, the presentation of narrative development over the years should be treated with caution, as for some years, much fewer documents exist.

Furthermore, my analysis is limited to the degree that the narratives found were not compared systematically with Russian stories, which were promoted before Syria and prior to the formative moment. Here, additional research is necessary to find out if the analyzed Russian narratives are new or if they have already been present during the early years of Putin's presidency. If these narratives were actually not a new phenomenon in the post-Cold War period, less would speak for the identity argument. Furthermore, the question remains open if Russia succeeded in the long-term to convince the world or, respectively, the US that Russia is a global power, which should be respected and not ignored. Even though the US has slightly increased its military presence in Europe in the last years, it seems unlikely that Russia will return as the "central reference point" (Mankoff 2012a, p. 92) for the American foreign policy. Current developments and statements by President Trump rather suggest that the security focus will shift even more to China and the Pacific in the future. However, in 2018, the Pew Research



Center found out that 72 % of the Russians and 52 % of the US-Americans believe that Russia plays a more important role than ten years ago (Letterman 2018, p. 10). Therefore, it seems that Russia partly succeeded in promoting its identity as a global power towards its own and the American people. Nonetheless, without additional comparative values, it is difficult to draw a final conclusion about this question. Further research is also needed here. For example, researchers could conduct a similar narrative analysis of US-officials, comparing their narratives about Russia over the years, especially about Russia framing as an influential global actor. Therefore, I hope that my thesis helps to understand Russia's foreign policy motivations and contributes to build a foundation for further research regarding Russia's global power identity.

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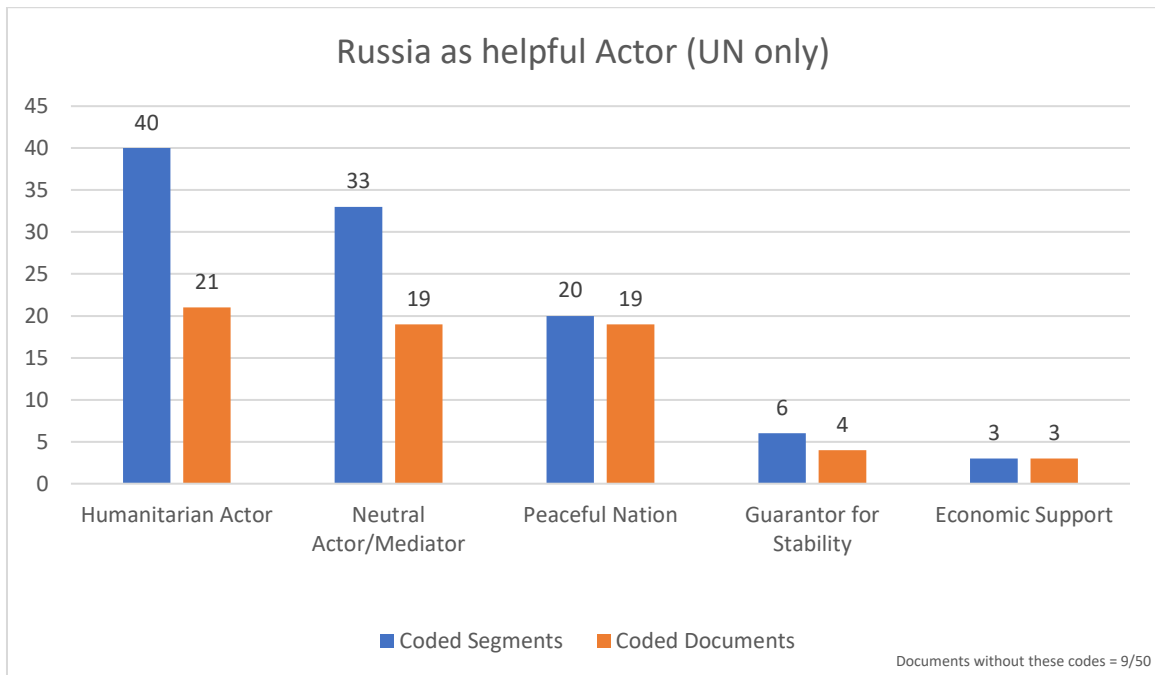
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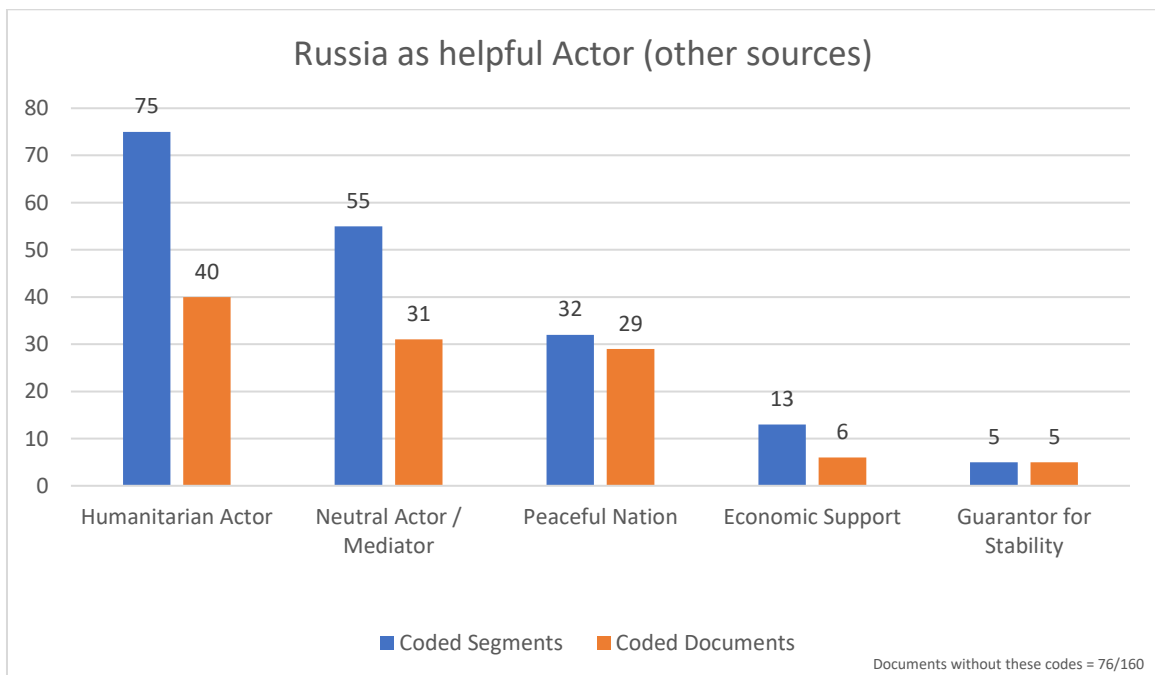
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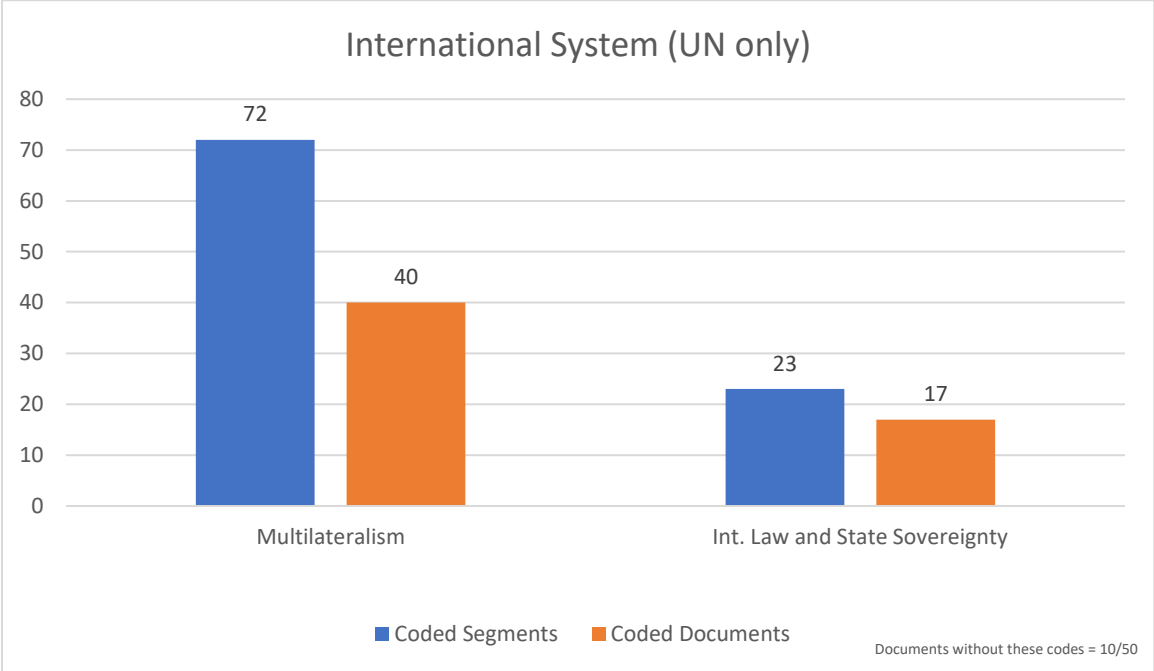
### Appendix 1: Russia as helpful Actor (UN only)



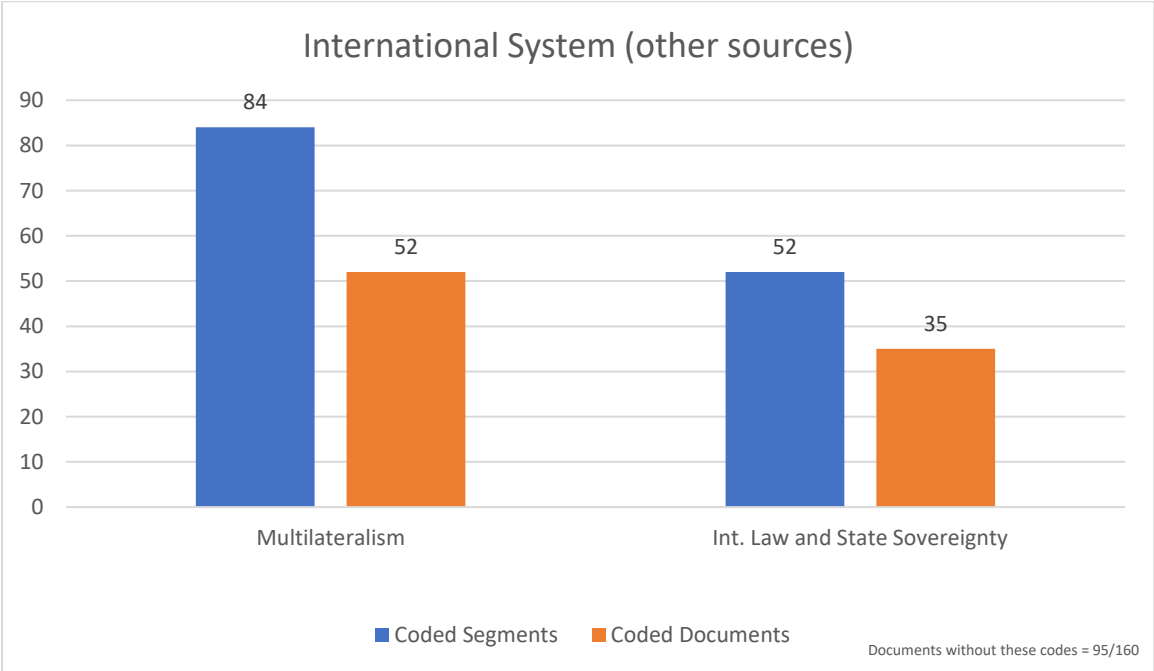
### Appendix 2: Russia as helpful Actor (other sources)



