



# Russian Foreign Policy Identity and the War in Ukraine

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**Abstract**

Current Russia's unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine raised concerns about Russia's aggressive behavior that poses a serious threat to international security, as it is the largest war in a European continent since World War II (BBC, 2022a; Psaropoulos, 2022; The Guardian, 2022). Russia rejects to stop its hostile and brutal foreign policy, and as a result, faces economic, political, and social isolation from the world (Psaropoulos, 2022; Bown, 2022; Ria Novosti, 2022). This dissertation explores 1) how Russian foreign policy identity is revealed in the discourse surrounding the war in Ukraine and 2) to what extent the war in Ukraine demonstrates long-term identity patterns of Russian foreign policy. In terms of a theoretical contribution, this dissertation explores Russian foreign policy identity from the perspective of constructivism and a theory of strategic culture (Adler, 2013; Antczak, 2018; Berger, 1966; Hopf 1998; Kanet, 2022; Snyder, 1977; Wendt, 1992). The question of Russian foreign policy identity will be addressed through the qualitative case study analysis of the war in Ukraine and thematic discourse analysis (Dijk, 2009; Paltridge, 2012; Paul, 2009; Priya, 2020; Yin, 2009). The dissertation argues that Russian foreign policy identity analyzed through the discourse of RIA Novosti and Vladimir Putin's official speeches surrounding the war in Ukraine presented a long-term imperialist identity, and an idea of establishment of new world order, utilizing the otherness concept by the perception of Russia's messianic role while narrating the West as an enemy.

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**Abbreviations**

EU: European Union

FPC: Foreign Policy Concept document of the Russian Federation

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NSS: National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation

RN: RIA Novosti, Russian state-owned media

The ‘West’: EU, mostly NATO members

USA/US: United States of America

## Introduction

Recent Russia's unprovoked attack on and full-scale invasion of Ukraine raised serious concerns about international security and Russia's aggressive behavior, as it is the largest war in a European continent since World War II (Psaropoulos, 2022). According to the UN's refugee reports, hundreds of Ukrainian residents including children have been violently killed and around 6.5 million Ukrainians have moved from their homes within Ukraine, while 12 million Ukrainians left Ukraine as refugees to escape from Russia's military attacks (BBC, 2022a, The Guardian, 2022). As a result of Russia's invasion, headed by Vladimir Putin, the EU, the US, the UK, and many other countries imposed a severe package of economic sanctions on Russia (Psaropoulos, 23 March, 2022; Bown, 2022; BBC, 2022b). However, Russia does not appear to stop its aggressive foreign policy and brutal behavior despite economic, and politico-social isolation from the world (Psaropoulos, 23 March, 2022; Bown, 2022; Ria Novosti, 2022).

The first aim of the thesis is to discover and reveal the Russian foreign policy identity construction as a reflection of Russia's strategic culture in light of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Secondly, investigate how the narratives of the Russian state-owned media outlet, Ria Novosti creates constructed knowledge and truth by presenting alternative social, cultural, and political order. This will help achieve objectives in terms of better comprehension of the Kremlin narratives, the Russian identity, and Russia's strategic thinking. Thus, this will allow a better understanding of the harmful effects of Russian foreign policy identity on European and International security in light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Moreover, the dissertation on the Russian foreign policy identity can identify wider implications of the war in Ukraine for the world. The dissertation answers the following research questions:

1. How is Russian foreign policy identity revealed in the discourse surrounding the war in Ukraine?

2. To what extent does the war in Ukraine demonstrate long-term identity patterns of Russian foreign policy?

In terms of a theoretical contribution, this study explores Russian foreign policy identity from the perspective of constructivism and a theory of strategic culture (Adler, 2013; Antczak, 2018; Berger, 1966; Hopf 1998; Kanet, 2022; Snyder, 1977; Wendt, 1992). As for the research methodology, the question of Russian foreign policy identity will be addressed through the qualitative case study analysis of the war in Ukraine and thematic discourse analysis (Priya, 2020; Dijk, 2009; Paltridge, 2012; Paul, 2009; Yin, 2009). The dissertation argues that the Russian foreign policy identity revealed through the discourse surrounding the war in Ukraine is based on the long-established identity and cultural patterns, such as imperialism, the otherness concept, and the establishment of new world order. Examining the connection between existing studies on Russian identity and empirical evidence showed a prolongation of long-term Russian strategic culture and constructed knowledge and truth about its unique social and historical role both as a good state in its normative meaning and a great/imperial power that aims at establishing 'new world order' based on multilateralism and spiritual values (RN, April 3, 2022; RN, April 7, 2022; RN, May 7, 2022; RN, May 29, 2022b)

Russia's imperialism consists of Russia's perception of its messianic role in the world and the strengthening of Russian civilization/Russian World (RN, May 14, 2022; Zhurzhenko, 2014). As for the otherness concept, first, otherness in Russian discourse constructs the West consisting of the EU, NATO, and USA as enemies and provocateurs of the war in Ukraine (RN, May 29, 2022a; RN, April 3, 2022). Secondly, the otherness concept includes a representation of Russia as a different-moral actor through the discourse on the victimization of Russia and the promotion of a Russian world (RN, April 3, 2022; RN, April 30, 2022c; RN, May 7, 2022; RN, May 14, 2022). The war in Ukraine showed that

Russian foreign policy identity is dissatisfied with the Western hegemony in international security, political actions, and cultural and normative understandings of the West. As it is also stated in NSS 2021, 'westernization of culture intensifies threat of losing Russian Federation's cultural sovereignty' (NSS, 2021: 35). Moreover, China is perceived by Russia as a significant partner in this vision of new multilateral world order (RN, April 7, 2022). In this sense, Russian identity disregards the universalism of human rights and the sovereignty of Ukraine (RN, April 3, 2022). When Ukraine, a relatively prosperous new democracy, keeps forming freedom, and rule of law, hence integrating with the West, it is perceived as a threat to Putin's feeling about Russia's global-moral mission in its identified zone of influence and the Russian World (De Witte, March 2, 2022). Putin's proclaimed purpose of 'denazification' and 'demilitarization' in Ukraine (RN, 24 February, 2022) is a cipher word for imperialism, as well as the transformation of Ukraine because now Putin perceives it as different from Russia.

Imperialism, Russia's perception of its great power status, and the Russian world, hostile relations of Russia-West, Russia-NATO, and authoritarianism in existing studies (Rowley, 2000; Ivakhnenko, 2006; Clunan, 2014; Riasanovsky, 2005; Pain 2016; Kanet, 2022) hence became confirmed once again.

On the one hand, existing literature before the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 discussed the more cooperative nature of Russia from the collapse of the USSR till the early periods of the 2000s (Forsberg and Herd, 2015; Malinova, 2018; NSS, 2009; NSS, 2015; Samokhanov, 2018) On the other hand, it is argued that cooperative Russia was more a reaction to decrease of Russian power in global terms due to internal economic, socio-political challenges and national identity crisis in Russia after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, and the necessity of collective response to international security rather than a strong willingness to integrate into the Euro-Atlantic security and democracy-oriented norms

(Gorenburg, 2019; Wallandez, 2000). However, currently, the war in Ukraine led to the worsening of Russia– NATO, Russia-US, and Russia-Europe relations even more, but it is still the reflection and consequence of long-term patterns of Russian aggressive foreign policy behavior.

This normative messianic and imperialist perception of Russia about itself and new world order is worrying and requires attention to not only Russian identity but also future implications of the war in Ukraine for international as well as European security. It raised speculations about how this war will affect not only West-Russia relations but also, for instance, Russia-China partnership for a so-called 'new world order', hostile China-Taiwan relations (Liu, 2022; Politico, 2022; RN, April 7, 2022; RN, May 7, 2022; RN, May 29, 2022b; Rumer and Sokolsky, 2022) Thus, the significance of the study on Russian foreign policy identity and the war in Ukraine are justified by wider inferences of these topics for international relations and security. Furthermore, the war in Ukraine especially raised alarms about Russia's aggressive assertion of its hegemonic-imperialistic role in the post-Soviet space (Marat, 2022a). Thus, comprehending the strategic culture of Russia helps other post-Soviet countries, especially those that are under Russian influence for decades, realize the imperialistic nature of Russian identity.

The first chapter consists of a literature review, the second chapter is a theoretical framework, the third chapter grasps the research design and limitations of this dissertation, the fourth chapter presents empirical evidence discussing the challenges of data collection, and the fifth and sixth chapters are main parts of interpretative analysis based on the primary findings and secondary sources, including theoretical and practical implications by connecting empirical evidence with a literature review. This will develop or confirm the long-tern identity patterns of Russian foreign policy. Finally, the

thesis concludes by aiming to understand lessons learned from this war and its future implications for the international community and scholars.

## Chapter 1. Literature review

### 1.1 Historical outlook on Russia: Colonialism and Imperialism

The second chapter of a literature review discusses the Russian identity construction from a historical viewpoint, particularly from colonialism and imperialism outlooks. Russian identity construction can be divided into three important periods: pre-Soviet, the Soviet, and post-Soviet time after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991 (Rowley, 2000; Ivakhnenko, 2006; Clunan, 2014; Riasanovsky, 2005; Pain 2016). An imperialism discourse referring to Russia is predominant in the 21st century as well, particularly after the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014 and an unprovoked attack on Ukraine in 2022 (Pain, 2016: 46; Lister, John, and Murphy, February 24, 2022).

Ivakhnenko (2006) argues that Russian colonialism is something that is inspired by Western initiatives and power in the course of colonialization. However, at the same time, Russia can be described as an 'empire of second order' that craves for colonialism and imperialism but lacks enough resources to fulfill its appetite (Ivakhnenko, 2006: 599). Furthermore, the way how Russia constructs itself and its Russian identity is significantly affected by the comparison of itself with Europe and the historical developments (Rieber, 1994). Historically, Russians thoroughly and consciously followed and legitimized imperial objectives in 'direct imitation of the West' (Rieber, 1994: 333). A symbol of European status was considered by both elites and masses through the invasion of exotic regions (Rieber, 1994). Since from the end of the 17th century, the Russian self-perception was expressed in relation to the European time of

enlightenment, and Russia's pro-Western elites began viewing their country as 'a priori backward and lagging' (Ivakhnenko, 2006: 599).

However, the problem is that Russia was imitating the European imperialism and European colonial experience without realizing the peculiarities of Russia's domestic institutions and socio-cultural problems, hence overcompensating the potential of its imperialism-based mission over the nation's interests (Rieber, 1994; Rowley, 2000). In this sense, Russia lacked proper 'nationalist movements' (Rowley, 2000: 24). The attempts to catch up in competition with the European civilization and economic development did not result in 'synchronization' with the European modernity, culture, and economy (Ivakhnenko: 603; Rieber, 1994: 334-335). Moreover, if Western states which were associated with colonialism, later in the mid of 20th century realized their mistakes in the past and acknowledged the destructive effect of colonization and imperialism, moved towards a more liberal-oriented approach, and focused on a sovereignty principle, Russia's mindset is still trapped in imperialistic approach by replacing this in practice with neo-imperialist strategy, and soft empire by adding modern instruments (Aldrich, 2018; Kushnir, 2022).

The modernization approach of the new empire of Russia was constructed based on the principle of obedience of every person and everything to the single and merely one political force - 'the will of the leader' (Ivakhnenko, 2006: 608; Rowley, 2000: 27). The Russian imperial regime that was prevalent for two centuries, in the eighteenth and the nineteenth can be categorized as 'soft,' while the period of almost seventy years of the Soviet Union from 1922 to 1991 can be labeled 'hard' (Ivakhnenko, 2006: 605). During the Soviet Union, Russia accomplished its task of occupying the territories. Declaring itself the protector of 'the oppressed people', the Soviet authority succeeded in occupying back part of the areas 'lost' during 'the threshold period'- Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Western Ukraine, and Belarus" (Ivakhnenko, 2006: 607).

*21st century*

Both Tsarist and Soviet periods established an empire, and the identity of Russia hence was more imperial than national (Rowley, 2000). This is most clearly releveled in the tsarist autocracy. Even though Russian tsars attempted to reinforce their legitimacy through national matters, no tsar indicated a concern about forming a Russian nation-state, which in turn, would convey inferences of 'popular sovereignty' (Rowley, 2000: 27). Moreover, Russian tsars were proud of the 'multinational' characteristic of their empire, they did not disseminate policies of systematic and thorough 'Russification' of the entire population of their state (Rowley, 2000: 25).

In contrast, some shifts in the Russian identity construction were perceived after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The end of the Soviet Union gave a temporary signal that there was the appearance of strong Russian national consciousness, and the need to establish and strengthen a Russian nation-state (Rowley, 2000; Pain, 2016). Nevertheless, the imperialistic sentiments did not completely disappear (Rowley, 2000). Therefore, currently, Russia does not aim at limiting itself to serving just a Russian nation because it wants to influence and be a so-called protector beyond its borders (Pain, 2016). Therefore, referring to the past and historical role of Russia, particularly, imperial discourses is part of a strategy to claim Russian influence in other territories (Pain, 2016).

In comparison with Yeltsin's administration in the 1990s, the modern power of Putin's presidency seems determinedly instigated the task of preserving the imperial-colonial matrix in the Russian-speaking population (Ivakhnenko, 2006; Pain, 2016; Liñán, 2010). Putin's administration imitates the idea of a 'zone of vital interests' (Ivakhnenko, 2006: 612). The Russian mass media amenably discuss the preservation of the zones of Russia's influence in and even beyond the post-Soviet space (Pain, 2016; Liñán, 2010). History plays an

important role in the persistent presence of an imperial discourse that is especially prevalent in the current president Putin's identity construction (Liñán, 2010). One of the dominant perspectives about Russian identity construction is that Putin uses history as a propaganda tool to emphasize the imperial ambitions and potential of Russia (Liñán, 2010). Thus, by referring to the achievements of Russia in the past, and the role of the Soviet Union in international affairs in the past, Putin aims at presenting Russian identity as an empire. Furthermore, Putin called the breakdown of USSR the 'greatest geopolitical catastrophe' (Putin, 2005, cited in Pain, 2016: 58).

The Kremlin often had a weak 'nationhood' throughout history (Rowley, 2000: 29). Nevertheless, Russia associates itself with post-Soviet countries, always going beyond its borders, even though it has a long list of domestic problems and internal socio-economic problems (Pain, 2016). Instead of fulfilling the interests of its nation in Russia, the political system pleases the ruler and silences the people, as it is not a modern state where the state serves its nation but still has imperialistic features where the system serves the ruler and his ambitions (Pain 2016; Rowley, 2000).

The institutional repression of the imperial legacy of Russian politics influences contemporary Russian politics and development, especially during Putin's presidency from the 2000s (Pain 2016; Rowley, 2000). Imperial nationalism appeared as an alternative and comfortable term for the Russian elites to unite nationalist sentiments with the imperial objectives of Russia, and at the same time overcome the ideological differences between the right and the left wings (Pain, 2016: 72). Therefore, it appears that since the revival of the Soviet Union is not realistic and Putin understands this impossibility, the shift from the Soviet narratives to imperial is some kind of a solution to declare its identity based on imperial qualities but with modern characteristics of Russian nationalism (Pain, 2016).