### Appendix 3: International System (UN only)



### Appendix 4: International System (other documents)

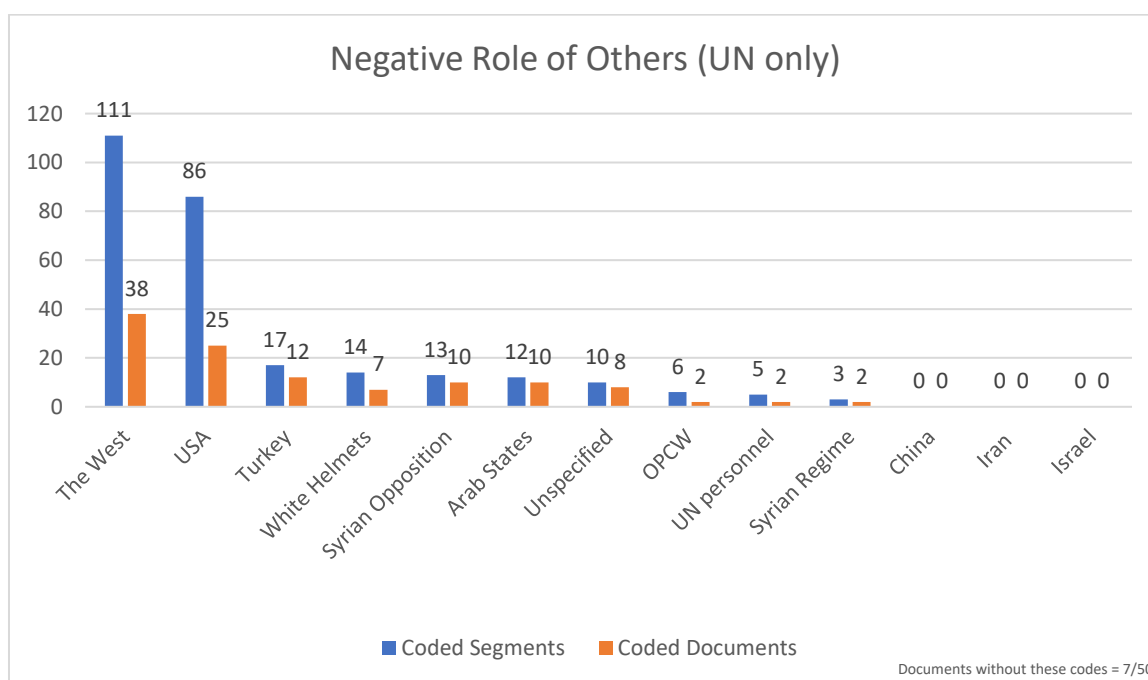




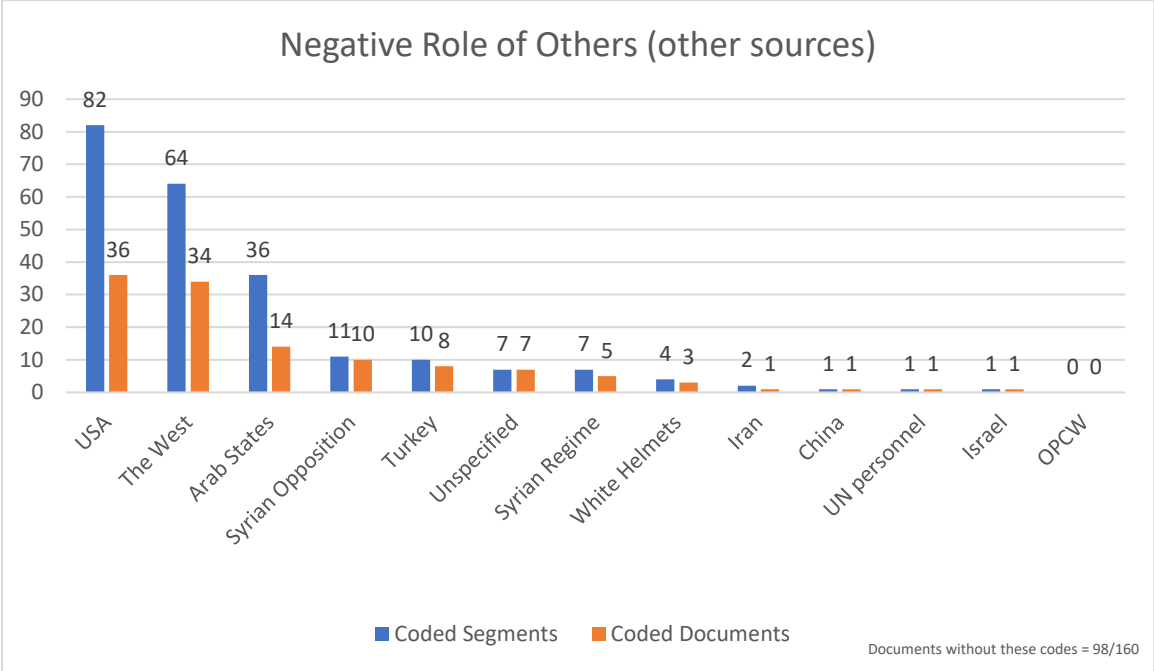
## Appendix 5: Relationship between Role of Others and Multilateralism

Codesystem	Undermining Multilateralism / UN	Support Multilateral Measures
<b>Negative Role of Others</b>		
OPCW	0	0
UN personell	1	0
Israel	0	0
Iran	0	0
White Helments	2	0
Unspecified	0	0
Turkey	2	0
China	0	0
USA	15	0
The West	18	0
Arab States	3	0
Syrian Opposition	0	0
Syrian Regime	0	0
<b>Positive Role of Others</b>		
The Kurds	0	0
UN personell	0	10
Iran	0	3
Turkey	0	3
Arab States	0	6
USA	0	6
China	0	1
The West	0	0
Syrian Regime	0	13
Syrian Opposition	0	0

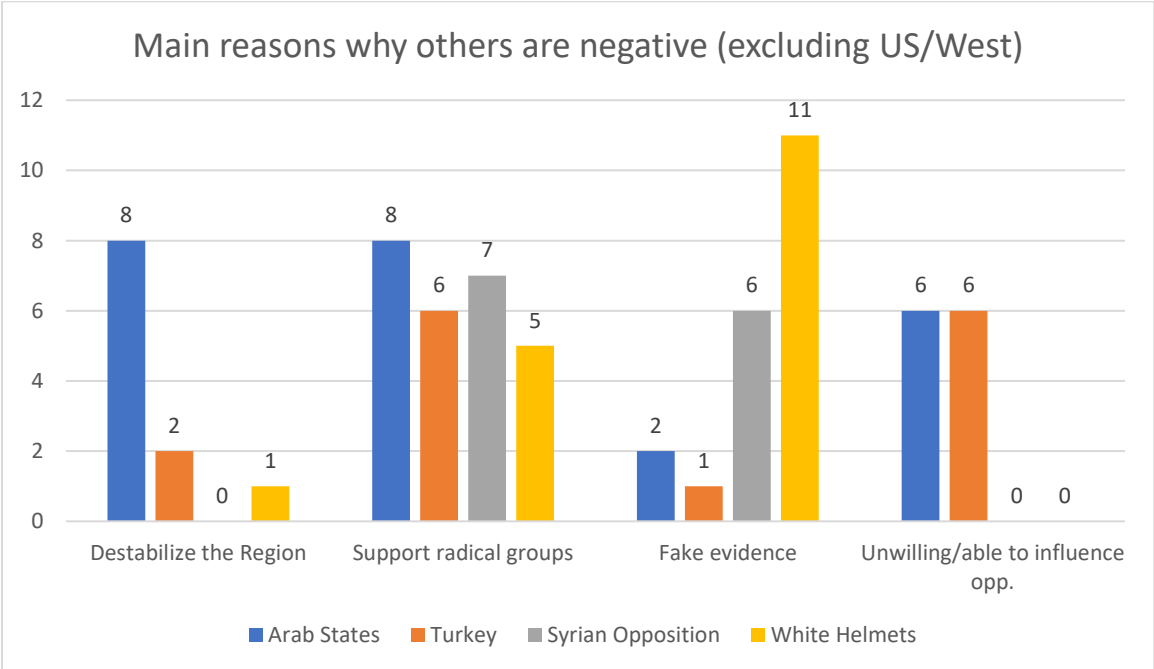
## Appendix 6: Negative Role of Others (UN only)



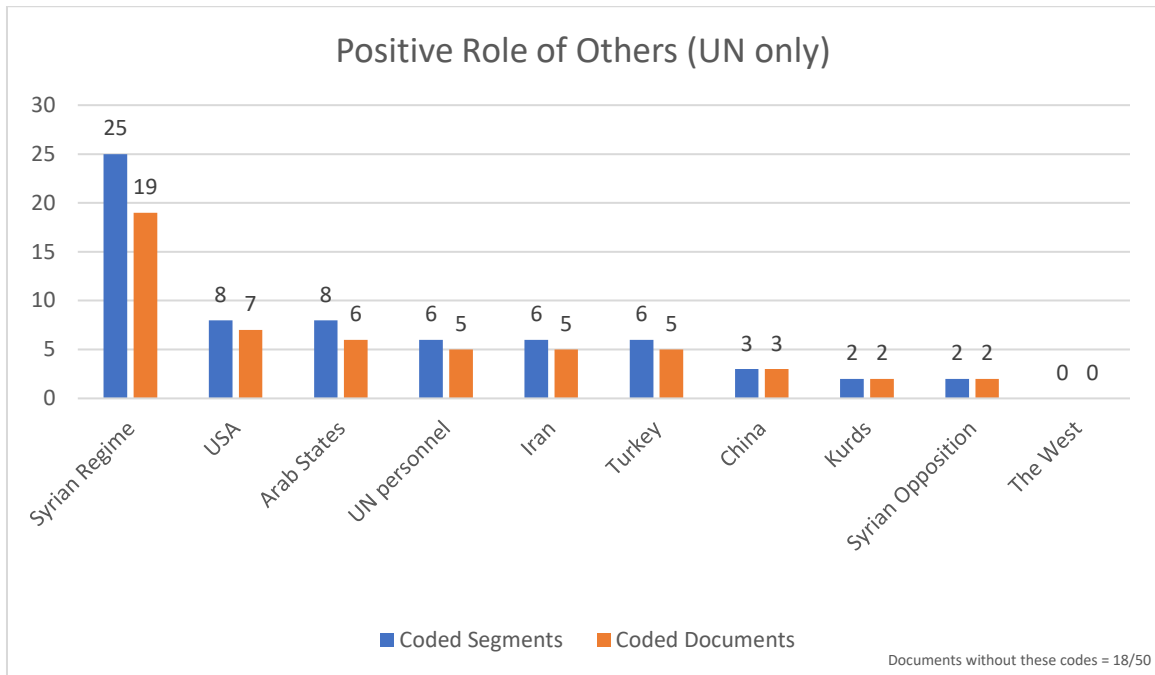
### Appendix 7: Negative Role of Others (other sources)



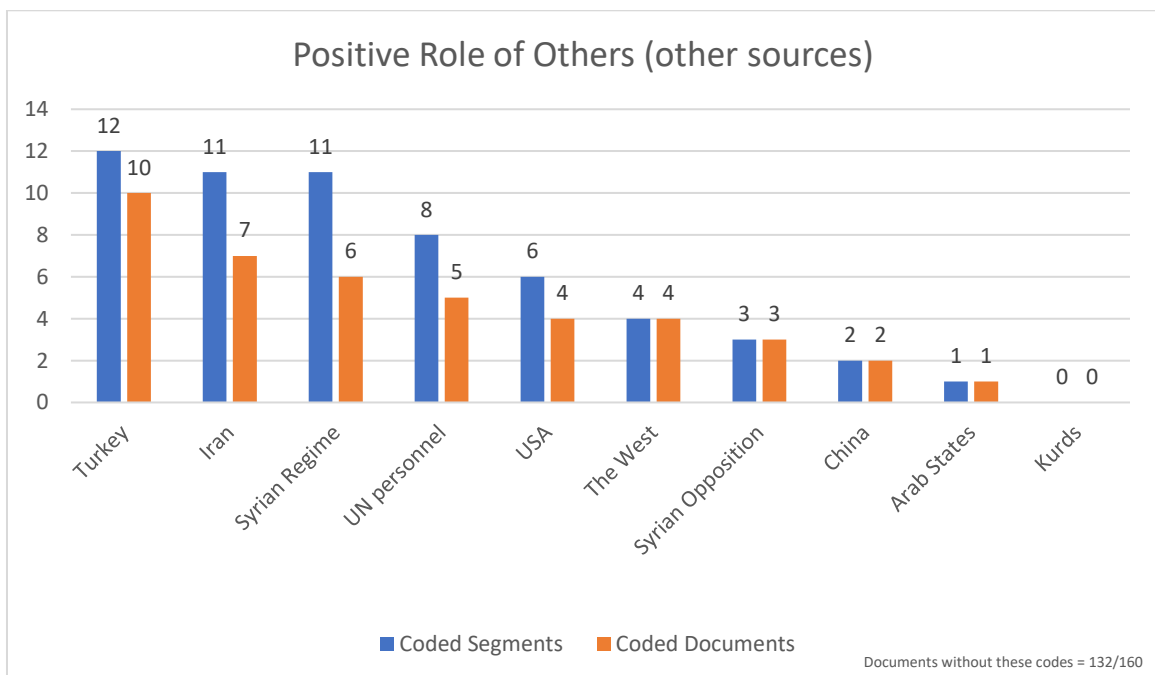
### Appendix 8: Main Reasons why Others are negative (excluding US/West)



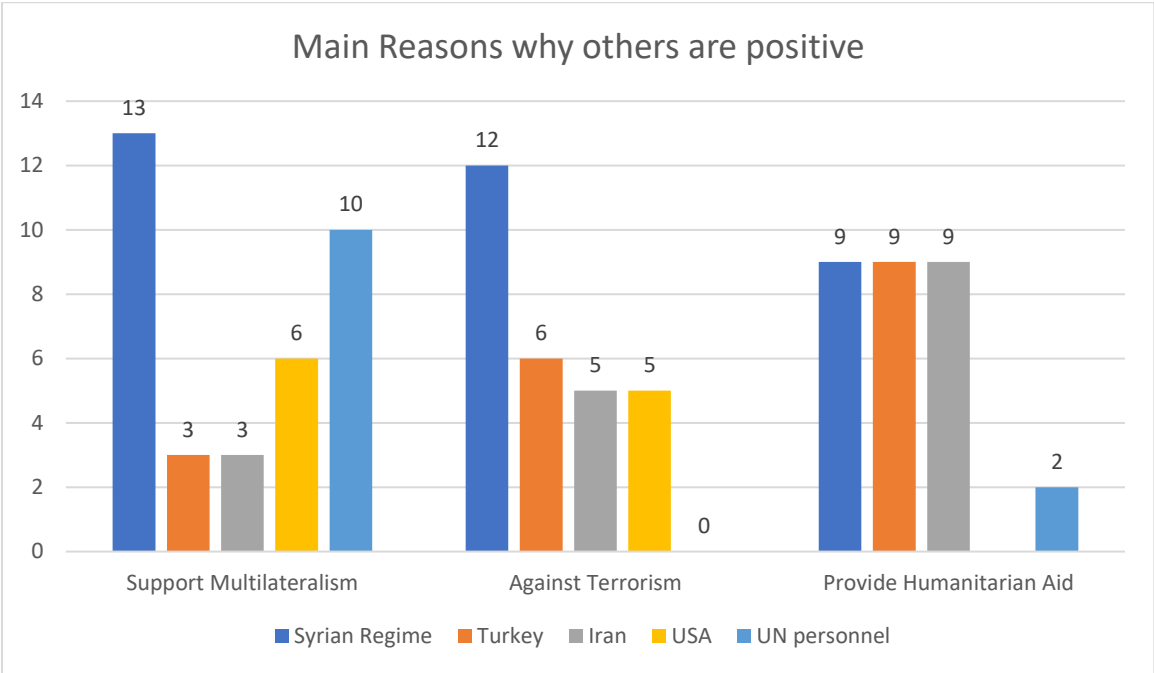
## Appendix 9: Positive Role of Others (UN only)



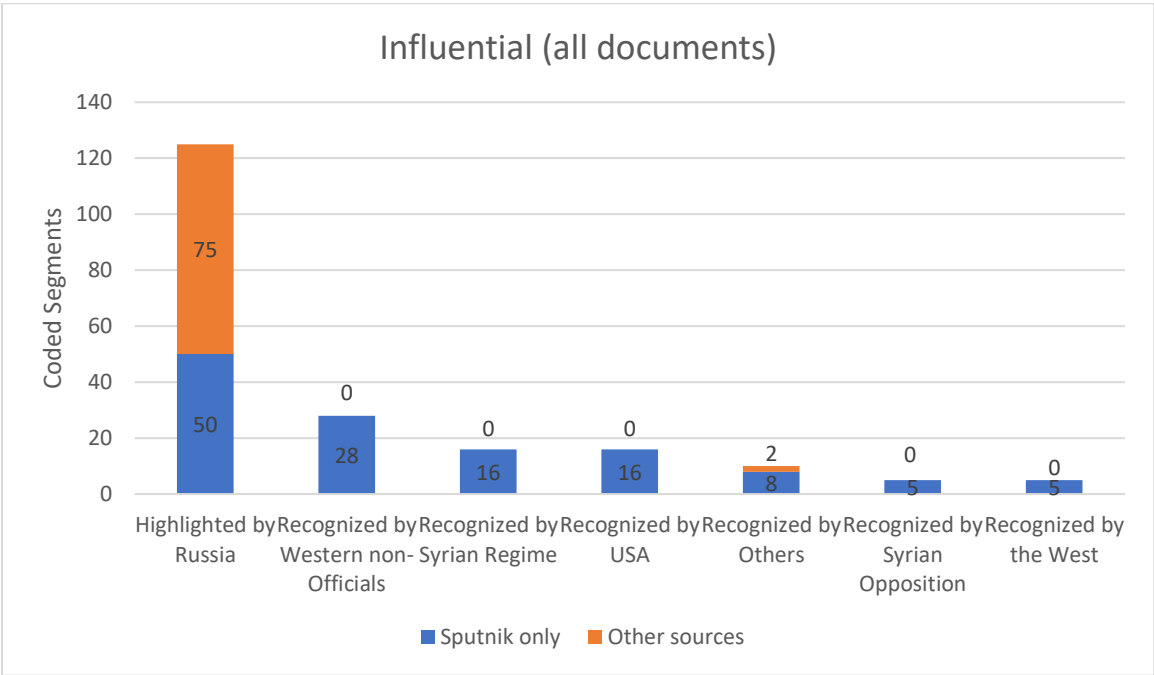
## Appendix 10: Positive Role of Others (other sources)



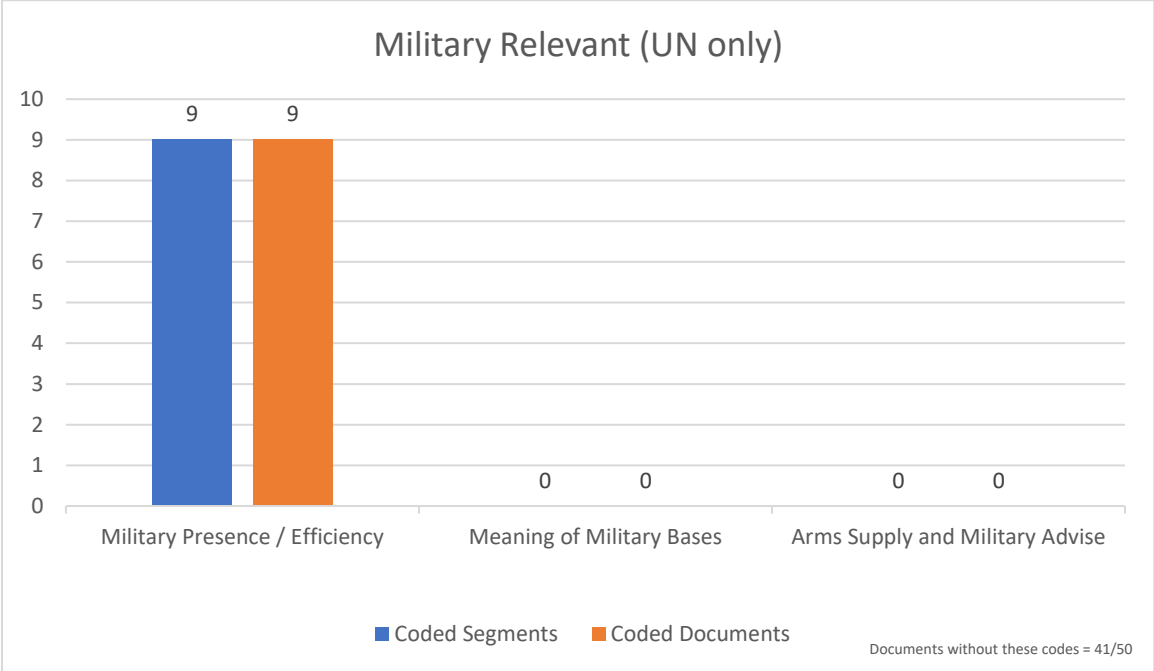
### Appendix 11: Main Reasons why others are positive



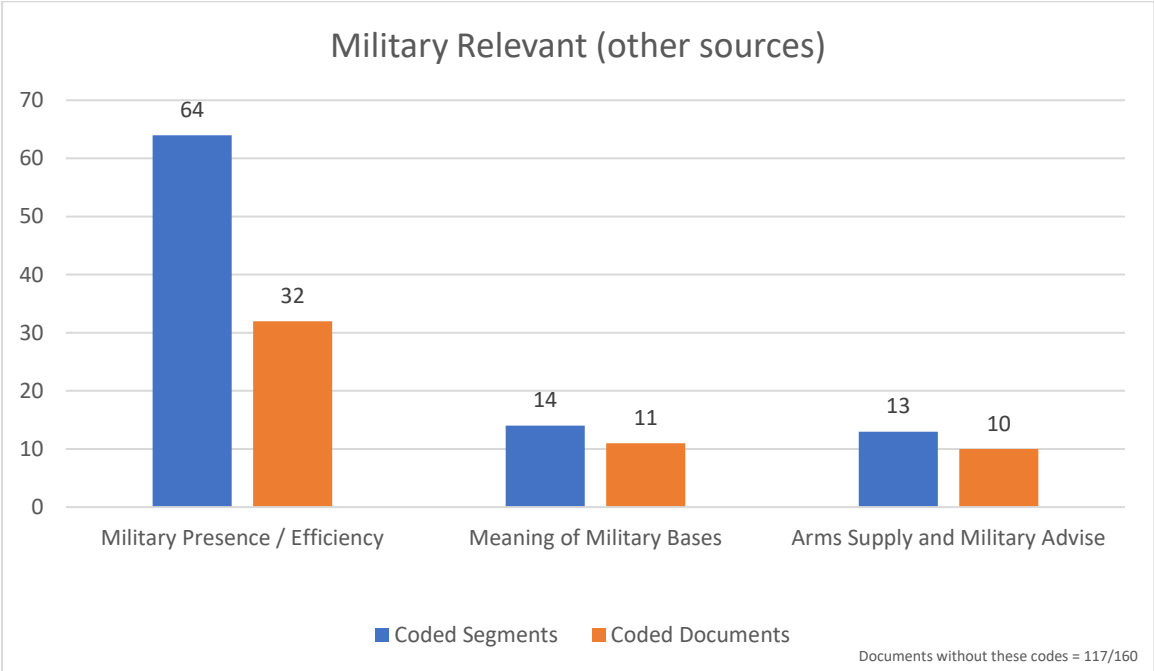
### Appendix 12: Influential (all documents)



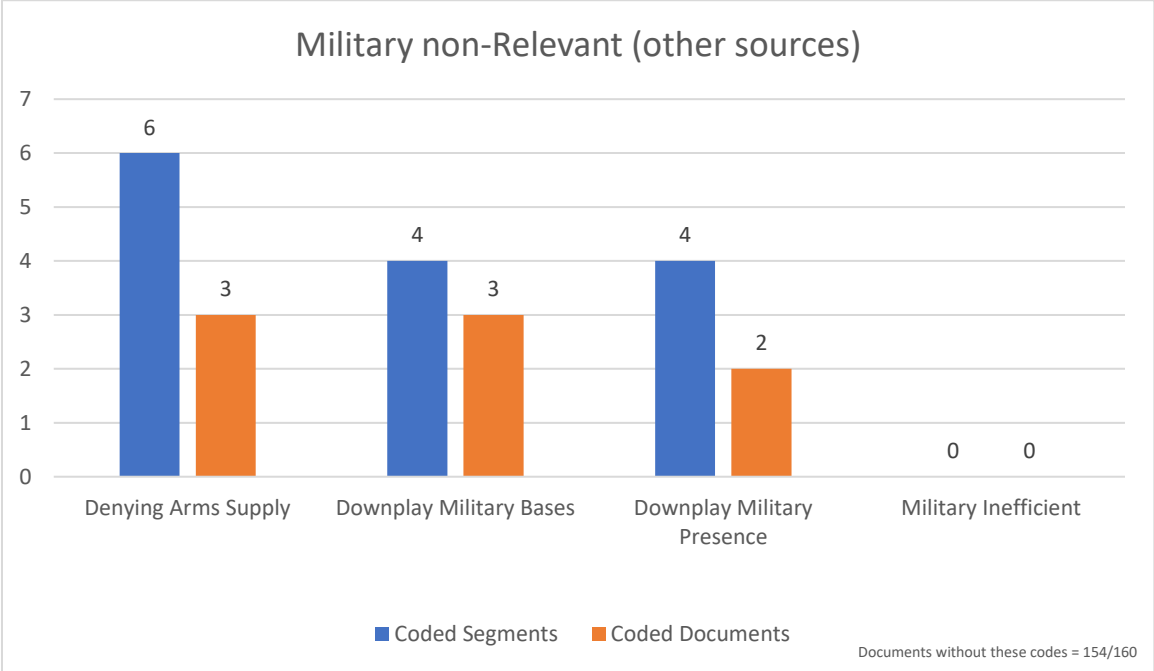
### Appendix 13: Military Relevant (UN only)