## Chapter 1.2 Russia's Grand Strategy in the 21st century

Russia's grand strategy is widely addressed in the literature to explain Russian action on the international stage (Marangé, 2019; Monaghan, 2013; Monghan, 2020; Tsygankov, 2011). Although there is a perspective that considers Russia's actions as incoherent and 'opportunistic', there are also views stating that Russian behavior is determined by strategies (Monaghan, 2020: 3; Marangé, 2019). After Putin became president, starting from the late 2000s and reclaiming again in 2018, Kremlin has repeatedly highlighted the significance of 'a strategic agenda' to solve 'the economic, social and national security problems' and formulate a strategic plan for 'Russia's long-term development' (Monaghan, 2020: 4). Tsygankov (2011) highlights Russia's grand strategy to revive its great power status but criticizes it due to Russia's inability to communicate properly its foreign policy and appealing strategic vision.

In general, the security strategy of Russia in the 2000s involves both external and internal threats. Domestically, Russia identifies sovereignty, socio-economic development of the state, welfare of Russian citizens, and military security as national interests in its security strategy and foreign policy documents (NSS, 2009; FPC, 2008; FPC, 2013; FPC, 2016; MD, 2010; MD, 2014). On the other hand, Russia emphasizes maintaining regional domination and Russia's great power status and warns about the unipolarity of the international structure with the US domination (FPC, 2008 2013; FPC, 2016; Haas, 2010; Tsygankov, 2011).

The official foreign policy concept (FPC) documents of 2008, 2013, 2016 which have been implemented since Putin returned to the presidency in 2012 demonstrate the following pattern: reference to the global order, and Russia's economic development, and the identity of Russia (FPC, 2008; FPC, 2013; FPC, 2016). Foreign policy documents of 2008 and 2013 and the Military Doctrines

of 2010 and 2014 substantially discuss exterior military threats within the context of NATO enlargement (FPC, 2008; FPC, 2013; MD, 2010; MD, 2014).

Currently, Russia's Grand Strategy can be divided into three important aspects: the 'otherness' dimension of Russia's strategy that consists of the West, NATO, and the USA, the Russian World and the Near Abroad, and particularly Ukraine's role taking into consideration current realities and an unprovoked attack of Russia on Ukraine (Greenhill, 2008: 345, Haas, 2010; Malinova, 2018; Oliker and Al, 2009; Forsberg and Herd, 2015; Ratti, 2009; Samokhanov, 2018; Zhurzhenko, 2014).

### 1.3 "Others" in Russia's Grand Strategy: West, NATO, USA

An important constituent in Russia's grand strategy is the West because it has a strategic role within Russia's identity construction where Russia identifies the West, the USA, and NATO as 'others' and threats to Russia's security (Siddi, 2012: 2; Malinova, 2019; Marangé, 2019; Shearman, 2010).

The role of the West as a potential external threat in the national security strategy documents of Russia is nearly steady throughout the 2000s until the present time, but the Russian behavior, actions, and perception and portrayal of the West as a security threat are distinctive under different conditions (Samokhanov, 2018; NSS, 2009; NSS, 2015). After the collapse of the Soviet Union until 2007, Russia's security strategy was more focused on building a nation-state rather than external threats (Haas, 2010; NSS, 2009; NSS, 2015; Tsygankov, 2011; Wolff, 2015). Samokhanov (2015) argues that Russian behavior had periods of both cooperation and conflict with Europe and the USA, introducing different interpretations and descriptions of the West by Russia. Samokhanov criticizes a purely realistic approach to Russian foreign policy, applying 'identity-based research', revealing Russia's construction of Europe as

‘True Europe’, ‘False Europe’, ‘Civilizing Europe’, and ‘Sinful Europe’ (2015: 809).

However, Malinova (2019: 227) emphasizes that noticeable changes in Russia’s foreign policy in relation to the outside world appeared in the third term of Vladimir Putin’s presidency in Russia. In 2007 Putin announced at the Munich Security Conference that Russia is against unipolar international order with the US leadership in the current structure of European security (Putin, February 10, 2007; Malinova, 2019). Thus, the obvious weakening of relations with the West and the USA began instantaneously after Putin’s appointment as president due to ‘suspicions’ regarding external backing for the opposition in 2011–2012 (Malinova, 2019: 227). This ultimately was grown into a complete crisis, affecting the multilateral cooperation with the US and European countries, that had been a key priority of Moscow’s foreign policy goals in the 2000s (Malinova, 2019). Russia’s national security strategies (NSS) of 2009 and 2015 indicated the Kremlin’s belief that the Western powers threaten Russia’s geopolitical ambitions in the Asia-Pacific, and Eurasian regions (Berryman, 2010; NSS, 2009; NSS, 2015**)**. The decline of Russia’s interaction with the West and the USA after Russia annexed Crimea, the intensification of the military conflict in eastern Ukraine, and the consequent ‘war of sanctions’ caused ‘the deepest crisis’ since the Cold War ended (Malinova, 2019: 227).

Another constituent of Russia’s othering concept is NATO (Gobarev, 1999; Haas, 2010; Ratti, 2009; Kanet, 2010; Wolff, 2015). At the beginning of the 2000s, NATO was not perceived as a serious threat (Forsberg and Herd, 2015; Ratti, 2009). With the instituting of the NATO-Russia Council in 2002, NATO-Russia relations entered a new period of cooperation (Forsberg and Herd, 2015: 47: Ratti, 2009: 410). The objective of the Council was ‘coordination of joint approaches and decision-making’ centered on ‘equality, reciprocity and parity’, where Russia’s great power role was recognized (Forsberg and Herd, 2015: 47;

Gobarev, 1999). Furthermore, Russia's cooperative behavior with NATO in the early 2000s was essential for global security, deterrence of nuclear weapons, terrorism, and other possible threats to international security which required a mutual collaborative commitment (Haas, 2010; NSS, 2009; Military Doctrine, 2010; FPC, 2008; FPC, 2013; Ratti, 2009).

In general, Russia-NATO relations' evolution in the literature discussed by revealing the optimistic and pessimistic viewpoints, ups and downs depending on different periods of Russia-NATO relations such as 1) the early optimism of post-Cold War cooperation based on both actors' readiness to enter the stage beyond Cold War separations to achieve a united Euro-Atlantic region (Forsberg and Herd, 2015: 43), 2) deterioration of NATO-Russia relations due to NATO's enlargement and intervention in Kosovo, and consequently, Russia's dissatisfaction of NATO having a leading role in collective security (Gobarev, 1999; Forsberg and Herd, 2015), 3) Putin's modification of strategic policies concerning NATO to a more cooperative as a result of 9/11 and as a means to reinforce Russia due to domestic economic and political challenges (Bukkvoll, 2003), 4) pessimistic phase in NATO-Russia relations as a result of NATO's enlargement objectives concerning Baltic States, Georgia, and Ukraine, and finally, the peak of worsening the relations between NATO and Russia is Russia's annexation of Crimea (Forsberg and Herd, 2015: 43-50; Nygren, 2010; Rogov, 2009; Wolff, 2015).

### Chapter 1.4 Russian World and Near Abroad: The role of Ukraine

Current Russian aggression toward Ukraine has emphasized threats posed by Russian 'self-confident' and assertive foreign policy in the post-Soviet space (Way, 2015: 692; Dickinson, 2022; Durand, 2022). Since Russia's annexation of Crimea, its interference in Eastern Ukraine, and the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Putin's policies are substantially designated as 'imperial' (Teper, 2016: 378; Dickinson, 2022; Durand, 2022). The US presidents, Barack Obama and

Joe Biden stated Putin's revisionism concerning the collapse of the USSR as the key impetus for Putin's actions (Teper, 2016: 378; Biden, February 24, 2022; Haltiwanger and Seddiq, 2022).

Russia confronts the democratic development in its neighboring countries by supporting pro-Russian and authoritarian presidents, for example, in Belarus, Ukraine, Tajikistan, Georgia, and Moldova (Way, 2015: 692-693). Putin's inclination toward autocracy maintenance is visible when Putin supported Yanukovich's electoral fraud in Ukraine's presidential election in 2004 and oppression of protests in 2014 (Way 2015: 693; Tolstrup, 2009: 932). However, Way (2015) argues that despite scholars' observations of Russia's authoritarianism (Ambrosio, 2016; Tolstrup, 2009), Russia is less interested in normative contribution to authoritarianism in comparison with the West's commitment to democracy. Although Russia offered economic support to individual authoritarian elites, Way argues that Russia does not have much influence in affecting autocracy in its neighboring countries because Russia is more interested in opposing the US influence and 'geopolitical interests' in Russia's sphere of influence – former Soviet Union countries (Way: 2015: 692). Moreover, Russia does not have an influential role in undermining democracy in the region because former Soviet countries already have fragile democratic conditions (Way, 2015).

At the same time, many Russian observers argue that Kremlin's power over energy flows causes the increase of its 'strategic power with neighboring states' (Oliker and Al, 2009: 95). For instance, some politicians claim that Russia must cultivate a condition in which its neighboring countries exchange their 'sovereignty' to 'energy security, safeguarding a continual Russian supply (Delyagin, 2007, cited in Oliker and Al, 2009: 95). Moreover, the chief executive officer of UES, Anatoliy Chubais, argued in 2003 that 'Russia's

electric-power company should lead the CIS through an economic occupation of neighboring economies' (Chubais, 2013, cited in Oliker and Al, 2009: 95). Thus, the Russian grand strategy in economic terms is based on a repetitive threat to cut off supplies of oil and natural gas to Europe including Ukraine (Oliker and Al, 2009). However, the threats concerning the supply of energy are also a reflection of the Kremlin's discontent with Ukrainian policy choices that are seen by Russia as adverse, mainly moves taken by each elected Ukrainian leadership to build ties with the European Union, the United States, and NATO (Oliker and Al, 2009).

Furthermore, the idea that Russia follows a 'revisionist' tactic to 'international order' has been common in Western sources, particularly since Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 (Allison, 2020: 976; Allison, 2014; Marten, 2015). It is argued that the annexation of Crimea is the result of Russian aggressive political choices, the expansionist nature of Russia's identity, the upsurge of nationalism, anti-Western hatred, and imperial reminiscence in Russia proposing substitute identities to the mainly Russian-speaking population in the east and south of Ukraine – Donetsk, and Luhansk (Marten, 2015; Zhurzhenko, 2014). At the same time, the polarization of Ukrainian society, characterized by 'two Ukraines' has been considered Ukraine's internal vulnerability for Russia to intervene (Zhurzhenko, 2014: 249). This mainly Russian discourse contrasts 'the Ukrainian-speaking pro-European west' and 'the pro-Russian, Soviet-nostalgic east' as two historically and culturally tied identities, having incompatible collective reminiscences and divergent identities, that have difficulty in existing peacefully as 'a unite' (Zhurzhenko, 2014: 249).

The significant triggers in both Russian and Ukrainian foreign policies are seen in the 2004 revolution, Euromaidan, and unquestionably 2022's Russian invasion of Ukraine (Allision, 2014; Dickinson, 2022; Durand, 2022). In general, Russia views colored revolutions in the post-Soviet space including

Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan by default as an attempt for regime change by the Western coup with the ultimate goal to destabilize Russia's legitimate influence in its Near Abroad - zone of geopolitical interests (Makarychev, 2018; NSS, 2015: 4; Zhurzhenko, 2014). The Orange Revolution of 2004 and the Kremlin's fiasco to ensure the success of the pro-Russian politician Victor Yanukovych extremely traumatized the Russian ruling elite (Zhurzhenko, 2014: 257). This in turn changed Moscow's approach to Ukraine and predefined its response to the Euromaidan, describing Kyiv as 'a puppet of the West' later in 2004 (Zhurzhenko, 2014: 257).

One of the consistent Russian discourses about Ukraine involves undermining Ukrainian pro-Western elites by labeling them as 'nationalists' and 'fascists' who threaten Russians and Russian speakers residing in Ukraine (Kuzio, 2019: 305-306; Zhurzhenko, 2014). From 2005 to 2010 the belief of a Russian mission to avert the spread of Ukrainian nationalist sentiments and defend 'Russian compatriots' was already at this period in Russian public discourse (O'Loughlin, Gerard Toal and Vladimir Koloso, 2016; Zhurzhenko, 2014: 258). Pro-Russian, state-owned media portrayed Ukraine as a miserably divided state, 'an artificial state' comprising civilizations with antagonistic 'mentalities and cultures', an object that lacks 'a political future' (Zhurzhenko, 2014: 258; Kuzio, 2019: 298). The Euromaidan, which began in November 2013 as a protest due to the government's decision to delay signing the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement planned for the end of 2013 transformed into an immense demonstration against 'the corrupt and brutal political regime' (Zhurzhenko, 2014: 256). It restarted the old fears of 'radical Ukrainian nationalism' in eastern and southern Ukraine (Zhurzhenko, 2014: 256).

By rejecting Ukraine's idiosyncratic national identity, Moscow proposed other identities as an alternative (O'Loughlin, Gerard Toal, and Vladimir Koloso, 2016: Zhurzhenko, 2014: 258). This alternative is based on the concept of *the*

*Russkiy mir* (the Russian World) which made a rapid conversion from an 'intellectual discourse' to an 'original state ideology' maintained by the Russian rulers and 'the Russian Orthodox Church' in the 2000s (Zhurzhenko, 2014: 258; O'Loughlin, Gerard Toal, and Vladimir Koloso, 2016). The significance of *Russkiy Mir* is colossal in Russian soft power, as well as hard power projects. (O'Loughlin, Gerard Toal and Vladimir Koloso, 2016) *Russkiy mir* is highly linked with discourses of a common past and with the shared values, history, and culture that ascend from it (Bogomolov and Lytvynenko 2012). This is predominantly exact in relation to Ukraine, as Russia's political rulers identify Ukraine as a constituent of their country's own identity. As a consequence, Russia counts on its 'national myths' to invent narratives and projects aimed at binding Ukraine into a shared future with Russia (Bogomolov and Lytvynenko 2012: 1; Zhurzhenko, 2014: 259-260).

# Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework: Constructivism and a Theory of Strategic Culture

## 2.1 Constructivism

After the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR in 1991, significant changes occurred in the field of IR (Bezarra, 2019). Previous theoretical viewpoints of realism or neoliberalism could not forecast the consequence of the ideological and political struggle that determined the 20th Century, being unable to explain the reasons why it finished (Bezarra, 2019: 16; Clunan, 2014: 282).

According to Wendt, 'self-help and power politics' do not result rationally or causally from anarchy (1992: 394). Anarchy serves 'a permissive condition' which leads to states' power-related actions (Wendt, 1992: 395). Thus, the existence of a 'self-help world' is due to processes (Wendt, 1992: 394). By saying that, according to a constructivist view, 'anarchy is what states make of it' (Wendt, 1992: 395). Actors do not hold a collection of interests that they act

upon independently from the social setting (Wendt, 1992). Behavior or action is meaningful only ‘within an intersubjective social context’ (Hopf, 1998: 173).