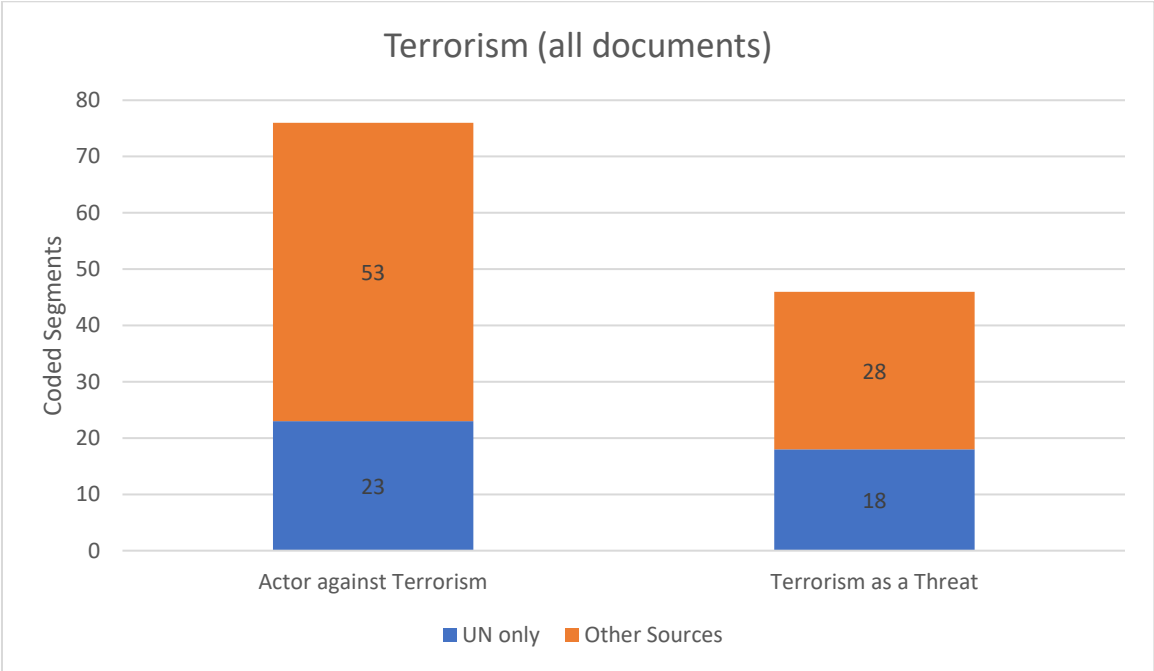
### Appendix 14: Military Relevant (other sources)



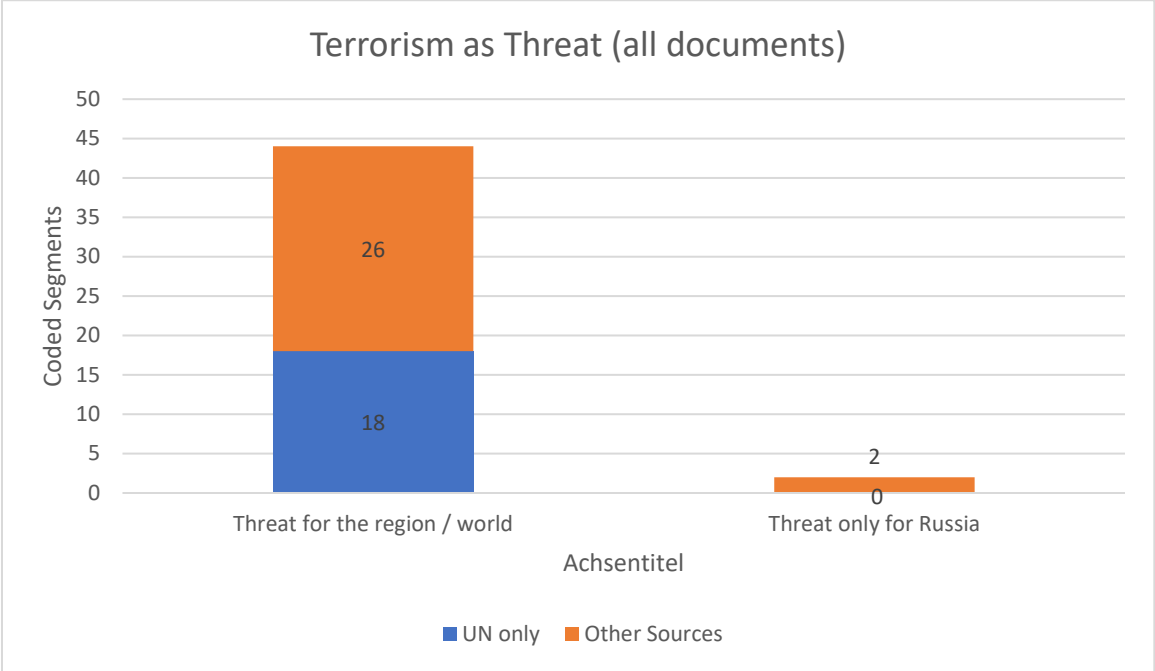
### Appendix 15: Military non-Relevant (other sources)



### Appendix 16: Terrorism (all documents)



# Appendix 17: Terrorism as Threat (all documents)



## Appendix 18: Sample Selection Sputnik News

Sputnik News:

Keywords: "[Russia Syria](#)" and "Russian Syria"

Random Dates	Next date with article(s)	Number of articles
09.10.2011	11.10.2011	1
14.12.2011	16.12.2011	1
24.12.2011	08.01.2012	1
17.01.2012	17.01.2012	1
12.04.2012	19.04.2012	1
22.05.2012	28.05.2012	2
25.01.2013	29.01.2013	1
14.02.2013	15.02.2013	1
01.11.2013	01.11.2013	1
15.11.2013	17.11.2013	2
28.01.2014	11.02.2014	2
22.07.2014	24.07.2014	1
01.09.2014	06.09.2014	1
06.03.2015	25.03.2015	1
25.03.2015	26.03.2015	1
27.05.2015	27.05.2015	1
07.06.2015	15.06.2015	1
18.07.2015	21.07.2015	1
28.09.2015	28.09.2015	6
31.01.2016	31.01.2016	3
11.02.2016	11.02.2016	11
21.02.2016	21.02.2016	1
27.07.2016	28.07.2016	4
03.01.2017	03.01.2017	1
04.03.2017	04.03.2017	3
06.05.2017	06.05.2017	5
17.07.2017	17.07.2017	2
26.07.2017	26.07.2017	6
01.10.2017	01.10.2017	1
26.10.2017	27.10.2017	1
12.04.2018	12.04.2018	6
09.06.2018	09.06.2018	1
11.08.2018	17.08.2018	1
27.09.2018	27.09.2018	2
27.12.2019	28.12.2019	1
<b>Sum:</b>		<b>76</b>



## Appendix 19: Sample Selection President

Website of the President of Russia:

Keyword: [Syria](#)

Random Dates	Next date with article	Number of documents
09.10.2011	07.12.2011	1
14.12.2011	09.03.2012	1
24.12.2011	25.03.2012	1
17.01.2012	15.06.2012	1
12.04.2012	31.08.2013	1
22.05.2012	02.09.2013	1
25.01.2013	10.09.2013	1
14.02.2013	12.09.2013	1
01.11.2013	14.11.2013	1
15.11.2013	16.11.2013	1
28.01.2014	26.11.2014	1
22.07.2014	29.06.2015	1
01.09.2014	21.10.2015	1
06.03.2015	24.02.2016	1
25.03.2015	14.03.2016	1
27.05.2015	27.03.2016	1
07.06.2015	23.05.2016	1
18.07.2015	08.08.2016	1
28.09.2015	14.10.2016	1
31.01.2016	29.11.2016	1
11.02.2016	23.12.2016	4
21.02.2016	29.12.2016	1
27.07.2016	27.07.2017	1
03.01.2017	05.09.2017	1
04.03.2017	21.11.2017	1
06.05.2017	22.11.2017	2
17.07.2017	06.12.2017	1
26.07.2017	11.12.2017	3
01.10.2017	04.04.2018	1
26.10.2017	14.04.2018	2
12.04.2018	17.04.2018	1
09.06.2018	07.09.2018	1
11.08.2018	24.09.2018	1
27.09.2018	14.02.2019	1
27.12.2019	07.01.2020	1
<b>Sum:</b>		<b>42</b>

## Appendix 20: Sample Selection Foreign Ministry

Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation:

Keyword: [the Syrian Arab Republic](#)

Random Dates	Next day with statement	number of documents
09.10.2011	15.11.2011	2
14.12.2011	04.02.2012	1
24.12.2011	07.02.2012	2
17.01.2012	15.02.2012	1
12.04.2012	14.02.2012	1
22.05.2012	28.05.2012	1
25.01.2013	31.01.2013	1
14.02.2013	15.02.2013	1
01.11.2013	01.11.2013	1
15.11.2013	19.11.2013	1
28.01.2014	30.01.2014	1
22.07.2014	15.08.2014	1
01.09.2014	01.09.2014	1
06.03.2015	12.03.2015	1
25.03.2015	06.04.2015	1
27.05.2015	27.06.2015	1
07.06.2015	29.06.2015	2
18.07.2015	03.08.2015	1
28.09.2015	30.09.2015	1
31.01.2016	01.02.2016	1
11.02.2016	11.02.2016	2
21.02.2016	22.02.2016	2
27.07.2016	27.07.2016	1
03.01.2017	10.01.2017	1
04.03.2017	07.03.2017	1
06.05.2017	06.05.2017	2
17.07.2017	17.07.2017	1
26.07.2017	31.07.2017	1
01.10.2017	02.10.2017	1
26.10.2017	26.10.2017	2
12.04.2018	13.04.2018	1
09.06.2018	20.06.2018	1
11.08.2018	14.08.2018	1
27.09.2018	28.09.2018	1
27.12.2019	30.12.2019	1
Sum:		42

## Appendix 21: Sample Selection UN

### Protocols UN:

Keyword: [Syrian Arab Republic Situation](#)

Random Dates	Next Date	Number of Protocols
09.10.2011	24.10.2011	1
14.12.2011	31.01.2012	1
24.12.2011	04.02.2012	1
17.01.2012	12.03.2012	1
12.04.2012	14.04.2012	1
22.05.2012	19.07.2012	1
25.01.2013	24.04.2013	1
14.02.2013	23.07.2013	1
01.11.2013	20.01.2014	1
15.11.2013	22.02.2014	1
28.01.2014	29.04.2014	1
22.07.2014	21.10.2014	1
01.09.2014	15.01.2015	1
06.03.2015	06.03.2015	1
25.03.2015	21.04.2015	1
27.05.2015	07.08.2015	1
07.06.2015	22.10.2015	1
18.07.2015	16.11.2015	1
28.09.2015	18.12.2015	1
31.01.2016	26.02.2016	1
11.02.2016	18.04.2016	1
21.02.2016	04.05.2016	1
27.07.2016	22.08.2016	1
03.01.2017	17.01.2017	1
04.03.2017	05.04.2017	1
06.05.2017	30.05.2017	1
17.07.2017	27.09.2017	1
26.07.2017	24.10.2017	1
01.10.2017	07.11.2017	1
26.10.2017	16.11.2017	1
12.04.2018	13.04.2018	1
09.06.2018	25.06.2018	1
11.08.2018	28.08.2018	1
27.09.2018	17.10.2018	1
27.12.2019	10.01.2020	1
<b>Sum:</b>		<b>35</b>

### Additional selected for UN:

Additional Dates	Number of Articles
04.10.2011	1
23.01.2013	1
27.09.2013	1
22.10.2013	1
26.01.2016	1
25.07.2016	1
14.04.2018	1
27.06.2018	1
30.01.2019	1
26.02.2019	1
28.02.2019	1
27.03.2019	1
24.04.2019	1
21.01.2020	1
29.01.2020	1
<b>Sum:</b>	<b>15</b>

# Appendix 22: Codebook

Note: This Codebook refers to the coding procedure of the data file Hirling\_Marcel\_MT.mx20. The numbers in brackets next to the category names show the frequency of the coded segments. The citation after the examples refer to the name of the quoted document, which can be found in the MAXQDA file.