Although there is a criticism that constructivists are not rational, strategic culture theory particularly addressed the concept of ‘practical’ or ‘communicative rationality’ (Niemi, 2005; 526; Fearon and Wendt, 2002). Although rationality is related to calculations and choices, it is subject to or affected by conditions and sensitivity of ‘historical, social, and normative contexts’, and comprises ‘persuasive and communicative approach’ (Adler, 2013: 124). Therefore, actors or agents do not choose based on the logic of picking the most effective alternative or making the most efficient decision, but rather they act based on ‘rules’ that bond ‘particular identities to particular situations’ (Adler, 2013: 124). To constitute rationality and persuade, the language within speech act serves as an intermediary for constructing ‘intersubjective meanings’ (Adler, 2013: 125; Niemi, 2005; Walter, 2013).

In constructivist studies, identifying and opposing the ‘other’ is an essential stage for the construction of the ‘self’ (Siddi, 2012: 2; Samokhvalov, 2018: 793). ‘Othering’ concept in Russia’s grand strategy is part of recognizing action and ‘being recognized by others’ which is crucial to establishing the state’s identity and self-perception (Greenhill, 2008: 345). Moreover, recognizing the ‘other’ helps to connect both ‘self’ and ‘other’ to a single all-encompassing ‘collective identity’ (Greenhill, 2008: 345).

Constituent norms and the channels of experiences explain an identity by identifying the actions that will trigger others to recognize that identity and react to it suitably (Hopf, 1998). The use of power, or exercise of actions would be insufficient in the lack of norms. Conventional international relations theory's a most vital structural element, anarchy is meaningless without some subjective cognitive agenda of norms and practices shared between actors (Hopf, 1998).

‘Knowledge, change, social communication, rationality, language, power, and practice’ are social forces that construct reality, constitute norms, and has the role of collective purposes (Adler, 2013: 123; Wendt, 1992). These social forces have a causal effect on each other, thereby working together they create a social reality (Adler, 2013; Wendt, 1992). Therefore, knowledge is not given but constructed through interaction and hence subjective; agents assign meanings to situations and objects. As (Berger, 1966) argues, there is no objective and a priori given reality, it is socially constructed. ‘Intersubjective knowledge and ideas’ can convert material objects into meaningful sources of people’s rationality, reasons, ‘interests, and intentional acts’, hence when ‘institutionalized’, they become the foundation of international practices (Adler, 2013: 123). Thus, according to this constructivist logic, it follows that interests result from ontological ideas, and ideas being based on subjectivity lead to epistemological interpretations about material objects and world (Hopf, 1998; Walter, 2013).

The concept of change based on the constructivist perspective leads to the occurrence of new rules, the development and ‘transformation of new social structures, and practices’, which can affect collective learning and cognitive understandings and beliefs institutionalizing people’s novel knowledge (Adler, 2013:123; Hopf, 1998). Thus, collective understandings, beliefs, and norms can change depending on the agents and units who distribute these ideas across time and place and fix the meanings of material world if they wish to (Hopf, 1998). In this sense, a theory of ‘communicative action’ is useful to include (Adler, 2013: 124). Thus, to institutionalize the meanings and collective beliefs, which in turn would complement the social actors’ ideas and interests, communication through discourse is an important tool to demonstrate the validity of arguments (Adler, 2013: 124). Therefore, in contrast to rational choice theory, which focuses on ‘bargaining’ and utility maximization, communicative action prioritizes the influence of social communication on social relations and how

through this, shared understanding can be constituted (Adler, 2013: 124). In other words, discourses and persuasion can affect collective decision-making and create a social legitimacy of ideas (Berger, 1966; Walter, 2013).

Moreover, power is also socially constructed rather than being a material force that conveys visions about the world (Krebs and Jackson, 2007; Adler, 2013). 'Rhetorical coercion', for instance, can be a mechanism of power (Krebs and Jackson, 2007: 36). To make all these concepts empirical because otherwise, it would lack empirical explanation, constructivists included the term 'practice' (Adler, 2013: 126). Thus, actors do not act only based on their pre-defined knowledge, discourses, ideas, and culture. In addition to these factors, their actions are also driven through performing and practice: 'the moves they make, the signals they give, and the language they speak' (Adler, 2013: 126).

### 2.2 A Theory of Strategic Culture

Constructivism in international relations alone is challenging to use in its singular form due to its contested nature on basic parameters and different frameworks of various constructivist scholars on epistemological questions (Fearon and Wendt, 2002). The epistemological debate within wide constructivism scholarship is based on the concepts of knowledge and truth (Fearon and Wendt, 2002). Therefore, to narrow down the constructivist theory in this research, a theoretical framework of a strategic culture that will explain how truth and knowledge are used in practice, hence nexus of epistemological and ontological aspects will be applied to Russian Foreign Policy Identity. This concept is based on the idea that states while addressing and responding to security issues are prompted and prejudiced by their 'historical experiences, political systems, and cultures' (Hinton, 2020: 81; Kalinina and Menke, 2016). The definition of strategic culture in terms of war is identified as 'the set of attitudes and beliefs held within a military establishment concerning the political objective of war and the most effective strategy and operational method

of achieving it' (Klein, 1991: 5). According to Klein (1991), incompatible ideas eventually control the groundwork and conduction of war. Subjective factors and judgments including pre-defined assumptions identify the war and strategy construction (Klein, 1991). Strategic culture cannot be straightforward as perceiving the facts about an adversary can be limited to only relevant facts among numerous other factors of lesser importance or interest to the decision maker (Klein, 1991).

Snyder (1977) incorporated cultural constituents into security scholarships by examining the nuclear strategy of the Soviet Union. Snyder states that as an outcome of the socialization process, 'a set of general beliefs, attitudes, and behavior patterns with regard to nuclear strategy has achieved a state of semi-permanence that places them on the level of 'cultural' rather than mere policy' (Snyder, 1977: 8, cited in Antczak, 2018: 225). Thus, Snyder defines strategic culture as 'the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behavior that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation…' (Snyder, 1977: 8)

One of the claims of scholars who study the strategic culture of Russia is that it is driven by a particular approach to 'patriotism and glorification' of history (Antczak, 2018: 224; Kalinina and Menke, 2016). Russia's strategic culture aims at idealizing and strengthening myths about Russia's social mission in the world in 'spreading the values of the Orthodox Church' (Antczak, 2018: 224). As it was discussed by Adamsky (2019), messianism has long been a component of Russian foreign policy. It originates from religious, political, and public beliefs about Russia's special fate and purpose as 'the guardian' in the world (Antczak, 2018: 334; Adamsky, 2019). This idea, influenced by the religious viewpoint of the Holy Rus' and Third Rome, labels Russia as the 'spiritual center' in control of the rescue of 'Christian civilization and of the world' (Adamsky, 2019: 111). Thus, political considerations of Russia's strategic

culture were driven by religion and metaphysics over history, with a different extent of the impact on policies (Adamsky, 2019). But the choice between the pragmatic approach and messianism of the Tsarist and Soviet periods often resulted in an amalgamation of the two (Adamsky, 2019). The practical implication of Russia's acuity about its savior role identity was evident in a series of events related to the Arab Spring and Crimea (Adamsky, 2019: 111-115).

The Kremlin's messianism was especially obvious in 2014, as demonstrated by Putin's fusion of strategic and religious reasonings behind the strategy in Crimea – a territory that, according to his words, has 'sacral and civilizational meaning' for Russia (Adamsky, 2019: 112). Thus, the first pattern to confirm or test in empirical evidence is messianism, in other words, the imperialism of Russia's strategic culture. The specific feature of Russian imperialism is governed by 'nationalistic ideology' applying 'isolationism and protection from external influence' designed to defend the 'Russian world' consisting of its 'language, identity, history, religion, culture (with East-Slavonic national civilization concept) and traditions' which can be endangered by the outside world (Antczak, 2018: 233-234).

Another perspective on strategic culture has been examined by constructivists who emphasize the main point that strategic culture is a 'negotiated reality' among political leaders in a country (Kanet, 2022: 37). In this sense, strategic culture is not always stable, but rather develop over time when political elites act upon their evaluation and judgment of modifications in threats presented by internal and external factors (Kanet, 2022). As for the Russian strategic culture, Russia at the beginning of the collapse of the Soviet Union focused mainly on internal threats while external threats were addressed in cooperation with the West, but the security strategy of Russia shifted and became more assertive and hostile to the outside environment after Putin came to power, hence focused on

external threats, especially identified by liberal or Western political systems (Kanet, 2022). This change, on the one hand, was a reaction to Western policies, on the other hand, the outcome of the domestic political system of Russia and embedded Russian attitudes and values which were dominant during the Soviet Union as well (Kanet, 2022: 38-39). Thus, another pattern to analyze in Russia's strategic culture is the interpretation of the West and the structure of the international system in terms of Russia's and the West's, especially the USA's great power roles there (Antczak, 2018; Kanet, 2022; Marangé, 2019).

## Chapter 3. Research Methodology

This chapter explains the research method applied for this study to achieve the researcher's main goals. It explains the research design of the study, why the researcher chose a qualitative research methodology, a particular case study and thematic discourse analysis, data collection methods, and outlines the process and steps of primary sources' collection. Then, the chapter explains data analysis and interpretation procedures and concludes with methodological considerations, defining the limitations of the chosen research methodology.

### 3.1 Research Design

The research is designed based on a qualitative analysis through the utilization of a case study methodology and some elements of discourse analysis based on themes in the discourse. Theoretically, the discussion builds on the constructivist thinking about strategic culture. The primary goal of this study is to better understand foreign policy identity construction and contribute to a theory of strategic culture by connecting it with empirical evidence. The selection of qualitative methodology is justified by the research's objective to find important themes in Russian Foreign Policy identity and how the Kremlin's perceptions about these themes play a role in Russia's strategic culture through exploring the textual content of the war in Ukraine.

Significance of selecting Russian foreign policy identity as a topic and the war in Ukraine as a case study was based on the following reflections. Although Russian foreign policy was widely researched and analyzed in previous studies, the ongoing Russian war in Ukraine in 2022 created an additional gap, and hence, requires further qualitative observations and response. The war in Ukraine is an influential event to understand whether the researcher can explain and identify long-term identity patterns in Russian foreign policy. Most importantly, this study will help to identify lessons learned from the war in Ukraine. This in turn can contribute to the prevention of future threats to European/international security and international order, policy- making decisions, particularly at the EU level, in terms of addressing security issues caused by Russian foreign policy identity and its strategic culture. Thus, selecting Russia as a research object and the war in Ukraine as a case study are justified due to their significance on the global level, and the gap in theoretical, as well as policy implications.

### 3.2 Case study

A case study is explained as an empirical analysis that scrutinizes a specific contemporary ‘phenomenon’ in its ‘real-life context’ (Yin, 2009: 18). A case study research presupposes the use of multiple data gathering methods because it aims to achieve a study in-depth of a selected phenomenon, in this research, it is the war in Ukraine (Priya, 2020). Thus, the study of the war in Ukraine implies that this research uses multiple data collection methods: Ria Novosti is used as the primary data collection method, while university library and other reliable open sources, and Russian government archives as secondary. Therefore, by relying on multiple sources, case study research on the war in Ukraine benefits from previous developments and theories relevant to the phenomenon under study (Yin, 2009). It is necessary to emphasize, as underlined by Yin, ‘a case study is not a method of data collection’, but more a

strategic research design to examine ‘a social unit’ (Yin, 2009: 18, cited in Priya, 2020: 95).

Creswell gives a coherent and inclusive explanation of a case study strategy:

‘Case studies are a qualitative design in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. The case(s) are bound by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time’ (2014: 241).

A case study embraces a meticulous study of the chosen entity of analysis within its natural milieu (Yin, 2009). De Vaus suggests that in a research using case study strategy the ‘unit of analysis’ can be ‘an individual, a family, a household, a community, an organization, an event or even a decision’ (De Vaus, 2001: 220). In this research, a unit of analysis is the event: the war in Ukraine. There are two different formats of a case study design: single case study and multiple (Yin, 2009; Gustafsson, 2017). The advantages of a multiple case study are that it produces stronger empirical evidence than a single case study as it explores many cases (Gustafsson, 2017: 3). Multiple case study design also includes an investigation of similarities and differences between multiple cases (Gustafsson, 2017: 3).

However, this research uses a single case study design because the research aims to achieve more in-depth results while the more multiple case studies in the research, the less time for observation for each case study. In order to achieve a deeper comprehension of the subject under study, the researcher uses a single case study design (Gustafsson, 2017: 4). Moreover, the use of a single case study in this research still outlines similarities and differences between selected case study and other cases, as a single case study design allows to question old theoretical implications and explore new ones by combining existing theories, literature, and contemporary empirical evidence on the war in Ukraine (Priya, 2020; Gustafsson, 2017). Russian foreign policy identity within the case of the

war in Ukraine in this research reveals theoretical propositions of constructivism and a theory of strategic culture based on contemporary empirical evidence.

Another technical definition of the case study is classification. A case study can be classified into three different types: 'descriptive, explanatory, and exploratory' (Ariya, 2020: 96; Yin, 2018: 35; De Vaus, 2001). A descriptive case study describes a unit of analysis in-depth in its real-world setting (Yin, 2018; Priya, 2020). In explanatory, the research aims to identify causal factors for the explanation of a certain phenomenon (Priya, 2020; Yin, 2018). The crucial emphasis of this kind of case study is to elucidate why and how specific conditions occur, thereby why certain series of events appear or do not appear (Yin, 2018; Priya, 2020). The goal in the exploratory case study research strategy is to examine a phenomenon with the objective of discovering or finding new research questions which can be applied in the next research projects extensively (Priya, 2020; Yin, 2018: 35).

The case of the war in Ukraine has all elements of descriptive, explanatory, and exploratory case study designs. The descriptive one is used partly to describe facts, raw texts, and background in real-time related to the war in Ukraine. The explanatory approach of case study design is used in empirical evidence and analysis parts of this study to explain why Russia attacked Ukraine and how the war in Ukraine is contextualized, as a result, revealing and explaining long-term patterns or shifts, if there are any in Russian strategic culture. The exploratory approach is used almost throughout the whole study - in empirical evidence chapters and the last chapter of theoretical and policy implications, as well as the conclusion section, as this study opens up a possibility for additional research questions and can generate further hypotheses or theoretical ground through which other researchers can test or explain Russian foreign policy identity in other case studies (Yin, 2018: 35; Ariya, 2020).

### 3.3 Thematic Discourse Analysis

A complementary methodology used together with case study analysis is a discourse analysis through the identification of specific themes in discourse and context (Dijk, 2009). The discourse analysis method aims at presenting the idea that there are socially constructed realities (Paul, 2009). Therefore, based on the ontological factor, discourse analysts reject the subsistence of an impartial reality and undertake the presence of a compound, socially formed realities instead of a fixed and merely one reality, managed by fixed natural laws (Paul, 2009). However, this opposition to one reality should not be assumed as a renunciation of the material existence of entities because discourse analysis is interested in the ascription of varied meanings to events or objects (Paul, 2009).

Discourse is a procedure of contextualizing texts, language in use, and the creation of speech acts (Catalano and Waugh, 2020: 22). Discourse analysis observes patterns of the language within texts and reflects the interrelation between language and the socio-cultural context in which it is used (Paltridge, 2012). Thus, people analyzing discourse consider language as something that performs and functions, therefore, it is not seen as a neutral concept or merely a tool of communication. The focus of language within discourse is on what shape of the world, what kind of identity, or specific meaning is created by choosing what to include or exclude while describing something (Rapley, 2007). Therefore, since a discourse contemplates that the language offers various viewpoints on the world, a discourse analysis presents constructed realities (Paltridge, 2012). In this sense, discourse analysis scrutinizes how using language affects ‘social identities and relations’ between participants and examines how these identities are created through the practice of discourse (Paltridge, 2012: 2).

For researchers examining discourse the key interest is in how certain actors use language in specific contexts (Rapley, 2007). The context can vary from a

definite moment in a conversation to a certain historical period (Rapley, 2007). Creation and comprehension of text and speech significantly encompass the context of the talk, including such 'categories', such as, 'participant identities and roles, place, time, institution, political actions, and political knowledge' (Dijk, 2009: 3). Context is constructed subjectively showing the distinctiveness of each text and shared depictions on which the language users build on to interact with each other (Dijk, 2009). Dijk argues that the connection between society and discourse is usually not direct and depends on how actors involved in language construction determine the genre or 'communicative situations' (2009: 16).

In this research, elements of discourse analysis, in terms of themes identification within context will be applied to Russian foreign policy identity and the war in Ukraine. This will be operationalized through contextualizing the texts and understanding the socio-political and normative meanings, which Russia implies in official speeches and news articles in Ria Novosti. Thus, the purpose of a researcher within this approach is to critically analyze the interrelation and communication between texts and meanings that Russia implies as part of its foreign policy identity and understanding of the world. Therefore, in this study, interpretation through connecting literature review with the theoretical framework, and empirical data is a key part of discourse analysis methodology.

### 3.4 Data collection methods

*Ria Novosti*

The main platform that serves as a primary source to gather empirical evidence is Russian state-owned media Ria Novosti. The news reports collected from Ria Novosti were in the Russian language and were translated to English by the researcher, as the researcher speaks the Russian language fluently. According to the theoretical logic of a constructivist theory and principles of a strategic culture theory, the data collection is focused on the analysis of the use of

language, speeches, narratives, and specific words or phrases as the influential components to construct, and present knowledge and a specific image of reality. The collection of empirical evidence aims to illustrate the official Kremlin's narratives, from which a researcher can proceed with analysis and draw conclusions about the Russian identity discourse as part of the broader context – Russia's strategic culture in terms of long-term patterns or changes in Russia's perception of its foreign policy identity, socio-political order of international system after Putin announced its so-called 'special military operation' in Ukraine on the 24th of February in 2022 (Putin, February 24, 2022). Therefore, the analysis part will show Russian identity discourse based on already existing previous studies, a theoretical framework, and data findings of Ria Novosti.

The news, reports, and speeches from RIA Novosti are collected and analyzed from January 30, 2022, to June 30, 2022, which cover the time immediately before Ukraine's invasion by Russia, and during the war and Russia's military actions in Ukraine. The main figures that were identified in Ria Novosti's discourses who create narratives and who are cited around Russia's foreign policy identity, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Kremlin's role in Ukraine are Vladimir Putin, and Dmitry Peskov, Sergei Lavrov, and Maria Zakharova. Since Vladimir Putin is considered both Russia's key 'newsmaker and the most vital basis of political communications and messages, which afterward, are distributed and described by the official media (Teper, 2016: 380), it is most likely that other actors creating discourse around the war in Ukraine represent Putin's vision. Putin's statements and state-controlled media contain the most essential elements of Russian official political discourse (Teper, 2016). Therefore, to answer the research questions posed in this study, the section reviews the way in which Vladimir Putin and Russia's main state-controlled media RIA Novosti, framed the invasion of Ukraine and what it tells us about the Russian identity construction as an important constituent of Russia's foreign policy.

*Parameters of data collection*

To extract a comprehensive picture of Russian Foreign Policy Identity and Russian discourses on the war in Ukraine, the mechanism of selecting articles from media portal RIA Novosti was based on 4 parameters:

1. Case study
2. Time-period
3. Keywords
4. Relevance of articles to the case study

A case study is the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, time-period is 5 months from January 2022 to June 2022. As a result of exploring Ria Novosti's articles, 6 main themes were identified that will be named, presented, and analyzed in the following chapters based on their relevance to the research's topic.

### 3.5 Secondary sources

Secondary data is used to advance a cross-check approach to data collection and analytical process (Harwood, Stewart, and Gapp, 2015). Secondary data is collected through Internet search engines, university library sources, OPAC systems, reports, and government archives. To make the analysis impartial, Western sources are used alongside non-Western sources. Secondary sources including extensive literature review is used to develop new observations or confirm existing knowledge about Russian identity, foreign policy, and strategic culture.

### 3.6 Limitations of Qualitative Case Study Analysis and Discourse Analysis

A case study methodology's limitation and criticism are in its impossibility to achieve generalization from the extensive study of solely one case (Mitchell 1983). Mitchell (1983) claims that case studies are predominantly exclusive and peculiar while the achievement of general scientific knowledge from them is

laborious and devious. According to Yin (2014: 44–45), as a single case cannot be illustrative of a set of cases, it does not build the basis for generalizations statistically (Ariya, 2020).

However, to overcome the limitation of a case study in terms of widespread idea about the impossibility to get generalized knowledge from a case study and hence, contribute to scientific knowledge, this research takes into consideration Flyvberg's approach (2006), who claims that a researcher must expel the following misunderstandings about case studies: (1) A researcher cannot generalize on the foundation of a single case study case and, henceforth, case studies do not represent scientific knowledge, (2) Case studies are more valuable for creating hypothesis while other research methods are more appropriate for testing hypothesis and building theory and (3) It is usually problematic to acquire general schemes/ theories on the reliance on specific case studies (Flyvberg, 2006: 221). Thus, despite the conventional view on case study methodology in terms of its inability to produce generalized scientific knowledge and acknowledgment of this challenge by the researcher, through case study methodology, this study can achieve 'analytic generalizations' in which a prior established theory is operationalized as a 'template' to compare the empirical outcomes of the case under investigation (Ariya, 2020: 103). These generalizations improve 'the explanatory power' of a case study (Ariya, 2020: 103). Case studies from literature allow the researcher to explore cases in diverse places and at different times to discover alike processes and analogous explanations functioning (Ariya, 2020).

Another significant limitation of qualitative research methodology is to keep objectivity and preconceptions throughout the research (Yin, 2004: 28). As a case study research along with discourse analysis contains study of a societal 'unit' within its 'natural' environment, it is significant for a researcher to retain her prejudices away, and not overlay them either on the subject under study or

during the analysis of the data (Priya, 2020: 101; Yin, 2004) If this is not fulfilled, the entire case study investigation would be corrupted (Yin, 2004). To overcome preconceptions and corrupting features, the 'reflexivity' act is applied to this study (Giddens and Sutton, 2014, cited in Priya, 2020: 107). Giddens and Sutton suggest that reflexivity comprises the procedure of continuous reflection on 'one's biography, social position, values, biases, so as to constantly bracket them out while carrying out the research and analyze the data' (Giddens and Sutton, 2014, cited in Priya, 2020: 107).

Although the researcher went through persistent practice in the social science field throughout her academic experience of 7 years to develop reflexivity quality, the researcher defines potential preconceptions as a limitation for this study. However, the tactic, in which the researcher controls 'the values, dispositions, attitudes, and perceptions, which she brings from her social background to the field' is implied in this study (Ariya, 2020: 107). This tactic required a critical cognizance by the researcher of her 'social location (e.g., class, gender, race), and how this background may shape the enquiry' (Ariya, 2020: 107).

## Chapter 4. Empirical Evidence

This chapter demonstrates data findings and interpretation based on a case study analysis in combination with discourse analysis methodology by using news reports and official speeches of Russian president Vladimir Putin which tackled the war in Ukraine in the Russian-speaking state-owned RIA Novosti channel.

After Ria Novosti was filtered based on time-period from the 30$^{th}$ of January till the 30$^{th}$ of June and the key-word search - специальная военная операция на Украине (special military operation in Ukraine), it resulted in 9385 relevant articles.

Keywords in this study represent also key concepts and actors in Russia's narratives and play an important role in being 'others', contrasting them with Russia's messianic and imperialistic identity projected through the discourse on the war in Ukraine. Therefore, taking into consideration the 'Other' concept based on the main theoretical approach of this study - a constructivist theory, filtering was further narrowed by adding Europe, the USA as additional tags. This in turn resulted in 233 articles. Adding NATO as an additional tag to Europe and USA offered only 73 articles. 73 articles were not enough to review and cannot be a reliable empirical evidence for generalization process due to irrelevance of majority of articles. Therefore, the researcher was extracting data from 233 articles as well. Since it is not feasible to analyze all the articles due to limited time, only articles that have relevant headlines are considered as potential data findings for interpretation and analysis. Moreover, the tactic of monitoring and searching in Ria Novosti without filtering in real-time from the 24th of February, 2022 until the 30th of June is applied as well to avoid ignorance of other important Russian discourses which might not appear through filtering. The approach for selecting specific articles as empirical evidence was based on excluding the least relevant articles which had less appearance of keywords and no discussion of the war in Ukraine. It the end, after scanning the titles and reviewing 233 relevant articles, as well as monitoring Ria Novosti's news updates, 22 pieces of information from Ria Novosti which comprised of official speeches of Vladimir Putin, news reports, and opinion pieces reports are selected for in-depth interpretation and analysis.

As a result, data findings are categorized into 6 main themes: denazification/demilitarization, history/nostalgia, West as an enemy, Russia as a hero, victimization of Russia, and China as a partner. Each specific theme identified in data findings is based on either Putin's and Russia's political representatives' official speeches or respective news reports. Thus, the reports are chosen based on the following criteria: date of report, relevance, size, and

keywords mentioned. The first purpose is to reveal Russian foreign policy identity and its strategic culture, and the second purpose is to explore if there are shifts or long-term patterns in Russia's narratives and foreign policy identity construction. Thus, the literature review, secondary sources on Russian foreign policy and security strategies, and empirical evidence on the war in Ukraine are used in this study concomitantly.

### 4.1 Challenges and Limitations

Since the study is qualitative and interpretative by approaching the study from a constructivist viewpoint, the limitations of data findings are a potential of cherry picking, difficulty in excluding irrelevant articles and selecting relevant ones for analysis, a large amount of data, and lack of quantitative assessment of empirical evidence.

The researcher also addresses the presence of too abstract, unclear philosophical sentiments, and emotional statements in collected texts as a limitation for achieving an analytical implication from these texts. This is a factor dependent on the Russian nature of communication and hence it is a limitation of this thesis.

To avoid biases, cherry-picking, mitigate the process of selecting the pieces from Ria Novosti, and finally to enhance the objectivity of discourse analysis, a technique where articles were primarily selected and scanned based on the relevance in terms of keywords rather than specific argumentation in the reports is applied. Due to limits of a researcher's quantitative abilities, limited time framework, and therefore, the objectives of this research, quantitative analysis methodology is not used in this study.

Another limitation of the research is related to a selection of the platform to extract empirical evidence. The initial plan was to use Russia Today as it is

considered Russia's instrument of strengthening its foreign policy and disinformation (Elliott, 2019). However, since RT was banned due to security reasons and to prevent the spread of disinformation in Europe due to the unprecedented Russian war with Ukraine, the researcher had to consider other alternatives. (Chee, 2022)

Consequently, after considering the accessible media outlets of Russia, the Ria Novosti news agency was selected as the main platform to collect empirical evidence. The justification for the selection this particular outlet is based on the following reasons: the purpose of RN being the state-owned tool of domestic Russian elites, accessibility to the platform and archives of the news agency, and regular publications of Kremlin's news about social, cultural, and political issues (Davydova, 2013). The challenges for collecting data from RN are a huge amount of data, constant updates of the content there, repetitive articles of RN on the same news or event, and occurrence of irrelevant articles, for example, sport or music-related pieces.

### 4.2 Background on Russia's attack on Ukraine in 2022

On February 24, 2022, Russian president Vladimir Putin initiated a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, generating the largest war in a European continent since World War II (Psaropoulos, 2022). According to the UN's refugee data, since the invasion started, hundreds of Ukrainian civilians including children have been killed and around 6.5 million Ukrainians have been relocated from their homes inside Ukraine, and nearly 13 million Ukrainians fled their country as refugees to save their lives from Russia's military attacks (BBC, 2022a, The Guardian, 2022). As a result of Russia's unprovoked attack, the European Union, the US, the UK, and many other countries imposed a severe package of coordinated economic sanctions on Russia to penalize Russia and restrict routine trade and financial cooperation with Russia. Moreover, energy import has ceased in the USA, UK, and Europe (Psaropoulos, 23 March, 2022; Bown,

2022; BBC, 2022b). Meanwhile, Russia does not seem to change its aggressive foreign policy course despite economic, as well as political, and social isolation from the world (Psaropoulos, 2022; Bown, 2022; Putin, February 28, 2022).

Furthermore, even the emergence of clear facts about Russia's aggression in Ukraine including the massacre in Bucha, the demolition of Mariupol, and bombings in different parts of Ukraine did not stop many Russians to support the war in Ukraine (Marat, 2022b; Mirovalev, 2022). Many Russian citizens do not deny Putin's narrative of 'denazification' and 'demilitarization' of Ukraine, despite facing economic problems and food scarcities due to Western sanctions (Marat, 2022b). Critical opinions about Putin's decisions and actions are criminalized in Russia by the government and can lead to being sentenced (Reuters, March 4, 2022). Due to Putin's ban of independent and alternative media apart from Russian-state-owned channels and news outlets which support Putin's viewpoints, Russians are easily and blindly trapped in Kremlin's disinformation, propaganda, and lies about the war in Ukraine, glorifying Russia's military actions and demonizing Ukrainian resistance (Ellingworth, 2022; Marat, 2022b; Putz, 2022; Psaropoulos, 2022).

### 4.3 Themes

After identification of keywords associated with the war in Ukraine, such as специальная военная операция (special military operation), and additional keywords - West, NATO, USA, the main long-term pattern of Russia identity was identified and confirmed -imperialism. It was discovered that this main imperialism identity however consists of other patterns of Russian identity and foreign policy which all together form an imperialist identity: messianism, otherness, and multilateral new world order. These patterns were formed from the following 6 main themes or sub-patterns:

1) Denazification/demilitarization

2) History and nostalgia
3) West as an enemy
4) Russia as a hero
5) Victimization of Russia and Russophobia
6) China as a significant partner for a new world multilateral order

Based on identified themes, the research proceeds with the qualitative assessment of data findings and answering the research questions of this study. The official declaration of war in Ukraine was signaled by Putin's speech that was published on the 24th of February, 2022 on the official Kremlin's website (Putin, February 24, 2022). During his determined, decisive, and emotional speech, the crucial argumentation of Putin is centered on threats to Russia's security in terms of NATO's expansion, USA's interventions in other countries, the historical importance of Ukraine, genocide in Donbas and Luhansk, Nazism in Ukraine, anti-Russian Europe and Ukraine as threats to Russia's security. Moreover, Putin also aims at presenting Russia as the global actor being interested in European and international security while presenting NATO as the villain who does not negotiate with Russia. In the tone of Putin, we can observe his grievance, hatred, and dissatisfaction with the supreme role and power that NATO keeps in Euro-Atlantic security architecture and the decisive role of Western powers there (Putin, February 24, 2022).