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## 1 Influential [205]

This coding frame does include all segments where Russia is presented as an influential state. It lists certain actors who labeled Russia as influential. Segments are coded as influential whenever Russia's influence on other positions is highlighted. This does include statements which highlight that other states do agree with Russia, do have or want to cooperate with Russian, have been forced by Russia to change its position, or in general, see Russia as an important actor. The coding-frame include several categories that differentiate between the actors who highlight Russia's influence.

### 1.1 Highlighted by Russia (125)

Russia presents itself as an influential actor on other positions and policies.

#### Example 1:

*"Again, we engaged our resource, if you wish, and persuaded Damascus to say that they were prepared to work on this basis, although it was not easy for them, because they were saying: [...]"* (130215\_fm, Pos. 24).

#### Example 2:

*"The UN Security Council, of which Russia is a permanent, veto-wielding member,"* (120528(2)\_sp, Pos. 9).

Note:

Not only statements by Russian officials are assigned to this category but also statements by Sputnik News or by Russian experts which are present in Sputnik News articles. Whenever other non-Russian actors are directly quoted (or at least the argument contains a direct quote) and highlight Russia's diplomatic influence, they cannot be assigned to "highlighted by Russia." Whenever they are only indirectly quoted, for example, "The Syrian government [...] agreed to a Russia-brokered deal to destroy its chemical weapons arsenal," it has to be assigned to "highlighted by Russia" as it is Russia which highlights that others agree on their position.



## 1.2 Recognized by Western non-Officials (28)

Western non-officials do recognize Russia's influence and importance or express the support of the Russian position or view the Russian policy as constructive. Western non-officials are defined as former governmental actors, former bureaucrats, Western media, experts, or politicians who were not in a governmental or bureaucratic position during the release date of the article. A member of a national parliamentary is defined as non-official as long as he/she is not holding a governmental position at the same time.

### Example:

*"It didn't make the war go away but it [Russia] certainly saved the United States another foreign policy catastrophe," the former [CIA] intelligence officer said*" (140724\_sp, Pos. 9).

### Note:

Whenever Western non-officials are directly quoted (or at least the specific argument contains a direct quote) and highlight Russia's diplomatic influence, they have been assigned to "recognized by Western non-officials." Whenever they are only indirectly quoted, for example, "The Syrian government [...] agreed to a Russia-brokered deal to destroy its chemical weapons arsenal," the segments have to be assigned to "highlighted by Russia" as it is Russia which highlights that others agree on their position.

## 1.3 Recognized by the West (5)

Western officials do recognize Russia's influence and importance or express the support of the Russian position or view the Russian policy as constructive. The West is defined as Western officials, which means actors which are in a governmental position of a Western country, excluding the USA as they have their own category. Officials of NATO or the European Union are also summarized under this category.

### Example:

*"We've had many differences of view over Russia at the Security Council but Russia does support the Annan plan and so I hope Russia will redouble its efforts to get the Assad regime to implement that plan," Hague (British foreign minister) told British television on Sunday.*" (120528\_sp, Pos. 14).

Note:

Whenever Western officials are directly quoted (or at least the specific argument contains a direct quote) and highlight Russia's diplomatic influence, they have been assigned to "highlighted by the West." Whenever they are only indirectly quoted, for example, "The Syrian government [...] agreed to a Russia-brokered deal to destroy its chemical weapons arsenal," the segments have to be assigned to "highlighted by Russia" as it is Russia which highlights that others agree on their position.

#### **1.4 Recognized by Others (10)**

Others recognize Russia's influence or support the Russian position or view the Russian policy as constructive. "Others" are defined as actors who do not fit into the other subcategories of the coding frame "diplomatic influential."

Example:

*"Anyone who wants anything done in [the Middle East] is beating a path to Moscow," a senior analyst in Israeli military intelligence told the Independent.*" (160131(3)\_sp, Pos. 9).

Note:

Whenever unspecified or other actors are directly quoted (or at least the specific argument contains a direct quote) and highlight Russia's diplomatic influence, they have been assigned to "recognized by others." Whenever they are only indirectly quoted, for example "The Syrian government [...] agreed to a Russia-brokered deal to destroy its chemical weapons arsenal" the segments have to be assigned to "highlighted by Russia" as it is Russia which highlights that others agree on their position.

#### **1.5 Recognized by Syria (16)**

The Syrian regime does recognize Russia's influence and importance or express the support of the Russian position or view the Russian policy as constructive.

Example:

*"We highly respect Russia's honorable stance in support of the Syrian people,' SANA cited Governor of Tartus Atef al-Naddaf as saying." (120108\_sp, Pos. 7).*

Note:

This category does only include officials of the Syrian Assad regime. Other Syrian actors, such as the Opposition, are excluded.

## **1.6 Recognized by Syrian Opposition (5)**

Members of the Syrian Opposition do recognize Russia's influence and importance or express the support of the Russian position or view the Russian policy as constructive. Officials are defined as members of the government but also as official bureaucrats, which means diplomats or intelligence officers.

Example:

*"The rebel Free Syrian Army (FSA) said on Tuesday it considers Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's statement on Syria on Sunday as a 'new stance' by Moscow, which will speed up the ousting of the embattled Assad regime." (130129\_sp, Pos. 5).*

Note:

The Opposition does only include the FSA, respectively, the Kurds, but no other groups such as ISIS or al-Nusra.

## **1.7 Recognized by the USA (16)**

US officials do recognize Russia's influence and importance or express the support of the Russian position or view the Russian policy as constructive. Officials are defined as members of the government but also as official bureaucrats, which means diplomats or intelligence officers.

Example:

*" Hopefully we can work with the Russians, who for the first time at least are recognizing that this is a matter that needs to go to the Security Council,' she [Hillary Clinton] said. 'It's just that we have differences in how to approach it.'" (111216\_sp, Pos. 10).*

## **2 Non-Influential [18]**

This category does summarize Russian statements where they highlight that they have or had no influence on other actors' positions and policies.

### **2.1 On other Positions (16)**

Russia has no or weak influence on the position and policy of other actors.

Example 1:

*"Russia has circulated a draft of the United Nations Security Council's resolution on Syria, its third since December, but Western diplomats remained unimpressed, dismissing it as 'small tweaks' and 'playing for time.'" (120117\_sp, Pos. 5).*

Example 2:

*"Well, his first report was that if we managed to stabilize, even relatively, the situation with these international observers, then he would be really counting on those countries, who have more influence on the opposition, to push the opposition into a dialogue with the regime" (130215\_fm, Pos. 24).*

Note:

Statements where it is claimed that other actors have more influence than Russia are also assigned to this category. Whenever the influence is not related to the Syrian case, segments need to be assigned to the category "in the past and other cases".

## **2.2 In the Past and other Cases (2)**

It is claimed that Russia has not been influential on other countries' policies or positions in the past and other cases than the Syrian civil war.

### Example:

*"I will say honestly that it was a complete surprise for me. I think that in recent years all of us, myself included, have become accustomed to the Western community accepting everything without much discussion, or so it seems to outsiders, in accordance with the wishes and policies of their senior partner, that is the United States." (130831\_ps, Pos. 11).*

## **3 Military Relevant [100]**

This coding frame does highlight Russia's narrative about its role as a military actor. That means it deals with the importance of military bases, arms/advisor supply, the efficiency of the military involvement, and the military presence.

### **3.1 Highlight Military Presence / Efficiency (73)**

The military presence and military efficiency of Russian forces in Syria are highlighted. That mean's segments where Russia highlights that it has military capabilities in Syria or whenever it is highlighted how efficient the Russian troops conducted operations it is assigned to this category.

### Example 1:

*"Working alongside the Syrian Army, Russian airstrikes have had a severe impact on Daesh, also known as IS/Islamic State" (120528(2)\_sp, Pos. 12).*

### **3.2 Highlight Meaning of Military Bases (14)**

The Russian bases in Syria, namely Port Tartus and the Hmeimim Air Base, are framed as important.

Example:

*"The Kremlin has opposed attempts to impose UN sanctions on its ally, Syria, where Russia maintains its only military base outside the former Soviet Union"* (120528(2)\_sp, Pos. 12).

Note:

When it is highlighted that one of the bases is "the only base outside of Russia" or the only base "in the region" or similar formulations, it has to be assigned to the category "highlight meaning of military bases". In contrast, whenever it is claimed that Tartus or Hmeimim are not "real military" bases or similar formulations, it has to be assigned to the category "not powerful" specifically to the subcategory "downplay military bases".

### **3.3 Arms Supply and Military Advise**

This category does list Russian narratives about arms supply for the Syrian regime and against whom these weapons are aimed.

#### **3.3.1 Against Terrorists (6)**

It is claimed that the Russian arms supply for the Syrian government is aiming at the terrorist threat.

Example:

*"He [Russian Deputy Prime Minister] added that Syrians must free their country from terrorists by themselves, while Russia assists them with pinpoint airstrikes requested by the Syrian authorities, as well as providing the Syrian side with the necessary equipment."* (160211(9)\_sp, Pos. 7).

Note:

Similar names for "terrorists" such as "extremists" or "radicals", as well as "ISIS", "Daesh" or similar are assigned to this category as well.

### **3.3.2 Against Unspecified (4)**

It is not clear against whom Russian arms supply are aimed at.

Example:

*"Russia has largely been a staunch ally of the Syrian government throughout the war, sending weapons and other aid to Assad's regime and blocking several United Nations resolutions to sanction Syria for its behavior in the conflict."* (131117\_sp, Pos. 11-12).

### **3.3.3 Against Outside Intervention (3)**

Russia claims that its arms supply for the Syrian regime is aiming at potential outside interveners. That means other actors than the non-state actors who are operating in Syria.

Example:

*"The military hardware which we have been sending to Syria is to defend Syria from outside aggression. This weaponry, the air defense systems, cannot be used in the civil war."* (130215\_fm, Pos. 50).

Note:

In cases where it is highlighted that Russia only fulfills old contracts, it has to be assigned to the category "denying arms supply" as long as it is not mentioned against whom these weapons are.

## **4 Military non-Relevant [16]**

The military presence and the army efficiency of Russian forces in Syria are downplayed or criticized.

## **4.1 Military Inefficient (2)**

Russia states that its measures have been not led to the desired effect.

### Example:

*"The Russian and Turkish forces again tried to establish a ceasefire in Idlib. However, radical groups led by the recognized terrorist organization Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham once again ignored that [...]"* (200129\_un, S. 13: 4756).

## **4.2 Denying Arms Supply (6)**

Russia denies the supply of arms to the Syrian regime or other actors within Syria.

### Example:

*"Russia has repeatedly denied media reports that it was sending warships to Syria and delivering weapons to Damascus"* (130215\_sp, Pos. 14).

### Note:

When it is highlighted that only previous contracts are being fulfilled, it is also assigned to the category. When it is clear against whom these weapons are, even it is based on old contracts, it has to be assigned to the category of "against terrorists" or "against outside intervention".

## **4.3 Downplay Military Bases (4)**

The importance of military bases such as Tartus and Hmeimim, is downplayed.

### Example:

*"It's not a base it's actually a point, where logistical service of the ships is being made. It is too modest to be called a base. No more military it's a legitimate, legally sent naval personnel to service the ships who call on the port of Tartus"* (130215\_fm, Pos. 50).