### 4.4 Denazification and demilitarization

The main recurring concepts that Vladimir Putin uses concerning his military intervention in Ukraine are denazification and demilitarization of Ukraine (Putin, February 24, 2022). President Putin calls the invasion of Ukraine and the war in Ukraine 'a special military operation' (Putin, February 24, 2022). Moreover, the use of the word война (war) in the speech by people in Russia will result in a sentence (Reuters, 2022, March 4). Thus, in his official speech addressed to the public Putin said:

‘…I decided to conduct a special military operation. Its goal is to protect people who have been subjected to bullying and genocide by the Kyiv regime for eight years. And for this, we will strive for the demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine, as well as bringing to justice those who committed numerous bloody crimes against civilians, including citizens of the Russian Federation’ (Putin, February 24, 2022).

The review of Ria Novosti’s articles shows that numerous news items contain a paragraph repeating that ‘denazification and demilitarization’ are reasons behind the so-called ‘special military operation’ to protect people ‘who have been subjected to bullying and genocide by the Kyiv regime for eight years’ (Putin, February 24, 2022).

One opinion piece report of Ria Novosti written by Timofey Sergeytsev is selected that covers in details the densification concept (RIA Novosti, April 3, 2022a). The author of the news report conceptualizes denazification as a necessary course when many of the people have been controlled by and influenced by the Nazi regime’s politics (RIA Novosti, April 3, 2022a) Russia constructs Ukrainian identity as being ‘Banderits’ (RIA Novosti, April 3, 2022a). Furthermore, the idea of denazification is interpreted by the Kremlin as the process that can be only fulfilled and commanded by ‘the winner’, Russia, hence implying its unlimited and entire control and preservation of power over this ‘denazification’ process (RIA Novosti, April 3, 2022a). Thus, based on this news piece, the reflection which is achieved is that according to the Kremlin’s idea, Ukraine has a Nazi ideology and therefore, cannot exist as a sovereign nation-state (RIA Novosti, April 3, 2022a).

In addition to this, the most worrying part of the rhetoric within that narrative is that it makes a linkage between ‘денацификация’ (denazification) and ‘де-Украинизация’ (de-Ukrainization) implying that denazification will unavoidably also be ‘a de-Ukrainization’ (RIA Novosti, April 3, 2022a). According to this Kremlin’s idea, ‘de-Ukrainization’ is the process that started

from the period of the Soviet Union where there is ‘a rejection of the large-scale artificial promotion of the ethnic component and self-identification of historical Little Russia’s and New Russia’s populations’ (RIA Novosti, April 3, 2022a).

### 4.5 History and Nostalgia

Another recurring theme that is identified is Russian historical and nostalgic discourse about the war in Ukraine. One of the selected articles of Ria Novosti is called ‘Russia is responsible for Ukraine’ (Ria Novosti, March 26, 2022a). One of the main messages of this article is that Russian foreign policy identity is historically decisive in international relations. It claimed that now ‘the special operation’ in Ukraine reveals the beginning of a new world that is similar to 1654 (Ria Novosti, March 26, 2022a). Moreover, the article says that during that time ‘some parts of Russian land which had been under the control of Western neighbors in the 13th century was finally reunited with Rus’ (Ria Novosti, March 26, 2022a). By saying this, Kremlin refers to the supposed historical fact of the ‘Pereyaslav Rada agreement’, when according to Russia, Ukraine was once ‘reunited’ with Russia (Ria Novosti, March 26, 2022a).

Based on this article, it is also clear that Russian foreign policy identity is constructed by including tsars of the Russian empire in Russian discourses disclosing imperialistic sentiments of modern Russia. Thus, Russian discourse emphasizes Aleksey Mihaylovich and Petr the Great stressing the importance and greatness of the Russian empire’s role in the 19th century (Ria Novosti, March 26, 2022a). Therefore, the article states that Alexei Mikhailovich was the tsar of all the Great and Small Russia while his son Peter strengthened his position on the Baltic Sea, and became emperor. The discourse here emphasized the hegemonic status of Russia claiming that in the 20th century Russia became ‘великая держава’ (‘a great world power’), expanding to the east and south (Ria Novosti, March 26, 2022a).

The principles of Russia that show imperialist ideas based on historical narratives of Russia's foreign policy identity are 1) 'the return' of Malorossiya, 2) 'the reunification' of Kyiv and Novgorod, 3) the rediscovery of Novorossiya (Ria Novosti, March 26, 2022a). The relevance of this memory to Russian foreign policy identity is that these historical events opened up the possibility for Russia to perceive itself as a superpower in the 20th century, particularly in the form of the USSR (Ria Novosti, March 26, 2022a). Therefore, Russia frames the independence of Ukraine due to the collapse of the USSR as a sad event and loss that restricted prospects for Russia to retain its great power status and build a 'great future' (Ria Novosti, March 26, 2022a). Ria Novosti makes the connection between past and present, interprets and frames the amalgamation of Russia and Ukraine in present days not only in a sense of importance for Russia's geopolitical perspective but primarily in 'a spiritual, metaphysical' sense (Ria Novosti, March 26, 2022a).

It is also observed that the Russian foreign policy identity glorifies the historical role of Russia and connects the Russian war in Ukraine with Victory Day. Russian identity is shown by the nostalgic mood of Vladimir Putin. The main narrative in the Russian President's speech – the interconnection between World War II and the war in Ukraine is discovered during his speech at the parade of the 9th of May, 2022 (1TV Channel, May 9, 2022).

Therefore, Vladimir Putin claimed:

'9 May 1945 is forever inscribed in world history as a triumph of our united Soviet people, its cohesion and spiritual power, an unparalleled feat at the front and in the rear… I am now addressing our Armed Forces and Donbas militias. You are fighting for the Motherland, for its future, so that no one forgets the lessons of World War II. So that there is no place in the world for executioners, punishers and Nazis' (1TV Channel, May 9, 2022).

**4.6 West as an evil**

The Western dimension frequently appears in the Russian media discourse and the attitudes of elites. RN's keywords search resulted in the construction of the West as an enemy, provocateur, and source of the war in Ukraine, international disorder, and a threat to Russia's security. The West in Ria Novosti is often used in the same line as NATO members, the EU, the UK, and the USA. Most of RN's articles and Putin's speeches that contain the concept 'West' have a negative connotation. Adjectives such as 'immoral, deceiving, hysteric, cruel, impudent', 'liar', and violator of international laws are used to describe with the West (RN, May 29, 2022a; RN, April 3, 2022; RN, February 24, 2022; RN, February 28, 2022; RN, March 26, 2022b).

According to Kremlin's narratives, the United States and NATO members have always used Ukraine as one of the instruments to contain Russia (RN, April 30, 2022a). Lavrov claimed that 'over the years, they have actively fueled anti-Russian sentiment there, forced Kyiv to make an artificial, false choice: either with the West or with Moscow' (RN, April 30, 2022a).

Moreover, the article claims:
'It was the collective West that first provoked and then supported the anti-constitutional coup d'etat in Kyiv in February 2014, and over the past years, the United States and its allies have done nothing to stop the intra-Ukrainian conflict, only pumping Kyiv with weapons and engaging in military development of Ukraine' (RN, April 30, 2022a).

The USA remains the main external enemy in Russian foreign policy, mostly used in terms of its great power status on the international stage with which Russia reveals its dissatisfaction and frustration (RN, March 26, 2022b). The USA is defined as the main actor who wants war with Russia and aims at destroying Russia by sponsoring the war in Ukraine. (RN, April 8, 2022). The United States is framed by the Kremlin as 'a de facto proxy participant in the

conflict in Ukraine' who 'cultivated Ukrainian neo-Nazi's ideology', provided it with arms, and 'currently support this creation of its child in every possible way' (RN, April 8, 2022).

The Kremlin narratives represent the USA as an immediate enemy who does not follow international laws because, as Medvedev claims, it thinks that it is 'the master of Earth' who defines the rules and solves global issues after the collapse of the Soviet Union (RN, March 26, 2022b). Thereby, Russia expresses its discontent with the USA's military actions in Yugoslavia, Iraq, and Afghanistan and the absence of assessments of these acts according to the international law context (RN, March 26, 2022b). However, later in June, Peskov attested that dialogue between Russia and America is necessary:

'Communication is necessary. In the future, we will have to communicate. America will not disappear, Europe will not disappear. But this will be communication solely based on mutual benefit' (RN, June 14, 2022). He added that new hopes are centered on these principles, 'but this is not yet a topic for the near future' (RN, June 14, 2022).

Additionally, Europe or the EU is represented as a manipulator, a liar who misrepresents the truth about the war in Ukraine (RN, February 24, 2022; RN, 2022, May 29). Moreover, Europe, similar to the USA, is described as the provocateur of the war in Ukraine and the one who nurtured the Kyiv regime (RN February 24, 2022; RN, 2022, May 29). Europe is demonized in the Kremlin narratives and has an intention and desire to strengthen Nazism and neocolonial ideology (RN, April 30, 2022b). Furthermore, the article asks rhetorical questions if 'Europe were grateful for the salvation and return of national statehood? Did the peoples of Europe really need freedom? Is it true that they were enslaved by Hitler?' (RN, April 30, 2022b).

*NATO's expansion*

NATO is frequently associated with the West, particularly with the USA in RN's articles. The repetitive narrative, represented mainly by Vladimir Putin is that NATO is the USA's instrument to achieve its geopolitical and foreign policy objectives and hegemonic position in the international order (RN, April 8, 2022; RN, May 16, 2022). Therefore, most of RN's reports frequently blame NATO as the main trigger of the war in Ukraine as result of expanding its alliance in the eastern direction (RN, May 16, 2022).

Russia's attitudes toward NATO within a moral normative context is raised by representing NATO's identity as the one which does not keep its 'promises' regarding the expansion of the military alliance and intervenes in other countries (RN, May 28, 2022). In contrast, Russia portrays itself as cooperative and positively motivated that was willing to work jointly on the security issues such as 'counter-terrorism, crisis management, non-proliferation, arms control and confidence-building measures, missile defense, military cooperation, and civil reforms' (RN, May 28, 2022).

### 4.7 Russia is a hero

Russian foreign policy identity in its attack on Ukraine is presented by Russian discourses in RN as a savior of the world from Nazism and immoral values (RN, April 3, 2022; RN, April 30, 2022c) Russia identifies itself as the last and the only country who preserved and defended the old values and traditions of historic Europe and 'old world' (RN, April 3, 2022). According to Russia, Europe by rejecting those values 'lost the fight for itself' (RN, April 3, 2022).

Russian identity is expressed as the hero who saved the West in the 20th century (RN, April 3, 2022; RN, April 30, 2022c). In this sense, Russian identity is not restricted only to being a hero in Ukraine or Europe. Rather, Russia represents itself as a savior in its messianic meaning globally. In one of the articles of Ria

Novosti, it is stated by Lavrov that Russia's special military operation is liberating the world from neo-colonial Western oppression described by racism and arrogant attitudes (RN, April 30, 2022c). Lavrov claims that

'Everyone has true freedom of choice, including ways to develop and participate in integration processes. Our special military operation in Ukraine also contributes to the process of freeing the world from the neo-colonial oppression of the West, which is heavily mixed with racism and an elitism attitude' (RN, April 30, 2022c).

Another title of Ria Novosti states 'Новая Россия-Новый Мир' ('New World-New Russia') (RN, May 7, 2022). It claims that 'We (Russia) need to proceed from the fact that to save the country, we will have to defeat the West - not only in Ukraine but in a global confrontation' (RN, May 7, 2022). Thus, Russia presents itself as a hero or norms changer of the world where by creating a new socio-political reality, Russia's messianism is capable of ending the world which supposedly is threatened by the Western values and Western-dominated international system.

### 4.8 Victimization of Russia and Russophobia

Interestingly, Russia uses hero vs victim identity interchangeably. Russia identifies itself as the one who suffered a lot in the wars because of the West and continues to suffer because of the Western powers, revealing Russian historical grievances (RN, April 30, 2022c; RN, March 26, 2022b; RN, May 7, 2022; RN, May 27, 2002a; RN, May 27, 2022b). However, at the same time, Russia portrays itself as the great power that can defeat threats coming from the West (RN, April 30, 2022c; RN, March 26, 2022b; RN, May 7, 2022).

After Europe, the US, the UK, and other countries imposed the package of sanctions as result for the Russian full-scale invasion (Al Jazeera, March 3, 2022), Russian identity perception from a supposed hero was being converted

to being a victim. The most frequent use of words and phrases are Russophobia, anti-Russian sanctions, hatred towards Russians, Russian culture, and Russian World (RN, May 27, 2022a; RN, May 14, 2022; RN, June 1, 2022; RN, March 2, 2022). The main message that the articles with the titles 'Russophobia' aim to distribute is that everything related to Russians is discriminated against and abolished by the West (RN, May 14, 2022). Furthermore, the Kremlin claims that the rights of Russians abroad, in the West, are violated and 'total Russophobia shocks with its savagery' (RN June 1, 2022).

Moreover, the West is accused of rejecting Russian culture:

'After they tried to cancel Russia economically, by introducing restrictions, and then politically, labeling it as an 'aggressor', as well as a 'strangler of freedoms and progress', today a new, but probably the most difficult task is on the agenda: Russia will be expelled from the space of world culture, consistently canceling the concerts of our musicians, ceasing to organize exhibitions of Russian artists…' (RN, March 2, 2022).

Russia perceives Russophobia as not only 'a military defeat' of Moscow in Ukraine by the Anglo-Saxons but the eradication of 'the Russian World' as an ideology, hence the views and culture of all Russians (RN, May 14, 2022). Another word used along with Russophobia is 'de-Russification' implying that the West wants to 'de-Russify through the abandonment of Russian common history, opposing the Little Russians to the Great Russians, and then eliminating the unity of the Russian people as such' (RN, May 14, 2022). The self-perception of Russia as a victim is explained by the discourse that the West is creating anti-Russian Ukraine and convincing the majority of the Ukrainian population that they are not a segment of the Russian World. Moreover, Russia implies that the West's goal now is to 'take on the Russians' in the Russian Federation (RN, May 14, 2022).

Another prevailing theme is of sanctions being part of the victimization narrative of Russia. Sanctions are perceived as part of the West's hatred towards

Russia rather than a rational measure against Russia's invasion of Ukraine. At the beginning before the invasion in February, Russia was claiming that it is not afraid of sanctions and penalties that the US, Britain, and the EU threatened Russia with, in case of Russian invasion, and as Ambassador of Russia to Sweden, Viktor Tatarintsev asserted, 'нам наплевать на санкции' (we do not care about sanctions') (Kommersant, February 13, 2022). However, later in the following months, the narrative changed toward victimization claiming that the West who imposes sanctions aims to 'eliminate Russia on the map', and restrict its economic development, especially directed towards poor citizens (RN, May 27, 2022). This showed that Russia is in fact afraid of sanctions and economic isolation.