Note:

Whenever it is argued that a particular Russian military base in Syria is not "a real military" base and fulfills "supportive measures", which have nothing to do with the Syrian conflict or similar formulations. It has to be assigned to this category. In contrast, when it is, for example, highlighted that Tartus is "the only base outside of Russia" or the only base "in the region", it has to be assigned to the category "highlight meaning of military bases".

#### **4.4 Downplay Military Presence (4)**

Russia claims that it does not intend to send (more) troops to Syria or already do so.

Example:

*"Russia does not intend to carry out a ground operation in Syria, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin said Thursday. '[Speculations about] possibility of Russia's ground operation in Syria are not true,' Rogozin said in Baghdad" (160211(9)\_sp, Pos. 5-6).*

### **5 International System [232]**

This coding frame does express Russia's narratives about the ideal international system, including the norms which Russia shows to defend.

#### **5.1 Multilateralism (157)**

Russia as an actor who supports multilateralism, which is mainly operationalized in the cooperation with the United Nations or with other multilateral formats.

Example:

*"Russia has, however, given its full backing to Annan's six-point peace plan and Lavrov said in April that Assad needed to show more decisiveness to end the violence in Syria" (120528\_sp, Pos. 13).*

Note:

Segments where Russia is presented as a constructive provider of UN resolutions, or supporter for UN resolutions, are assigned to this category.

## **5.2 International Law and State Sovereignty (74)**

The text presents Russia as an actor who highlights the principle of state sovereignty and/or refers to international law.

Example:

*"This and our desire to prevent any erosion of the fundamental norms of international law and principles of relations between countries define our position with regard to the trials that Syria faces at this present time. Our view is that the most important thing is for the Syrians to act themselves, without any interference from outside, to stabilize the situation, stop the violence, and get an effective nationwide dialogue underway" (111207\_ps, Pos. 22).*

Note:

This category does include Russian statements about international law, state sovereignty, and, thus, also the principle of non-interference. Segments, where it is highlighted that the Assad regime is the legitimate regime, should also be assigned to this category.

## **6 Terrorism [122]**

Russia mentions terrorism, which has been the official justification for Russia's Syria intervention. Other formulations such as "extremists" or "radicals" will be synonymously used for terrorism. This coding frame aims to capture Russia's narratives, framing terrorism as a threat and presenting itself as an actor against terrorism.

### **6.1 Actor against Terrorism (76)**

Russia is presented as an actor against terrorism.

Example:

*"Russia launched its aerial campaign against jihadist militants in Syria in September 2015 at Syrian President Bashar Assad's request" (160211(9)\_sp, Pos. 8).*

Note:

Segments that lack the term "terrorists" but contain similar terms such as "extremists" or "radicals" should be assigned to this category as well. Whenever these terms are lacking, and it is only referred to terms such as "opposition", it cannot be assigned to this category.

## **6.2 Terrorism as a Threat**

This category evaluates how Russia frames terrorism as a threat to others or itself.

### **6.2.1 Threat for the region/world (44)**

Terrorism is framed as a threat to other countries or the entire international community.

Example:

*"The ministers noted that the threat posed by terrorist groups – the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Jabhat al-Nusra and the like – is a top challenge not just for the Syrian Arab Republic, but also for neighboring countries and the entire international community" (150629(2)\_fm, Pos. 6).*

Note:

When a threat is not exclusively related to a risk for Russian national security, it has to be assigned to this category; otherwise, it needs to be assigned to "threat only for Russia."

### **6.2.2 Threat only for Russia (2)**

Islamic terrorism is framed as a threat to Russia's national security.

Example:

*"This is a matter of concern for Russia too, given that sadly, people from the former Soviet Union, around 4,000 people at least, have taken up arms and are fighting on Syrian territory*

*against the government forces. Of course, we cannot let these people gain combat experience and go through ideological indoctrination and then return to Russia "(151021\_ps, Pos. 8).*

Note:

Only when a threat is exclusively related to a risk for Russian national security can it be assigned to "threat for Russia", otherwise it needs to be assigned to "threat for others".

## **7 Negative Role of Others [503]**

This coding frame does refer to Russia's narrative about the negative role of others. Whenever other actors are presented negative, which means that the other actors' motives or actions are perceived negatively by Russia, the text segments need to be assigned to this category.

Note:

Whenever other actors are framed as positive by Russia, they need to be assigned to the coding-frame "Positive Role of Others". Whenever other actors are just mentioned but not criticized or positively highlighted, they should not be assigned to a category. Actors who are labeled as "terrorists" "extremists" are not included.

### **7.1 OPCW (6)**

Motives and actions by the organization for the prohibition of chemical weapons are perceived as unfavorable by Russia.

Example:

*"We have repeatedly said that the OPCW's investigation could have been much more objective if the fact-finding mission's team had been put together on a wide geographical basis in order to fulfil its mission. Meanwhile, it is a fact that its key positions were held by representatives of countries involved in the Syrian conflict and hostile to Damascus" (171107\_un, S. 14: 1200).*

## **7.2 UN personnel (6)**

Motives and actions by the UN personnel are perceived negatively by Russia.

### Example:

*"In this regard, we regret that the UN Secretariat could not accomplish the consultations over this issue with the Syrian authorities over a long period of time. The negotiations with the government of the Syrian Arab Republic were stopped by the UN at the very moment when the progress outlined. Norwegian General R. Mood, leading the UN team, has been withdrawn "for consultations" and has not been returned to Damascus in spite of numerous requests in this regard of the Syrian party. It is difficult to explain the present situation, however, it is clear that all this does not facilitate the international and regional efforts to implement K. Annan's plan aimed at early achievement of peaceful settlement in Syria." (120414\_fm, Pos. 5).*

## **7.3 Israel (1)**

Motives and actions by Israel are perceived negatively by Russia.

### Example:

*"The reports of air raid of Israeli air forces at targets in Syria near Damascus were received in Moscow with deep concern. If this information is confirmed, these are unprovoked attacks at targets on the territory of a sovereign nation, which grossly violates the UN Charter and is unacceptable whatever its motives" (130131\_fm, Pos. 4).*

## **7.4 Iran (2)**

Motives and actions by Iran are perceived negatively by Russia.

### Example:

*"Moscow's evaluation of Tehran's policy in Syria is ambiguous. Apparently, Russia is not happy with Iran's attempt to impose its will on Damascus and establish a political and ideological basis for further expansion of Shiite influence in the region. Such a policy is destabilizing and is likely to trigger conflicts on two directions, between Iran and Israel and between Iran and*

*Arab countries. Such a scenario would not serve Russia's interests in the region. Many experts and commentators believe that this issue is the reason behind the emerging Russian-Iranian rivalry in Syria" (170726(5)\_sp, Pos. 17-18).*

## **7.5 White Helmets (18)**

Motives and actions by the White Helmets are perceived negatively by Russia.

### Example:

*"We know that the intelligence services are very closely aligned with the White Helmets. The White Helmets were there in Eastern Ghouta, they've been filming these fake rescues, fake chemical weapons attacks now for months, I mean YouTube is full of them. The White Helmets are financed by the Western government and work actively with the Western intelligent services" (180412(3)\_sp, Pos. 13-14).*

## **7.6 Unspecified (17)**

Whenever it remains unclear who precisely Russia means with its critique and perceives as unfavorable, it needs to be assigned to this category.

### Example:

*"He accused unspecified forces of trying to use humanitarian issues as a pretext for a military solution to the Syrian conflict" (140211(2)\_sp, Pos. 10).*

Note:

Before assigning a segment to this category, the specific context should be considered. When Russia, for example, addresses "all parties which support the opposition" as negative, it cannot be assigned to unspecified as it should be assigned to the categories "US", "West", and "Arab States".

## 7.7 Turkey (27)

Motives and actions by Turkey are perceived negatively by Russia.

### Example:

*"The Western countries, the Gulf countries, Turkey and others invested a lot of effort to unify the opposition. This coalition was created and they described the political credo of the opposition which is not really constructive at all" (130215\_fm, Pos. 44).*

## 7.8 China (1)

Motives and actions by China are perceived negatively by Russia.

### Example:

*"It is worth noting, however, that neither Russia, nor even China, which has greater economic weight, have been able to prevent any of these scenarios from happening" (111011\_sp, Pos. 16).*

## 7.9 USA (168)

Motives and actions by the United States are perceived negatively by Russia.

### Example:

*"Pockets of resistance of the Daesh\* terrorist group in Syria are located only in areas controlled by the United States, Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said on Saturday" (180609\_sp, Pos. 4).*

### Note:

Only text segments where the US is explicitly mentioned or where it is clear from the context that the US is explicitly meant can be referred to this category. For example, whenever it is mentioned that "other states" do push for outside intervention, these segments are assigned to the category "USA" and "the West" as both the US and the other Western States have pushed for a removal of Assad. Otherwise, terms such as "the West" or similar should be assigned to

the category "The West" only. When it is referred to the US and its allies or the US-led coalition, the segments are only awarded to "USA" as the US is the main reference point in the statement.

## **7.10 The West (175)**

Motives and actions by the West are perceived negatively by Russia.

### Example:

*"The President of Russia pointed out once again that the actions taken by a group of Western countries that committed an act of aggression against the Syrian Arab Republic, were in flagrant violation of norms of international law, including the UN Charter, and greatly damaged efforts towards a peaceful settlement of the Syrian crisis" (180417\_ps, Pos. 5-6).*

### Note:

Actors who are described as "the West" or "Western" should be assigned to this category. Furthermore, traditional Western countries such as Great Britain, France, or Germany are assigned to this category. Terms such as "Europeans", "European Union" or "NATO" are also assigned to this category. Even though Turkey is a member of NATO, it cannot be assigned to the category "the West" but to the category "Turkey", when Turkey is mentioned specifically. Whenever the text refers only to the US it cannot be referred to the category "The West" but have to be assigned to the category "USA".

Terms, where it is possible from the context to assign segments to this category, should be assigned to this category as well. This can, for example, include terms such as "parties which support the Syrian opposition", as it is well known that some of the mentioned member states do support the Syrian opposition.

## **7.11 Arab States (48)**

Motives and actions by the Arab States are perceived negatively by Russia.

### Example:

*" The question is where does the money come from? It probably comes from Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The questions that Saudis need to ask themselves is if their creation is still under the*



*control of its own masters," Dhuicq noted. Both Arab states must watch closely the great potential of the work of the anti-ISIL coordination center,' he added" (150928(3)\_sp, Pos. 17).*

Note:

The category "Arab States" does include the term "Arab states" or similar. The institution "Arab League" is also included. Furthermore, include the following states: Saudi-Arabia, Jordan, Qatar, Morocco, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates.

Whenever it is clear from the context that some of these member states are meant, text segments should be assigned to this category. This can, for example, include terms such as "parties which support the Syrian opposition", as it is well known that some of the mentioned member states do support the Syrian opposition.

## **7.12 Syrian Opposition (24)**

Motives and actions by the Syrian opposition are perceived negatively by Russia.

Example:

*"Russian deputy UN ambassador Alexander Pankin told journalists after the massacre that Moscow did not rule out that the killings were a 'provocation" carried out by rebel forces ahead of a visit by UN peace envoy Kofi Annan to Syria on Tuesday"' (120528(2)\_sp, Pos. 11).*

Note:

Whenever the term "Syrian Opposition" or "rebels" are used, these segments should be assigned to this category. Whenever other names such as "extremists", "terrorists", "radicals," or similar are used, they should not be assigned to this category.

## **7.13 Syrian Regime (10)**

Motives and actions by the Syrian regime are perceived negatively by Russia.

Example:

*"Russia has, however, given its full backing to Annan's six-point peace plan and Lavrov said in April that Assad needed to show more decisiveness to end the violence in Syria" (120528\_sp, Pos. 13).*

## **8 Positive Role of Others [124]**

This coding frame does list all reasons why Russia characterizes other actors as positive. That means other's actions or motives will lead or have led to results that are perceived by Russia.

### **8.1 The Kurds (2)**

The actions and motives of the Kurds are viewed as positive by Russia.

Example:

*"That process should ensure a meaningful role for the Syrians that did not leave their homeland during the many years of conflict, in particular the Kurdish population, which is one of the key elements in the counter-terrorist efforts" (160226\_un, S. 7: 1062).*

### **8.2 UN personnel (14)**

The actions and motives of UN personnel are viewed as positive by Russia.

Example:

*"UN representatives and the various international organizations. The International Red Cross and the World Health Organization were of greatest help during the operation, with close to 60 specialists taking part" (161223\_ps, Pos. 10).*

### **8.3 Iran (17)**

The actions and motives of Iran are viewed as positive by Russia.

Example:

*"I should note that the joint efforts of Russia, Iran and Turkey helped to prevent the disintegration of Syria and its capture by international terrorists and to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe" (171122\_ps, Pos. 11).*

#### **8.4 Turkey (18)**

The actions and motives of Turkey are viewed as positive by Russia.

Example:

*"Everybody is talking about the need to join the humanitarian relief effort for starters, but no one is doing anything practical except Iran, Turkey and Russia" (180404(2)\_ps, Pos. 73).*

#### **8.5 Arab States (9)**

The actions and motives of the Arab States are viewed as positive by Russia.

Example:

*"Russia has very good relations with all countries in the region without exception, and our contacts with these countries show that all of them are ready to make their contribution to fighting the evil that is the Islamic State. This is true of Turkey, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia" (150629\_ps, Pos. 8).*

Note:

The category "Arab States" does include the term "Arab states" or similar. The institution "Arab League" is also included. Furthermore, included are the following states: Saudi-Arabia, Jordan, Qatar, Morocco, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates.

Whenever it is clear from the context that some of these member states are meant, text segments should be assigned to this category. This can, for example, include terms such as "parties which support the Syrian opposition", as it is well known that some of the mentioned member states do support the Syrian opposition.

## 8.6 USA (14)

The actions and motives of the United States are viewed as positive by Russia.

### Example:

*"The US position, essentially, is what prevented Riyadh from sending anti-aircraft systems to Syria in the first place"* (160221\_sp, Pos. 18).

Note:

Only text segments where the US is explicitly mentioned or where it is clear from the context that the US is explicitly meant can be referred to this category. Other terms such as "the West" or similar should be assigned to the group "The West".

## 8.7 China (5)

The actions and motives of China are viewed as positive by Russia.

### Example:

*"But Russia and China are guided by a different philosophy and try to hold up what is falling, as in the case of Syria"* (111011\_sp, Pos. 16).

## 8.8 The West (4)

The actions and motives of the West are viewed as positive by Russia.

### Example:

*"Mr. President, last week, we addressed members of other countries' parliaments via the media, asking them to reflect very carefully and consider very seriously the situation unfolding in Syria. This was a useful step. The parliaments in a number of Western European countries have adopted a very healthy and balanced position"* (130902\_ps, Pos. 18).

Note:

Actors who are described as "the West" or "Western" should be assigned to this category. Furthermore, traditional Western countries such as Great Britain, France, or Germany are

assigned to this category. Terms such as "Europeans", "European Union" or "NATO" are also assigned to this category. Even though Turkey is a member of NATO, it cannot be assigned to the category "the West" but to the category "Turkey", when Turkey is mentioned specifically. Whenever the text refers only to the US it cannot be referred to the category "The West" but have to be assigned to the category "USA".

Terms, where it is possible from the context to assign segments to this category, should be assigned to this category as well. This can, for example, include terms such as "parties which support the Syrian opposition", as it is well known that some of the mentioned member states do support the Syrian opposition.

## **8.9 Syrian Regime (36)**

The actions and motives of the Syrian regime are viewed as positive by Russia.

### Example:

*"President al-Assad, for all his cruelty, has always allowed a certain degree of freedom to a few loyal and harmless opposition parties in the shadow of his ruling Baath party. The recent arrivals used to belong to such parties" (111011\_sp, Pos. 18).*

## **8.10 Syrian Opposition (5)**

The actions and motives of the Syrian opposition are viewed as positive by Russia.

### Example:

*"The Russian spokesman said the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has already agreed to take part in the talks and emphasised the importance of an inclusive delegation from the Syrian opposition, which should include Kurdish representatives as well as all other opponents of official Damascus that take a constructive approach and seek a comprehensive political settlement of the Syrian crisis" (160727\_fm, Pos. 6).*

Note:

Whenever the term "Syrian Opposition" or "rebels" are used, these segments should be assigned to this category. Whenever other names such as "extremists", "terrorists", "radicals" or similar are used, they should not be assigned to this category.

## **9 Reasons why other actors are "negative" [446]**

This coding-frame does list all mentioned reasons why other states are perceived as unfavorable in the eyes of Moscow.

### **9.1 Demonize Assad (3)**

It is criticized that other actors are demonizing Assad, which means that they present them worse than he is.

#### Example:

*"It is obvious that these unbelievable statements are made in order to further demonize the Syrian Government" (170506(2)\_fm, Pos. 8).*

### **9.2 Excluded Other Opposition Groups (3)**

It is criticized that other actors excluded certain Syrian opposition groups in diplomatic negotiation talks.

#### Example:

*"They ignored numerous opposition groups that occupied patriotic rather than aggressive positions and advocated political settlement" (150629\_fm, Pos. 22).*

### **9.3 Hiding Behind Civilians (3)**

It is criticized that other actors are using civilians in order to protect themselves from attacks.

Example:

*"The Syrian authorities have given their principled consent to the removal of civilians, primarily women and children, from this region, followed by an operative delivery of humanitarian aid there. However, the opposition, which also insists on free evacuation of wounded militants, does not agree to this" (140130\_fm, Pos. 6).*

Note:

Practices by actors that are labeled as "terrorists" "extremists" "ISIS" or similar are excluded.

## **9.4 Reject Assad Plans (1)**

The rejection of Assad's peace plans by other actors is criticized.

Example:

*"Now president Assad in January introduced a new plan inviting all patriotic opposition who is against outside interference to sit down, to have a national dialogue, to develop further the legislative reform and to prepare for new elections and to draft a road map for new Syria, which was rejected by the opposition. I think that this is a mistake" (130215\_fm, Pos. 11).*

## **9.5 Acted to late (2)**

It is criticized that a certain actor acted too late, which is perceived negatively by Russia.

Example:

*"He was responding to our appeals to speed up the reforms and he said that 'this would be done, this is on my plan, this is on my schedule'. But unfortunately, he announced those reforms only few months later. Well, February was already late for the reforms. Had the reforms been announced in the summer of 2011, things might have gone differently" (130215\_fm, Pos. 11)*

## 9.6 Attack Russia (8)

It is claimed that other actors involved in the Syrian conflict do not care about Syria but want to attack Russia. That does also includes segments where Russia highlights that other actors are always accusing Russia.

### Example:

*"I think the aim all along has been not so much to attack Syria, but to attack Russia. I mean this is what it's really been about; this is simply a proxy in order to attack Russia" (180412(3)\_sp, Pos. 9)*

## 9.7 Twitter Diplomacy (3)

Donald Trump's "Twitter diplomacy" is criticized.

### Example:

*"Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated that Russia would not engage in Twitter diplomacy with the United States. The spokesperson's remarks come in response to President Trump's recent tweets in which he warned Russia to prepare for new, smart missiles coming to Syria" (180412(3)\_sp, Pos. 4).*

## 9.8 Fake Evidence (41)

Does refer to the Russian claim that other actors fake or destroy evidence in order to blame the Assad regime for chemical attacks.

### Example:

*"Russia noted that the missile strike by the US can destroy all evidence of chemical weapons used in Syria. Do you think this is the main aim of the United States? Why is Washington so rushing with this forceful response?" (180412(3)\_sp, Pos. 7).*

### Note:

This category does also includes statements where it is claimed that the chemical gas attack was used as a provocation.



This category does differ from the category "Biased / One-Sided" as this category does imply that actors deliberately faked the evidence, whereas the category "biased / one-sided" does claim that certain actors do not wait for or ignore specific kind of evidence to pursue a one-sided policy.

### **9.9 Do Not Cooperate with Russia (7)**

Other actors are criticized as they are not cooperating with Russia with regard to the Syrian civil war.

#### Example:

"By the way, we asked our Western colleagues to share the details of their investigations so that our specialists could have a substantive discussion, but we were stonewalled" (171107\_un, S. 13: 3249).

### **9.10 Destabilize the Region (36)**

Other actors are accused that their actions or motives would destabilize Syria or the whole region. That means to increase the violence and chaos or, in general, worsen the current situation.

#### Example:

*"Any direct involvement by foreign players on behalf of the Syrian opposition will only worsen the violence"* (160211(4)\_sp, Pos. 10-11).

### **9.11 Ineffective against Extremists (11)**

Other actors are accused of acting ineffectively against terrorists such as Daesh.

#### Example:

*"Washington launched its anti-Daesh campaign in Iraq and Syria in September 2014, but has largely failed to deliver on its promise to 'degrade and ultimately destroy' the brutal group"* (160131(2)\_sp, Pos. 10).

## **9.12 Without a clear Policy (5)**

Other actors are criticized for not having a clear direction / clear Syrian policy.

### Example

*"The lack of very clear directions — especially from Washington, I think, is increasingly making the Russian case stronger," Fox told the UK Today radio program" (150928(2)\_sp, Pos. 15)*

## **9.13 Want a Military Solution (7)**

Other actors are accused of not wanting a peaceful political solution but a military one.

### Example:

*"He accused unspecified forces of trying to use humanitarian issues as a pretext for a military solution to the Syrian conflict" (140211(2)\_sp, Pos. 10).*

## **9.14 Not decisive enough (1)**

Other actors are criticized for not acting decisively enough.

### Example:

*"Russia has, however, given its full backing to Annan's six-point peace plan and Lavrov said in April that Assad needed to show more decisiveness to end the violence in Syria" (120528\_sp, Pos. 13).*

## **9.15 Supply Foreign Special Forces (2)**

Other actors are criticized for (potentially) deploying special forces in Syria.

### Example:

*"He also refused to rule out the participation of foreign special forces in the attack" (120528(2)\_sp, Pos. 11).*

## **9.16 War Crimes / Civilian Casualties (16)**

Other actors are accused of conducting war crimes or massacres. This does include the killings of innocent civilians or humanitarian workers. This does also includes actions that caused civilian casualties by mistake.

### Example:

*"Both government forces and rebels were responsible for this weekend's massacre in the Syrian town of Houla, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Monday"* (120528(2)\_sp, Pos. 5).

## **9.17 Breaking Cease-Fire (1)**

Actors are criticized for breaking / violating a cease-fire.

### Example:

*"Both government forces and rebels were responsible for this weekend's massacre in the Syrian town of Houla, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Monday"* (120528(2)\_sp, Pos. 5).

## **9.18 Unable to stop Western Policies (3)**

It is regretted that other actors have not been able or willing to stop Western policies. That does also include claims that other actors don't dare to criticize an individual Western policy.

### Example:

*"It is worth noting, however, that neither Russia, nor even China, which has greater economic weight, have been able to prevent any of these scenarios from happening"* (111011\_sp, Pos. 16).

## 9.19 Supporting Radical Groups (50)

Russia claims that other non-Russian actors are counterproductive because they support radical groups:

### Example:

*"For example, one part of those who fight Assad is a very tough group, Jabhat al-Nusra, which was designated as a terrorist group by the United States only to see the immediate rejection of this American position by the coalition of the Syrians, of the Syrian opposition. In other words, I believe that for the sake of sticking together they have to be very eclectic in whom they get under one umbrella" (130215\_fm, Pos. 45).*

Note:

It does not matter whether the support for radical groups is direct or indirect. Indirect support should also be assigned to this category.

## 9.20 Biased / One-Sided Policy (51)

It is claimed that other non-Russian actors are perceived as unfavorable because they ignore facts and/or are biased.

### Example:

*"In appointing former US ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton as his new National Security Adviser, Trump had selected a figure who believed in approving military strikes before waiting for considering intelligence assessments, Kwiatkowski warned" (180412(4)\_sp, Pos. 8).*

Note:

This category does differ from the category "Fake Evidence" as "Biased / One-Sided" category does imply that certain actors do not wait for or ignore specific kind of evidence in order to pursue a one-sided policy, whereas the category "Fake Evidence" does imply that actors deliberately faked the evidence.

## 9.21 Have Been Counterproductive in the Past (28)

Other actors are criticized for their policy in Syria concerning previous policies in other cases where their actions and motives have been perceived as unfavorable by Moscow.

### Example:

*"But the weapons which are being supplied to the opposition, I hope the suppliers follow the trace, the fate of these weapons. Because now all our European friends admit basically that in Mali the extremists are fighting with the weapons which were given to them when they were fighting against Qaddafi in Libya. We touched upon this in the beginning of our discussion, this reflects a piecemeal concentration. Well, we have Libya, we don't like Qaddafi, let's send the weapons to topple Qaddafi. And we don't think what might happen to these weapons after Qaddafi has been toppled"* (130215\_fm, Pos. 50)

### Note:

Whenever other and old cases are set into relation to the Syrian case, including the former case's negative consequences, it has to be assigned to this category.