### 4.9 China as a significant partner for a new multilateral world order

An important actor identified as a result of the review of RN's articles is China. Kremlin frequently mentions, tags, and cites China with the main message applied that China is on the side of Russia (RN, May 29, 2022b). China is represented as a partner of Russia to strengthen Kremlin narratives that Russia is innocent and to strengthen Russia's vision on multilateralism based on new world order. (RN, April 7, 2022; RN, May 29, 2022b)

Russia recurrently cites Chinese media outlets with the discourse that China thinks that the USA has the mentality of a Cold War with the purpose to divide and weaken Russia. According to Russian narratives, China states that more than thirty years have passed since the end of the Cold War, but Washington still pursues to 'explode ideological confrontation', generating 'the illusion of an imaginary enemy, from which it cannot get out' (RN, April 7, 2022).

Ria Novosti cited Chinee newspaper claiming that the escalation of the situation in Ukraine is 'a new trap set in the twenty-first century by the United States, a Cold War conspirator' who attempts to abolish Russia 'politically,

economically, culturally, and ideologically and control Europe', thereby preserve its 'absolute hegemony in the world' (RN, April 7, 2022).

Moreover, the article adds that 'once playing out this scenario in relation to the Soviet Union, Washington tries to repeat this scenario concerning modern Russia' (Ria Novosti, April 7, 2022). Thus, the article makes the parallel between the collapse of the Soviet Union and the current situation implying that the West wants to weaken Russia now as it did with the Soviet Union.

## Chapter 5. Interpretation and Analysis of Empirical Evidence

This chapter will respond to the main research questions through the analysis and interpretation of data findings based on the above-collected evidence from the Ria Novosti:
1) How is Russian foreign policy identity revealed in the discourse surrounding the invasion of Ukraine?
2) To what extent does the war in Ukraine demonstrate long-term identity patterns of Russian foreign policy?

*RQ 1: How is Russian foreign policy identity revealed in the discourse surrounding the invasion of Ukraine?*

### 5.1 Otherness and Imperialism

The first implication comprehended from analyzing data findings' results is that by using denazification and demilitarization concepts in its communication, Russian foreign policy is not just to prevent Nazism as it proposes in its official announcement but also to revise or transform Ukrainian identity. In this case, Russia's foreign policy identity is revealed as being driven to restrict Ukraine as an autonomous state. The war showed that Ukraine has a strong nation-state and a willingness to resist Russia's military invasions and Russia's imperialist

ideology. At the same time, Putin's disagreement with the reality that Ukrainians and Russians are two diverse nations revealed a return to 'a crisis of Russian national identity' (Kushnir, 2022: 7). As was discussed in the literature review, throughout history Russia lacked a proper nationalist consciousness which is revealed again these days (Rowley, 2000: 24). Thus, to compensate Russia's weak nationhood, Russia's authorities construct and interpret Ukrainian as 'an artificial anti-Russian entity that lacks its own civilizational content, an inferior constituent of an alien and alien civilization' (Ria Novosti, April 3, 2022).

Putin merely cannot admit or does not want to demonstrate that he acknowledges—that Ukrainians while epitomizing the "same nation" as Russians, can have dissimilar 'behavioral patterns' (Kushnir, 2022: 7). Therefore, empirical evidence shows that the basis of the construction of Russian foreign policy identity by Russian leadership is that it continues to misinterpret Ukraine and Ukrainians through myths and stereotypes of Ukraine as an 'artificial state' and Ukraine's Russian speakers as 'fraternal brothers' and Russians and Ukrainians as "odin narod" (one people) (Kuzio, 2019: 297).

Current political processes show that Ukraine constructs its identity based on democratic principles as it was also seen in Brzezinski's anticipation that characterized many differences between Russian and Ukrainian nations (Brzezinski, 1997: 15-17, cited in Kushnir, 2022: 6).

Russian foreign policy identity in terms of constructing Ukraine as subordinate to Russian identity and part of Russian culture failed as a result because it revealed that Ukraine has different political objectives, democratic norms, and is willing to integrate into Europe (Kuzio, 2019: 305-307). This reality triggered Russia's aggressive reaction as it understood that Ukraine's political trajectory is becoming dissimilar to Russia's and Ukraine-West relations are

strengthening. Thus, Russia uses other determinants such as history, and culture to remind about Russia's global interests, Russia's imperialistic and messianic roles, and justify the full invasion of Ukraine.

The main implication of President Vladimir Putin's rhetoric delivered on the 9th of May is Putin's attempt to justify Russia's unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the so-called liberation of Donetsk and Luhansk by utilizing the memory of the Soviet Union's defense against Nazi Germany. Russia commemorated the triumph over Nazi Germany in World War II. Although there are no military or offensive actions directed toward Russia in modern times, Putin was implying in his speech that Russia is defending the territory from possible invasions of the West in the same manner as if when the Soviet Union was defending Europe from Nazism.

Russia indeed had a significant role in the war against Nazi Germany, having lost the most lives in comparison with other participants in the war, and that war held the moral ground (Politico, 2022). However, this is just one of the few experiences in the last 100 years in which Russia acted morally and justifiably (Politico, 2022). The causal parallel that Putin makes with Nazi Germany is irrational - it is based on his idea that if Ukraine does not have pro-Russian sentiments or if it is pro-European, then it follows that it is Nazis. Therefore, data findings from Ria Novosti show that Russia repetitively refers to history and the past to justify its offensive actions in Ukraine even though the Great Patriotic War and the war in Ukraine have different causes and circumstances. Moreover, by raising the memory of Peter the Great, and comparing himself with Peter the Great, it appears that Putin's purposes are motivated by the project of imperial reestablishment which could theoretically extend to other territories that previously were parts of the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union. Thus, this is something that should activate alarms in all the states that occurred from the breakdown of the USSR (Marat, 2022a).

### 5.2 Messianism - Great Power Status - 'New World Order'

As for Russia's perception of itself as a hero and messianic role, three conclusions can be identified. First, Russia perceives itself as a great power and globally oriented actor who has resources, political and economic strength, and moral ground to save the world and humanity from Western aggression, Western influence, and neo-colonialism. Secondly, Russian foreign policy identity is not satisfied with Western-oriented international norms and US dominance in the world order. Thus, the idea that Russia truly has moral intentions of the so-called savior of the world is irrational. Instead, the analysis of results revealed that Russian identity is more frustrated with the current status-quo and prevailing liberal values and cultural aspects of the international system, where Russia's great power status and Russian perspective on security issues and the structure of the international system are not recognized. Therefore, Russian foreign policy identity perceives the war in Ukraine as the new chapter of a world order where Russia will become the center of a future multipolar world that will promote equality, right, mainly conservative values and norms, free from racism and discrimination.

Russian foreign policy's logical fallacy in terms of the West is that it is centered on the direct and immediate correlation between NATO's extension based on the inclusion of states voluntarily and Russia's security. In terms of portraying NATO as an immediate threat to Russian security, first, NATO is a collective defense organization that is based on mutual agreements of participants, hence the Russian idea that the USA is the instrument directed particularly against Russia does not have any pragmatic evidence (Mazarr, 2018; Baker, 2002). Statements of Russia are based on its illusions and anticipations regarding future and potential scenarios that NATO would attack Russia, or Europe wants the war with Russia. Secondly, based on international law on the sovereignty

principle, European countries have the right to decide if they wish to join NATO or not and define their foreign policy objectives (Mazarr, 2018: 10).

Moreover, as the findings show, Ukraine's cooperation with NATO was strengthened more as a result of the Russian invasion. Thus, Russia by attempting to prevent Ukraine from cooperation with NATO or becoming closer to the EU membership achieved the opposite results. Although NATO's expansion in eastward in the Baltic states is debatable, if it is the right decision or not even in the US and Western countries, Putin exploits the expansionism of the NATO narrative to blame NATO to rationalize interference in Ukraine and strengthen influence there (Mearshimer, 2014; Friedman, 2022; Person and McFaul, 2022: 18-27). Therefore, Putin's use of NATO to legitimize the invasion of Ukraine is not supported by any ample empirical evidence. Furthermore, it is also argued that NATO has been always a variable rather than the main reason (Person and McFaul, 2022: 18-24). In this case, Putin's interests in Ukraine are more than just prevention of NATO's expansion but a feeling about its great power status through preservation of its sphere of influence due to vulnerabilities related to the Western hierarchical position in the international security system. Even though argumentation about NATO's or the USA's intervention in other countries such as Yugoslavia, Kosovo, and intelligence failures in Iraq, for example, may be considered reasonable and legitimate arguments (Jervis, 2010: 123-155; Forsberg and Herd, 2015: 46-50), utilizing these factors as manipulative instruments to legitimize Russia's unprovoked attack on Ukraine is unjustifiable.

*RQ 2: To what extent does the war in Ukraine demonstrate long-term identity patterns of Russian Foreign Policy Identity?*

### 5.3 Russian World – Imperialism

If to make a parallel between the Russian NSS of 2015 and the current actions of Russia we can observe the pattern in Russian foreign policy identity in terms of threat construction that is characterized more by continuity rather than shift. For example, based on NSS (2015) Kremlin determines the Western involvement in Ukraine's political course as unfavorable conditions for Russian security, which splits the Ukrainian people and causes conflicts (NSS 2015). Thus, if to refer to the existing official Russian documents on security strategy, it is clear that Russian foreign policy identity has always been centered on tactical geopolitical interests in influencing the former Soviet Union countries and resisting Western involvement there (NSS 2015). This is because the distancing of former Soviet countries touches on insecurities of Russian identity in terms of its perspective about Russia's unique role in the world. Thus, the long-term pattern of the Russian foreign identity – strengthening the imperial power of Russia based on the Russian world concept including Russian culture, Russian language, glorification of history, and unique socio-historical and political role of Russia in the post-Soviet space was revealed.

If to compare Russian foreign policy identity in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea and with the recent Russian war, we can see the habitual behavior of Russia. In both behaviors, Russia is not happy about Ukraine having a divergent, more European, and democratic identity. In 2014, Vladimir Putin annexed Crimea by framing it as a protection of ethnic Russians from 'far-right extremists' who, according to Russian discourses, overthrew pro-Russian president Yanukovych (Zhurzhenko, 2014: 257; Clinton, 2022). Putin announced recognition of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics using the same protection of the Russians narrative which was discussed in the literature review. Russia has been supporting separatists in eastern Ukraine since 2014 (Kuzio, 2019; Goode, February 22, 2022). A similar narrative was used in the Georgian war in 2008 (Nygren, 2010: 89; Cohen, 2018; Military Doctrine, 2010; Person and McFaul, 2022).

Also, if to refer to the literature review section and add the observation of the current war, the imperialistic pattern is confirmed once more, where Russian President Vladimir Putin not for the first time asserted that Ukraine is not a legitimate country while stressing that Ukrainians and Russians are the same people. However, the only difference is that in comparison with the 2014 Euromaidan events where protests triggered Russian offensive actions, the recent escalation had no immediate trigger in Ukrainian domestic politics (Zhurzhenko, 2014, 2022). NATO as a security threat has been in Russia's foreign policy identity since it started expanding eastward (Forsberg and Herd, 2015). Nevertheless, based on the findings, Russia is more concerned about the preservation of its hegemonic role in the Near Abroad as part of the Russian World idea which includes traditional values, Russian language, Russian culture, so-called protection of Russian compatriots, as in turn strengthens Russia's national identity and self-importance in the global affairs. However, there is no clear analytical definition seen in the findings on what exactly Russia means by Russian values apart from highlighting its exclusiveness and resistance to Western values (RN, May 27, 2022a; RN, May 14, 2022; RN, June 1, 2022; RN, March 2, 202)

### 5.4 West vs Russia – Others vs Innocent Russia

The evolution of Russia-West relations has periods of more cooperation where the West was not defined as *Other* to more hostile relations where the West is an enemy to Russia's *Self*. The war in Ukraine revealed that Russian foreign policy identity is focusing on external threats while perceiving the West meaning most NATO members, the US as external threats. Thus, this confirms that the same political course of the second term of Vladimir Putin's presidency continues. As for US-Russia relations, the antagonistic attitude of Russia towards the US and inimical relations between Russia and the US are not new,

characterized by Cold War's ideological confrontation but with debatable differences in terms of the more Western-oriented foreign policy of the Yeltsin period, and ups and downs of post-Cold War relationships (Antczak, 2018; Forsberg and Herd, 2015; Person and McFaul, 2022; Rotaru, 2020). On the other hand, currently, US and Russia entered a more complicated phase of confrontation. Furthermore, Russia's foreign policy identity is getting more aggressive by strengthening the nexus of Russia's cultural assertion, military capabilities, conventional warfare ideas, and operationalization of modern technological advances.

Russian foreign policy in terms of Europe's identity shows continuity rather than change considering both Putin's as well as Medvedev's presidencies (Antczak, 2018; Haas, 2010; Kanet, 2021; Tsygankov, 2011). Europe has often been considered different based on the belief that Russia has unique traditional values different from Europe (Kanet, 2021; Samokhanov, 2018). Therefore, Russia criticizes the new Europe as opposed to Europe in the 1960s. According to Russia, current Europe is not 'a True Europe' (Samokhanov, 2018: 809). This in turn explains why Russia labels sanctions and security measures of Europe and other states as Russophobic that rejects Russian culture and the Russian way of living. Russia does not discuss what caused sanctions but why Europe hates Russia based on culture, values, and traditions. Russia fuses discrimination or hatred with sanctions without differentiating pragmatic, and ethical reasons of sanction, and rational response to aggression from real racism. Another observation made is that the EU demonstrated unanimity by imposing sanctions and revealing mutual solidarity with Ukraine. This has presented a new impetus for strengthening the EU foreign policy cooperation while at the same time revealing the increase of Russian threat perception towards the EU.

### 5.5 China- Russia - A Multipolar World Order

Furthermore, reference to China is a tactic of Russia to demonstrate that Russia is supported by a powerful state and that Russia is not alone in the fight with the West. Thus, it is clear that China is perceived if not as a friend but as a strategic partner in Russian foreign policy identity, not only in pragmatic ways but also in the normative sense. Sino-Russia relations are a prolongation of already established collaboration based on a shared geopolitical idea of multipolarity, as well as, economic cooperation. This also confirmed a long-term strategy to confront Western democracy, particularly after the 2014 event in Ukraine (Bolt, 2014; Feng, 2022; Korolev, 2022; Yoder, 2022). Putin's regime does not appear to identify any other options apart from Russia's 'no limits partnership with China' (Rumer and Sokolsky, 2022: 1; Kendall-Taylor and Shullman, 2022) Furthermore, even in case of Putin's disappearance from the leadership position in Russia, an inheritor regime would have prevailing 'economic, geopolitical, demographic, and military-strategic' reasons to sustain this partnership (Rumer and Sokolsky, 2022:1).

To conclude, according to data findings and empirical evidence collected from RIA Novosti, Russia's identity construction is controversial in a way that on the one hand, it portrays itself as both an innocent victim whom Western countries hate, discriminate, and does not acknowledge Russia's role in history and peace that Russia brought, and on the other hand, Russia narrates itself as a determined hero who defends the world from Nazism and establishes so-called fair principles and new structure of the international order.

Based on empirical evidence on the war in Ukraine, it appears that the main fundament of Russian foreign policy identity - main topics, security and threat perceptions, and categorization into friendly and non-friendly social actors have not changed substantially. The skeleton of Russian foreign policy identity is stable and presented by continuous patterns– it consists of Russian self-identification in terms of its unique imperialistic historical and special

hegemonic role in global affairs, especially in the post-Soviet space or Russian World, hostile Russia-West relations, discontent with the NATO expansion, negative attitudes towards the Western norms of the current socio-political order, and the US leadership there. The only observable difference is that the threat perception of Russia towards the West has intensified, but also implies double standards in terms of if Russia is willing to cooperate or not. It seems now that the previously built. interaction, although not ideal, is annulled for the indefinite period. Thus, it is not explicitly clear if and how Russia-West interaction will evolve in the future.

## Chapter 6. Theoretical and Practical Implications of Data Findings

In this chapter the researcher will apply a constructivism theory to Russian foreign policy identity, focusing mainly on a strategic culture theory. Secondly, the researcher will link theoretical implications and the literature review with results and analysis of empirical evidence. The chapter will analyze deeply the interrelation between themes identified through empirical evidence and the literature review, which in turn helps understand the long-term patterns of Russian behavior and practical implications.

### 6.1 Knowledge and Truth in Russian Theory of Strategic Culture: Embedded and Hidden Imperialism

The main argument achieved based on the analysis of empirical evidence is that Russia's foreign policy identity revealed in the war with Ukraine is founded on long-established patterns, identified as follows: imperialism hidden by Russia's constructed messianic role and the Russian World idea, victimization of Russia by constructing West as an enemy, and Russia's vision on a new multilateral order. Therefore, it is just a renewed round of Russia's foreign policy practices but perhaps with more determined assertive political, and forceful behavior. Therefore, after observation of Russian narratives and applying the case study

with thematic discourse analysis and secondary sources, the insight is that the foreign policy identity of Russia is a prolongation of already existing and entrenched Russia's strategic culture based on the construction of knowledge and truth.

According to the constructivist vision discussed in the literature section of this study, Russia does not only act based on physical capabilities or material gains but also on normative understandings. Norms play an essential role in the social identity of Russia and norms assign meanings and contents to its national interests. In this sense, Russia's interaction with other countries is driven not merely by cost-benefit analysis but by Russia's existing culture, values, and ideas (Adler, 2013). The way how people apply norms to the world is relevant to states where they apply norms to world politics (Hopf, 1998; Adler, 2013). The Russian invasion of Ukraine, as was the case with the annexation of Crimea, is a significant case to test and characterize the current Russian official identity and norms discourse (Teper, 2016: 376). Any unprovoked attack on the other state's territory and borders induces the requirement to explicate and legitimize this action, and by this means underlines identity construction by restating an already existing 'definition', or by 'fostering its reformulation and reconfiguration' (Teper, 2016: 376).

Teper (2016) in his study identified that investigation of Russia's TV channels and media revealed that domestically the Kremlin framed annexation of Crimea in 'national terminology', which aimed at the reunification the Russian nation, hence merging Crimea and Russia into one state. The unification concept of Russia in annexation of Crimea was based on the shift from the state as the main referent object to nation for constructing 'Russianness' (Teper, 2016: 92). The knowledge about Russian identity previously was formulated based on its 'greatness of status' (Teper, 2016: 392). However, during the Ukrainian crisis, Russia also emphasized its moral duty to defend 'fellow *Russkiye'* (Russians)

beyond its state borders and the necessity to ‘reunify the divided *Russkiy* nation’ (Teper, 2016: 392). Thus, Russia was uniquely framed as ‘nation–state of *Russkiye* and the champion of the Russian national cause’ (Teper, 2016: 392).

If applying a constructivist theory, particularly in its epistemological sense (Hopf, 1998; Walter, 2013), the relationship between being not pro-Russian, therefore, Nazis is one of the knowledge that Putin tries to spread and present to Russia’s domestic audience. The Soviet Union and Russia’s role in fighting Nazism in World War II are important historical components of Russian identity. According to the analysis of empirical evidence collected from Russian state-owned media Ria Novosti and previous studies on Russian strategic culture (Antczak, 2018), an important insight that can be drawn is that knowledge and truth about Russian foreign policy identity are centered more on the perception of the past than the present. Memories play an important role in Russia’s communication technique while constructing the truth based on the portrayal of Russia as a blameless actor. Since the past is not that just objectively existing as a fact, it is disposed to ‘societal negotiations’ (Kalinina and Menke, 2016: 60). Given the diversity of media and their overload in everyday life, people’s memories are increasingly intervened in online media narratives. Thus, in the case of Russia, the media outlets’ role is to create, negotiate, and constitute knowledge about the past and history, which in turn lead to a strengthening of the current domestic and foreign policy of Russia (Kalinina and Menke, 2016). In the war with Ukraine, by emphasizing particularly the Soviet Union’s contributions to international peace, Putin is not only glorifying Russia’s achievements but expanding and exploiting the past as part of its contemporary imperialistic foreign policy strategy in Ukraine.

Putin’s “denazification” in Ukraine is a cipher word for regime transformation and preservation of Russian civilization as part of the Russian World idea and strengthening Russia’s great power status based on antidemocratic alteration

(Person and McFaul, 2022). Losing control over Ukraine, thereby the development of more Europe-oriented course in Ukraine will undermine Putin's so-called messianic mission and Russian strategic culture that imply global imperialistic objectives.

Melancholic nostalgia serves as a political instrument of Russia's grand strategy to create historically shared emotion to institutionalize the imperialist policies that Putin chooses (Kalinina and Menke, 2016). Moreover, nostalgia helps to merge 'myths of defeat' and 'heroism' by offering an 'emotional' connection between 'suffering and glory' in Russian identity (Kalinina and Menke, 2016: 63). This in turn was used as a tool by Putin in the war with Ukraine for creation of collective knowledge, mutual understanding, patriotic sentiments, and approval from the nation.

As it was found out by Marat (2022b), even after Russia committed the massacre in Bucha and destroyed Mariupol, many in Russia remain supportive of the war in Ukraine. Despite the Western sanctions, economic shortages, isolation from the outer world, most Russian citizens admit Putin's rhetoric of 'denazification' and 'demilitarization' of Ukraine. (Marat, 2022b; Parker, 2022). Survey findings conducted by London School of Economics (LSE) scholars show that when Russian citizens, seemingly more liberal, were directly asked, 68% responded that they supported the war in Ukraine (Chapkovski and Schaub, April 6, 2022; Kizlova and Norris, 2022). Interestingly, the experiments of LSE found that 15% of 68% of Russian respondents said that they supported the war in Ukraine out of fear and risks, hiding their true attitudes (Chapkovski and Schaub, April 6, 2022). Yet 53% who support the war is still a substantial part. Moreover, the fact that the more liberal part of Russia's population does not reveal their truthful opinions against the war in Ukraine even when given a chance to do so, and just accepts Putin's unjustifiable narratives and constructed

truth about the war and aggressive actions toward Ukraine is worrying (Chapkovski and Schaub, April 6, 2022).

This is also explained by communicative action tools of Putin's strategic culture that aims at creating the imaginative truth based on the identification of Russia's roles both as a hero and a victim. In Putin's opinion, Russia has always been a victim of foreign antagonism, courageously deterring aggressors and foreign efforts to destroy Russia. Some examples he frequently uses involve 'the 1612 Polish-Lithuanian occupation of Russia', the annexations of 'Charles XII of Sweden in 1708–9 and Napoleon in 1812, the Crimean War, and Hitler's Operation Barbarossa in 1941' (Frost, 2022). Therefore, to institutionalize collective beliefs and justify the invasion of Ukraine, Russia's tactic is the glorification of Russia through the heroic achievements of Russia in the past and concurrently, the creation of knowledge that there are antagonist attitudes towards Russia (Antczak, 2018). This in turn creates a shared understanding, especially between Russian citizens and Putin's decisions regarding the invasion of Ukraine. Through selective concepts such as changing the war concept to a special military operation, and imperial ideology to the Russian world, Putin manipulates the public to gain trust and social legitimacy for his aggressive history-based offensive actions and attack on Ukraine.

The interesting aspect drawn from this Russia's war narrative is that Russia either romanticizes the past by accentuating glorified Soviet Union's history of Russia as being betrayed or suffering without acknowledging or discussing Russia's negative actions in the past or Russia's failures within a Soviet system, disregarding its colonialism-based identity (Marat, 2022b; Clunan 2009). As it was described by Ivakhnenko (2006) the period of almost seventy years of the Soviet Union's imperial regime from 1922 to 1991 can be marked 'hard' (Ivakhnenko, 2006: 605). Russian strategic culture tends to keep very particular 'historical memory', and memorizes merely 'what is preferred' (Etkind, 2004,

cited in Antczak, 2018: 229). Based on the historical aspect and imperial attitudes of Russia, it seems that one of the reasons why Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022 and is obsessed with the post-Soviet space is because colonialization discourses and collective memory of taking back the lost territories inherited during the Soviet Union are still appearing as the consequences in the present days (Ivakhnenko, 2006; Pain, 2016; Rieber, 1994; Rowley, 2000). Following this logic, Russia's strategic culture returned back to the Soviet Union's origins in terms of attitudes to the outside world (Kanet, 2022).

The security strategic culture of Russia within the Russian foreign policy identity has always been focused on geopolitical objectives in controlling the former Soviet Union countries, especially Near Abroad (Antczak, 2018; Nygren, 2010; Rukavishnikov, 2010; Rumer and Sokolsky, 2020). Building the argument on previous studies (O'Loughlin, Gerard Toal and Vladimir Koloso, 2016; Rukavishnikov, 2010; Zhurzhenko, 2014) and the evidence in the current case study on the war in Ukraine, Russia claims to defend the Russian people abroad without distinguishing between Russian people within its Russian nation and those who do not associate themselves with Russia anymore. For Russian identity, all states which are historically connected to Russia or ethnically Russian people living in other post-Soviet countries belong to Russia and constitute the Russian world (Rukavishnikov, 2010; Zhurzhenko, 2014). Backing to the literature review, during the colonialization centuries, Russia did not have enough resources to contribute to and control its colonized territories to the extent Russia wished (Ivakhnenko: 612). Therefore, it seems that now this unfulfilled desire of Russia along with Russia's historical grievances since tsarist times emerge as a consequence for the post-Soviet space. Russia believes that smaller states which were in the past associated with the Russian empire, still need Russia, even though they are now independent countries, which, as Ukraine showed, do not need the Russian hegemony in the region and wish to develop their political and social paths autonomously.

### 6.2 Russian Social Values and Domestic Political Culture's confrontation with 'other' Western culture

As it is explained in strategic culture theory's studies, strategic culture is a steady factor determining the character of security policies, and does not perform once entirely designed (Antczak, 2018) Instead, it is produced through the exercise of leadership, as a reaction to the external security threats and the effect of domestic politics (Antczak, 2018: 224). Similar to the Soviet Union period but before Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms (1985-1991), Russian political culture currently is characterized by its determined, almost single ruling elite that asserts to embody a grander replacement of liberal democracy (Fish, 2017; Marangé, 2019). The political system of Russia is based on unconstrained one-man ruling logic and the removal of institutions, parties, and individuals apart from president as autonomous political actors (Fish, 2017). Domestic cultural elements of Russian society shape Russia's identity and foreign policies (Leszczenko and Tarnavska, 2021). Excluding political actors, especially those who hold liberal values are common in Russia's political culture (Leszczenko and Tarnavska, 2021; Fish, 2017). Thus, the authoritarian regime is entrenched in the culture of Russia as the main path for development, affecting social values and norms, leading eventually to support of Putin's offensive policies and acceptance of the war in Ukraine by Russian citizens.

Anna Antczak argues that Russia's strategic culture is defined through its robust history of 'authoritarian models' due to the need to rule over the vast territory populated by diverse nations, which could be arranged only by 'strong authority' (Antczak, 2018: 232). However, the war in Ukraine shows that 'Putinism' is a concept that represents the current authoritarian political culture in Russia and imperialist strategic culture, as he is the chief man who determines norms, values, and national interests for Russia (Fish, 2021: 68). Furthermore, as the results of analysis of the war in Ukraine and existing studies show, Russian culture meets with its conservatism in the practice of resisting what

Russian leaders call the expansion of immoral liberalism (Edenborg, 2017; Zhuravlev, 2018; NSS, 2021). Immoral liberalism for Russian culture includes issues that oppose Russian spiritual and moral values, traditional family values, appreciation of history, 'authoritarianism, patriotism', collectivism, and the Orthodox Church (Edenborg, 2017; Zhuravlev, 2018; NSS, 2021). For example, in 2013 Russia adopted a law on anti-propaganda of same-sex relations among minors (Tass, June 30, 2013). The ongoing conservative course in Russia is narrated as an international project - Russia is invented and portrayed as a directing light for persons all over the world who are concerned about what is measured to be a closure of traditional family values (Edenborg, 2017). Indicative of the anti-Western narrative, the Russian narrative in state-owned media operationalized LGBT rights in Europe as evidence of its moral breakdown (Edenborg, 2017).

Opposing liberal, Western values has a deeper explanation: the homophobic values that Russian narratives try to entrench reflect a 'civilizational choice', demonstrating that Russia will not imitate the Western model of modernity (Edenborg, 2017: 90). The war in Ukraine confirmed the continuation of Russian confrontation with Western modernity and civilization, presenting Russia as the savior. In this sense, Russian foreign policy identity tries to eradicate values associated with Western culture at all levels, political as well as in daily lives based on conservative family institutions and social aspects of lives, showing that Russia is different from the Western culture because it has moral values. Therefore, the modern wave of political exclusion of minorities or people, not only LGBTIQ representatives but rather people with different or liberal values in Russia, should be understood from 'a global geopolitical perspective' in which non-conservative choices are linked with "Western modernity" and hence, reveals 'clash of civilizations' narratives (Edenborg, 2017: 91).

An interesting insight is that Russian civilization and Russian values are not dominant themes in previous official foreign policy discourses of 2013 and 2016 (FP, 2013, 2016). However, the new NSS 2021 defines prominent spheres of national security: 'preservation of the Russian people and development of human capital, state defense, state, and public security, information security, economic security, technological and scientific development, ecological security and rational use of natural resources, preservation of traditional spiritual and moral, values, culture, and historical memory, as well as strategic stability and mutually beneficial multilateral cooperation' (NSS, 2021: 9). Therefore, in comparison with the earlier 2015 NSS and FP of 2013 and 2016, two new significances have been determined in NSS 2021- 'information security and protection of traditional values, culture, and historical memory' (NSS, 2021: 9). Thus, entrenched Russian values and culture with anti-Western logic represent continuity in the war with Ukraine being important components of Russian foreign policy identity. Putin emphasizes that

'In fact, until recently, attempts to use us in their own interests, destroy our traditional values and impose on us their pseudo-values that would corrode us, our people from the inside have not stopped, those attitudes that they are already aggressively planting in their countries and which directly lead to degradation and degeneration, because they contradict the very nature of man. It can't happen, no one has ever done it. It won't work now either' (Kremlin.ru, 24 February, 2022).