## 9.22 Pursue Geopolitical Goals (23)

Characterizes other non-Russian actors as counterproductive because they pursue their own agenda with their (egoistic) goals.

### Example:

*"The people who say that the regime must be changed are driven, willingly or unwillingly, by the well-known notion of the Greater Middle East and North Africa introduced many years ago by George Bush Jr. who said that democratizing the Middle East is "our utmost goal". I think any interested observer who follows what is going on in the region can make his or her own conclusion as far as the results of this democratization move are concerned"* (130215\_fm, Pos. 15).

Note:

Whenever it is highlighted that other non-Russian actors do not mainly care about the fate of the people but about other egoistic interests. The promotion of democracy can be assigned to this category as well as long as it is related to negative consequences.

### **9.23 Unable or Unwilling to Influence the Opposition (18)**

Characterizes other non-Russian actors as unable or unwilling to use their influence on opposition groups to influence them in a specific kind of manner. That does also imply that the supporters of the opposition groups are unable or unwilling to use their influence in order to stop the opposition in continuing their fights, to enter negotiations, or to distance themselves from radical segments of the opposition.

Example:

*"Those who have influence on the opposition, be it the countries of the region, be it Europeans, be it Americans, never managed to persuade the opposition to change its mind, to change its confrontational mood. I mentioned about the creation of this Syrian National Coalition of the Revolutionary Forces and the Opposition" (130215\_fm, Pos. 24).*

### **9.24 Unable to cooperate/speak with Assad (16)**

Other actors are perceived as negative as they are unable to talk or work with the Assad regime.

Example:

*"It is not our fault that this document has been frozen since. Because the people who signed up to this document, when it came to the practical implementation of the Geneva communiqué, were saying 'well, it's O'K but before anything Assad must go'" (130215\_fm, Pos. 9)*

Note:

In cases where it is claimed that the opposition groups are not ready to sit on one table together with Assad within a multilateral framework, the segment is assigned to this category (unable to cooperate/speak with Assad) and not to the category "undermining multilateralism".

## **9.25 Because they imposed Sanctions (7)**

Other actors are criticized for imposing sanctions against the Syrian regime.

### Example:

*"The use of unilateral sanctions, whose greatest impact is on ordinary Syrians, is equally shameful"* (190226\_un, S. 12: 3143).

## **9.26 No solidarity with Syrians (10)**

Characterizes other as counterproductive as they do not care or show not solidarity about/with the Syrians.

### Example:

*"The Russia delegation head said Syrian people were outraged by the fact that world leaders had stayed silent on the violence taking place in the country. He said European leaders had expressed their solidarity with French people after the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris but had not done the same for Syrians. He also said that the Russian delegation aimed to assess the situation in Syria, as Moscow was concerned about the possibility of Islamic State seizing Syria, from where it wanted to spread a "global caliphate." Russia and Syria agreed to create a White Book, which would contain the crimes that Syrian people were suffering so that Europeans could understand what was really happening in the country, he said"* (150527\_sp, Pos. 8-10).

Note:

That does also imply critique on other actors, which claims that they were unwilling to provide humanitarian aid.

## **9.27 Undermining Multilateralism / UN (32)**

Text highlights that the actions, motives, or influence of other actors than Russia will or have led/led to an undermining of UN plans or/and actions.

Example:

*"Russia has particular role in applying pressure," Lavrov said. 'We sense from our contacts that some other forces are not committed. We support Kofi Annan's plan and they should do everything for this to succeed...There should no be external interference.' Moscow has condemned Western suggestions that regime change in Syria is the solution to the spiral of violence, and Hague was keen to stress on Monday that Assad's immediate fate was not the main concern" (120528(2)\_sp, Pos. 19-20).*

Note:

Only segments where concrete UN plans or decisions are highlighted can be assigned to this category. Other segments where it is referred to international law or norms in general, need to be assigned to the category of "undermining international law."

## **9.28 Undermining State Sovereignty / International Law (54)**

Other actors are accused of undermining the principle of state sovereignty or respectively violating international law.

Example:

*"The Russian president also said that the future of the Syrian regime must be decided by the people and leadership of Syria, not NATO or certain European countries" (111011\_sp, Pos. 13).*

Note:

All segments which highlight that other actors are undermining international law or state sovereignty need to be assigned to this category. This does also include calls or support for a regime change.

## **9.29 Radical Position (4)**

Other actors are criticized for having a radical and violent attitude.



Example:

*"He also noted that the opposition's actions are 'acquiring a tinge of extremism' and that the situation should be viewed from a broader perspective" (111011\_sp, Pos. 13).*

## **10 Reasons why other actors are "positive" [104]**

All reasons why other states are "productive" in the eyes of Moscow need to be assigned and listed in this category.

### **10.1 Provide Economic Support / Trade (1)**

Other actors are perceived as positive as they support Syria with economic aid or, respectively, with trade.

Example:

*"We welcome the growing economic relations between Syria and its Arab neighbors" (190424\_un, S. 9: 4652).*

### **10.2 Balanced Policy (1)**

Other actors are characterized as positive as they conduct a balanced policy, neither one-sided nor biased.

Example:

*"We note that the new report of the Secretary-General has been drawn up in a more balanced way, insofar as it does not contain any hasty assessments and unverified data on possible civilian casualties" (151116\_un, S. 12: 404).*

### **10.3 Support Russian Initiative (2)**

Other actors are characterized positively as they are supporting a Russian policy or initiative.

Example:

*"We are pleased to say that this initiative enjoys support from our Iranian and Turkish partners" (180907\_ps, Pos. 19).*

#### **10.4 Influenced the Opposition (1)**

Other actors are characterized as positive as they used their influence on the Syrian opposition to bring them on the negotiation table.

Example:

*"Less than a year ago, we initiated the launch of the Astana process, taking responsibility for guaranteeing the implementation of the agreements reached and promoting the inter-Syrian dialogue in Geneva under the aegis of the United Nations. For the first time, it was possible to bring together at one table representatives of the government and the armed opposition "(171122\_ps, Pos. 12).*

#### **10.5 Support Multilateral Measures (37)**

Other actors are characterized as positive as they are supporting multilateralism or respectively multilateral measures. That does include the willingness to negotiate with other conflicting parties embedded in a multilateral framework.

Example:

*"During the upcoming meeting, the Russian side plans to once again confirm its support for Kofi Annan's peaceful plan for a political and diplomatic settlement of the crisis in Syria. The Russian side believes that this plan is the only viable platform for resolving Syria's internal problems" (120715\_ps, Pos. 5).*

Note:

Measures by UN personnel such as Kofi Annan are characterized as multilateral measures since they don't work for a single state but the international community.

## **10.6 Provide Humanitarian Aid / Protection of Civilians (19)**

Other actors are characterized as positive as they provide or support humanitarian aid or respectively protect the life of civilians.

### Example:

*"I should note that the joint efforts of Russia, Iran and Turkey helped to prevent the disintegration of Syria and its capture by international terrorists and to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe" (171122\_ps, Pos. 11).*

## **10.7 Same Civilization / Identity (2)**

Other actors are characterized as positive concerning the common identity between Russians and the specific other actor.

### Example:

*"Well, forget about organizations, just the Europeans, which include Russia and the United States, by the way, – we are three branches of the same civilization" (130215\_fm, Pos. 51).*

## **10.8 Against Terrorism (28)**

Other actors are characterized as positive as they are fighting against Terrorism.

### Example:

*"President Putin sent a message to President of the Syrian Arab Republic Bashar al-Assad, in which he highly praised this strategic victory and offered congratulations on this important step on the way to liberating Syria from terrorism" (170905\_ps, Pos. 8).*

### Note:

That does also include segments where it is highlighted that other actors do not or prevented any actions which might have been beneficial for terrorists. Terrorists must be labeled as such or in similar terms such as "extremists" or "radicals".

## **10.9 No Radical Position / Constructive (6)**

Other actors are characterized as positive as they do not hold a radical position and are supporting resolutions and policies constructively.

### Example:

*"He also endorsed Bashar al-Assad's readiness to send a Syrian government delegation to the event. The hope was expressed that Syria's main opposition groups will adopt a constructive approach to the conference and participate in it"* (131114\_ps, Pos. 5).

## **10.10 Allows the Opposition some Freedom (2)**

This category does characterize other actors (mainly the Syrian regime) as positive as they allow the opposition some freedom or respectively rights.

### Example:

*"President al-Assad, for all his cruelty, has always allowed a certain degree of freedom to a few loyal and harmless opposition parties in the shadow of his ruling Baath party. The recent arrivals used to belong to such parties"* (111011\_sp, Pos. 18).

### Note:

The opposition does need to be labeled as such. Terms such as "radical opposition" or "terrorists" are not included.

## **10.11 Holding Up International Law and Norms (5)**

Characterizes other actors as positive as they are holding up international law and norms.

### Example:

*"But Russia and China are guided by a different philosophy and try to hold up what is falling, as in the case of Syria"* (111011\_sp, Pos. 16).

## **11 Russia as the helpful Actor [282]**

This coding frame is dealing with Russia's specific role, which it took for Syria, which can be mainly summarized under the term "the helpful actor". In contrast to the coding-frames "influential", "military relevant," or "international system," this coding-frame does not (mainly) focus on the relationship towards other countries, but rather on Russia's social values.

### **11.1 Economic Support (16)**

The text highlights Russia's economic support for Syria.

#### Example:

*"The parties discussed current issues of the Russian-Syrian relations including the outcome of the 8th meeting of the Permanent Russian-Syrian Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation that took place in Moscow on 25 May" (120528\_fm, Pos. 7).*

#### Note:

Category can include investments, trade, trade agreements, or providing economic expertise in different industrial sectors.

### **11.2 Neutral Actor/Mediator (88)**

Russia is presented as a neutral actor/mediator within the Syrian civil war, who claims to treat the opposition and the Syrian government all in all as equal.

#### Example:

*"The draft demands that "all parties in Syria immediately stop any violence irrespective of where it comes from," but does not call for sanctions" (111216\_sp, Pos. 5).*

#### Note:

Text passages where it is claimed that Russia has no egoist interest and that it is up to the Syrian people do decide about the future, are part of this category definition.

Segments, where it is highlighted that Russian officials are meeting with officials from the Syrian opposition, are assigned to this category as official meetings do imply that Russia officially recognizes the opposition as a negotiating partner similar to Assad.

### **11.3 Russia as Humanitarian Actor (115)**

Russia is highlighted as a humanitarian actor, who provides humanitarian aid to civil society. That does also include Russia's attempts and actions in order to protect the civil society and even Russian concerns and commitment about human rights.

#### Example 1:

*"The conference in Switzerland on the war-torn Middle Eastern country should also help to permit delivery of humanitarian aid through "local ceasefires," Lavrov told a press conference in Moscow" (140211(2)\_sp, Pos. 6).*

#### Example 2:

*"On the 29 October we managed to ensure the evacuation of another 1800 civilians from Al-Maadamia. This has become possible as a result of the efforts undertaken by the authorities, the regular army, and leaders of militants and representatives of the Syrian civil community" (131101\_fm, Pos. 6).*

### **11.4 Russia as Peaceful Nation (52)**

It is highlighted that Russia pushes for a peaceful solution without military measures.

#### Example:

*"Russia's principled policy on Syria is based on support for the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic and the use of political and diplomatic methods as the only alternative for settling the acute internal crisis in Syria" (150627\_fm, Pos. 6).*

Note:

Text passages where it is highlighted that Russia opposes a violent solution, need to be assigned to this category.

## 11.5 Russia as Guarantor for Stability (11)

Russia is presented as a guarantor for stability.

### Example:

*"Andrei Klimov, a Russian senator and deputy chairman of the senate's committee on foreign affairs said: 'This not about us as a government, this is about stability in the region. We have some interests in Syria and it is not a secret that there is a special technical military point in Syria where there is some Russian equipment. We have some obligations to support them with some equipment and, for this very purpose, we need some instructors, experts. This is in favor of stability in the area'" (150928(2)\_sp, Pos. 7-8).*

### Note:

Whenever it is highlighted that Russia provides stability to the region of Syria, it needs to be assigned to this category.