### 6.3 Is the End of a Unipolar World an ultimate goal of Russian Foreign Policy Identity?

The war in Ukraine revealed that the ultimate strategic culture of Russia is based on its great power status and hence, the prevention of perceived threats to its status. Perception itself as a great power and recognition from the outer world as such is in turn a reflection of Russia's dissatisfaction with Western hegemony, especially the USA's dominance. According to Hopf, Russian foreign policy identity related to its great power status or influence is defined through interacting with other states (1998: 173). The channels of norms and

experiences affect Russia's relationship with and understanding of other countries (Hopf: 1998).

Based on Adler's (2008, 2013), as well as Adler and Pouliot's (2011) theories of constructivism, who incorporated discursive, constructed social norms and ideas into material and practical situations, practices play an influential role in Putin's invasion of Ukraine. Practices, in this case, mean that signals and acts related to Ukraine such as closer political, cultural, and social integration with the EU, NATO's expansion strengthened Putin's decision to invade Ukraine. As it was discussed in the theoretical framework chapter, subjective and normative factors affect the decision maker's choice of a respective strategy based on his association of identities with certain situations. Thus, Russian strategy concerning the war in Ukraine is linked to several *Other* identities of the West – the EU, NATO, USA, and this war has been associated with situations that Russia had experienced with the collective West in the past. Identifying and confronting the West as 'other' is vital for the construction of the Russian 'self' (Siddi, 2012: 2; Samokhvalov, 2018: 793). 'Otherness' component in Russia's strategic culture is used to recognize the action and 'being recognized by others' which is significant for the self-perception of Russia as a great power (Greenhill, 2008: 345). Moreover, using the 'other' concept helps Putin to create a single 'collective identity' among Russians (Greenhill, 2008: 345).

One of the perspectives of social constructivists, underlining the role of status, has claimed that 'Russia is not a revisionist power seeking to challenge the United States and the West or create a non-Western international order' (Clunan 2009: 220; Allison, 2020: 979). According to this view, Russia expects to connect with the West but in a way that permits its leaders to preserve 'national self-esteem in the eyes of Russian political elites, primarily through Russia's involvement in the management of global affairs' (Clunan 2009: 220; Allison,

2020: 979). However, findings revealed that the means through which Russia aims to achieve this preservation of national esteem as a global actor is by challenging Western dominance, particularly the USA. Thus, the war in Ukraine is defined by Putin's strategic culture to prevent Ukrainian identity from distancing itself from Russian identity as it, in turn, triggers Russia's practices with the West based on its either personal experience with the West or observation of West's actions in other countries. Therefore, using practices of the West in the international system, Russia presents itself as an alternative actor, which discloses Russian identity perception as a great power who can amend supposedly Western-oriented international system.

Although Russian foreign policy is affected by its internal political and cultural principles, the US's strategy (Sokolsky and Rumer, 2020: 2-6; Biden, 2021) where it also views Russia as a threat and at the same time does not accept Russia as it is and does not recognize Russia's role in global affairs to the extent that Russia expects, have affected Russia's strategic culture (Kanet, 2022; Rumer and Sokolsky, 2019; Biden, 2021) Therefore, the construction of each other's roles in negative terms in both strategies of Russia and the USA is reciprocal due to accrued grievances and opposing norms regarding the world order on both flanks (Sokolsky and Rumer, 2020). In both grand strategies, the US and Russia see each other as potential external threats. According to the US's perspective, the current world order is bipolar with the US and China being superpowers, while Kremlin has preferred a multipolar structure of global power since the proclamation of the Primakov doctrine in the middle of the 90s (Sokolsky and Rumer, 2020: 4). Thus, it is possible that such a perspective could stimulate Moscow to undertake offensive actions in Ukraine due to the desire for being recognized as a major power by the US specifically, but obviously not justifiable (Mazloomi et al., 2018: 494). In this sense, the two will continue being 'strategic competitors' (Sokolsky and Rumer, 2020: 6) Moreover, Russia

does not agree with the US's idea that NATO is 'the only legitimate security organization for Europe and Eurasia' (Rumer and Sokolsky, 2019: 1).

Although Russian elites intensely confronted NATO's expansion eastward from the 1990s, in the beginning they did not resist former Soviet Union states joining the European Union (Antczak, 2018; Samokhanov, 2018; Kanet, 2020). The period of Russia's relatively softer security approach in comparison to this period can be explained by the rising threats to global security, particularly prospects of terroristic attacks, internal political, social, and economic problems of Russia, hence the insufficiency of Russia's great power (NSS, 2009; NSS, 2015; Kanet, 2020; Tsygankov, 2011). However, non-hostile relations shifted to hostile attitudes of Russia towards the West when by the early 2000s, Russia realized that not only would post-communist countries' EU memberships deteriorate into Russian' markets for exports', but it was the share of a more far-reaching Western economic, political, as well as 'social approach' to incorporate East European countries into the 'Western order' and, therefore, weakening Moscow's long-term objectives in a region affiliated with Russian identity and great power status (Kanet, 2020: 39; Antczak, 2018).

Even though Russian approach and policies toward the West shifted specifically after Putin came to the presidency, this alteration in strategic culture was, on the one hand, a result of the Bush administration's one-sided judgment to invade Iraq in 2003 and other Western actions (Kanet, 2020: 38). These decisions comprised the enlargement of both NATO and the EU eastward, the initiative of the United States to install 'an anti-missile system in Poland and the Czech Republic', the EU's vow to a new 'neighborhood policy', and support of the West for the 'color revolutions' that contested and overthrew Moscow's supporters in Kyiv, Tbilisi and Bishkek while groups who were attracted to closer relations with the West came to power (Kanet, 2020: 38).

The conclusion about *Others* identities in Russia's strategic culture and the war in Ukraine is that Russia continuously exploits Western political experiences/initiatives, especially related to the integration of Ukraine into European security architecture, and 'ending the unipolar world' narrative to justify its offensive foreign policy in Ukraine, caused by Russia's perception as a great/imperial power (Kottasová, Pokharel, and Gigova, 2022; RN, March 26, 2022b). Therefore, the main interest of Russia is to keep control over the post-Soviet space, as it secures Russia's perception of itself as a great power, at the same time it preserves Russia's non-democratic political system and mitigates Russia's threat perceptions. Thus, the end of the unipolar end is rather the logical consequence when Russia's main strategic interests in terms of the hegemonic role in the post-Soviet space are strengthened. In other words, Russia is still trapped in the imperialistic project that former Soviet Union countries, including Ukraine, are parts of Russia and cannot move toward the Western direction.

### 6.4 China-Russia identities cooperation and force multiplier - a threat to Europe and international security?

Analysis of the war in Ukraine revealed that Russia is more confident now that it is not the only country aiming at great power status who share similar geopolitical visions. There is China. China-Russia relations changed from being Cold War rivalries to partners in the 21st century (Feng, 2022; Yoder, 2022). The war in Ukraine proved one more time that Russia relies on China as a like-minded partner. Thus, Russia's cooperation and pragmatic friendship with China are secured. Although Russia and China share a common negative attitude towards the USA's hegemony, the economic growth of China and a lack of other stable shared interests create rational concerns in the Russian strategic community (Haynes, 2022; Maizland, June 14, 2022; Sokolsky and Rumer, May 2018). Nevertheless, those rationales seem to have a petite effect on Russian policy making and decisions (Kendall-Taylor and Shullman, 2022;

Rumer and Sokolsky, 2022). Furthermore, a common view on international order, 'illiberal regime type' of the two countries so far makes cooperation more stable unless American hegemony declines (Yoder, 2022; 4; Haynes, 2022).

Russian foreign policy identity is particularly dependent on Chinese partnership because an antagonistic rapport with China would add the additional strong *Other* identity in Russian foreign policy which put Russia against two great powers in 'two widely separated geographic theaters' (Rumer and Sokolsky, 2022: 1; Korolev, 2022). Therefore, the war in Ukraine has secured the Russian-Chinese strategic partnership for the anticipated future. Moreover, the attack on Ukraine reveals the supremacy of Europe and the insignificance of Asia, except China, in Russian strategic rationale (Rumer and Sokolsky, May 2022).

Russia-China partnership is not just cooperation as with other countries but it is cemented on a set of articulate, complementary, and strategically well-thought justifications (Korolev, 2022; Yoder, 2022). The war in Ukraine opened new challenges for the USA, European states, and the international community in general to confront Russian aggression because Russia has China on its side, and as an analysis of Chinese opinions cited in Ria Novosti shows, Russia and China's strategic culture share at least two common goals: preservation of non-democratic regime and strengthening multipolar world. Therefore, the threat is particularly in terms of instruments and resources that Russia and China might use or even multiply to achieve their interests of establishing multilateralism, especially when universal norms are not desirable to practice for Russia and China.

Moreover, the war in Ukraine has raised discussions about the potential invasion of Taiwan by China and broader inferences from it for the world (Lau, 2022; Liu, 2022). Discussions have mostly two main points on this theme. First, Russia's military actions in Ukraine intensified threat perceptions and fears that

the Chinese president, Xi Jinping, might earnestly consider and plan the invasion of Taiwan, similar to Putin (Bluth and Greene, 2022). China has repetitively called for 'peaceful reunification with Taiwan', nevertheless, it also mentioned capturing the place forcefully as an alternative (Lau, 2022). There's no well-defined timeline about when the Chinese invasion of Taiwan may happen, but U.S. authorities before the Ukraine war discussed that this might happen in the next six to ten years (Lau, 2022). 'Strategic ambiguity' has been the foundational principle that has channeled US-Taiwan relationships for years (Liu, 2021). After the war in Ukraine, the Biden administration appears to be speculating about a stronger tactic toward its support for Taiwan (Cogan, 2022).

The U.S. agreement to make protection articles and 'defense services' in the quantity as might be sufficient to empower Taiwan to preserve an adequate 'self-defense capability" as a part of its Taiwan Relations Act agreement shows the willingness to defend Taiwan. (Shattuck, 2022) But not necessarily by the military response (Shattuck, 2022). Thus, the question of how the defense of Taiwan by the US would be operationalized is open.

Second, China learned from Russia's mistake in Ukraine and how extremely risky it can be to invade followed by military confrontation, strategic difficulties in planning military operations, economic sanctions, and isolation (Scobell and Stevenson-Yang, 2022). An invasion of Taiwan is different from the invasion of Ukraine and requires careful military planning (Scobell and Stevenson-Yang, 2022). Thus, this view does not anticipate the invasion of Taiwan and does not support Ukraine vs Taiwan analogy because Chinese behavior is different from Russia since historically China was not involved in major interventions in other countries apart from its invasion of Vietnam in 1979 (Scobell and Stevenson-Yang, 2022). Moreover, by comparison, China has one official military base in Djibouti while Russia has 20 in other territories (Scobell and Stevenson-Yang, 2022).

However, the conclusion based on the war in Ukraine is that ignorance of and passiveness in relation to even not the highly likely potential of future invasions is extremely dangerous. Despite the factors pointing to the unlikeliness of China's invasion of the island, the war in Ukraine raised important discussions and concerns regarding China's growing power, potential behavior, and a new wave of Russia-China partnership, which can strengthen Russia's imperialistic policies, and create uncertainty about the approach that the USA and European states should choose in response.

**Conclusion and Future Implications**

Russian foreign policy identity reflected through the Russian discourse surrounding the war with Ukraine in Ria Novosti confirmed Russia's perception of itself as an imperial power based on its constructed messianic role. At the same time, this thesis confirms that Russian foreign policy identity has a continuous strategic culture throughout history based on great power/imperial goals, non-democratic values, and demonization of the West.

Otherness is a continuous concept in Russian identity that portrays the West as evil and immoral while presenting Russia as a victim and a hero at the same time. By promoting the Russian world idea, Russia reveals its imperialist sentiments and long-term goal to establish a new multilateral order. Russia's strategic culture is based on Russia's self-perception of its unique historical, political, moral, and cultural role globally, particularly utilizing ties with the post-Soviet space. Therefore, Russian discourse resists social, cultural, and political cooperation in the post-Soviet space with Europe, especially with NATO members, and the USA.

Analysis of empirical evidence shows that interpretation of history and creating collective memory are tools of president Putin to constitute knowledge and truth

about Russian foreign policy identity in terms of Russian great power status and the narrated innocent nature of Russia. Russia by referring to history reveals that it misses the past civilization and its foreign policy identity did not adapt to the current realities of international order. Moreover, the politicization of history is a tool of Russia to persuade the domestic public of the necessity of a special operation in Ukraine and at the same time remind the world about Russia's identified sphere of influence in the former Soviet Union countries. By creating collective memory, Putin communicates with the Russians to gain social legitimacy and create a subjective reality on how the international system should operate.

Data findings reveal that Russia has been repetitively claiming that it does not agree to adjust itself to the current norms of the international system as Russia is different from Europe politically, culturally, and spiritually and that NATO members, Europe, and the US must accept Russia as it is and not dictate the rules and norms according to which Russia should live. Thus, since being a part of the European security architecture requires a common understanding and democratic values, there is a low chance that Russia-West relations will improve in the near future, as long as NATO keeps expanding eastward, the EU continues getting closer to the former Soviet Union countries and encouraging democracy there, and Russia keeps prioritizing the past, imperialist ambitions, futuristic and messianic ideas while struggling with historical grievances.

The war in Ukraine is just a renewed round of Russia's foreign policy practices but perhaps with more determined assertive political and forceful behavior. The paradox is however if Russian strategic culture and Russian foreign policy identity are stable with no definite shifts and Russian behavior has patterns, hence predictable, why could not the international community and the West prevent the war in Ukraine? What mistakes or miscalculations did we do and what lessons were learned from the war in Ukraine? Although the US

intelligence predicted the war in Ukraine, NATO members, and US could not directly intervene as it would escalate the war even worse and even trigger the possibility of WWIII (Kelly, 2022; Beauchamp, 2022; Wong and Jake, 2022) Moreover, Ukraine is not a NATO member, which cannot give a legal right for NATO to be directly involved in the conflict (Wong and Jakes, 2022). Thus, discussion about why the West or NATO could not prevent the war is controversial and complex. However, the significance of this study is to acknowledge a static foreign policy identity and entrenched strategic culture of Russia and improve the approach in dealing with Russian offensive policies to prevent threats to European security and international order in the future. Moreover, China observing Russian behavior may get inspired to do the same with Taiwan as Russia is doing in Ukraine.

It is concluded that the central long-term pattern of Russian foreign policy identity is a perception of itself as an imperial great power with its unique messianic cultural-moral role, while other factors, such as NATO's expansion, integration of Ukraine into Europe, and a perceived unipolar world are rather significant conditions which prevent Russia from perceiving its constructed imperial power role to the fullest. Thus, this dissertation by an in-depth analysis of the strategic culture of Russia opened a discussion that might help other countries, especially those who are under Russian influence for decades, realize the imperialistic nature of Russian identity and make reflections respectively. The dissertation contributed to understanding the importance of the EU institution's unity and prevention of polarization as never before. Moreover, evolved Russia-China partnership as a threat in one context rather than two separate threat scenarios due to the war in Ukraine is a potential topic and food for thought for other scholars and decision-makers.

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