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**DISCOURSES OF DANGER: RUSSIAN IDENTITY PRODUCTION IN THE
SYRIAN CONFLICT**

MA Thesis

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Author's declaration

I have written this Master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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The defence will take place on / *date* / at / *time* /

..... / *address* / in auditorium number / *number* /

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Kimberly Metcalf

Abstract

This Master's thesis is a poststructuralist discourse analysis for a single case study and one event research problem. Drawing on an existing body of literature in the realm of discourse analysis, poststructuralism and securitization, I examine Russian official discourse to reveal the nexus between the internal and external security dimensions of Russian foreign policy as it relates to Russian domestic and foreign anxieties resulting in identifiable repetitious acts of identity production. This focus allows me to interrogate the discursive structures and to reveal the performative nature as seen through the continuous repetition of acts, which can be seen as articulations of antagonisms towards the 'West' and 'terrorists' in the Russian official discourse domestically and in the Syrian conflict. By linking together security, foreign policy and identity, a pattern of oscillating threat postulation is observed, initially, by other scholars in the early 2000s, and then through my case study. I see a re-emergence of a similar pattern of discourse repeating itself in the Syrian conflict. I examine the formal rhetoric of the Russian government in the context of the Syrian conflict through analysis of the official discourse, and secondary sources from professional analysts (academics, think tanks and other referent opinions). This research design follows the framework as explained by Lene Hansen which includes four significant components (1) number of selves (2) intertextual models, (3) temporal perspective and (4) number of events. (2006: 66) This is a single case study which covers one self—Russia. This research design includes one event, which is Russia's foreign policy in the Syrian conflict. From the temporal perspective, I cover one event and two time periods (1) Construction of the 'Threat of Chaos:' as articulated in Post-Arab Spring Reflections 2011-2015 (2) Construction of the 'Threat of Terrorism:' Post-Russian Military Intervention Reflections 2015-2020.

Keywords: national security, national identity, securitization, poststructuralist IR, Russia, Syrian War

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1. INTRODUCTION

Russia's military intervention in the Syrian conflict in 2015 has perplexed some analysts and fatigued others in an already overcrowded arena of protracted conflict fueled by regional sponsors. Scholars of traditional International Relation theories search for what Russia has gained or lost in Syria from the position of material and prestige. Analysts demonstrate a proclivity towards approaching Russian foreign policy from a rational actor model, neglecting the domestic and foreign nexus of identity construction. (Snetkov, 2012) Thus, failing to see how Russia's official discourse is a performative production of identity, as observable through "stylized repetition of acts." (Butler, 1988) I assess that previous attempts to analyze Russian foreign policy towards Syria, fail to examine the discursive dimension of the constitution of identity. These attempts overlook domestic and foreign anxieties present in the Russian discursive structures, which leads to an impoverished understanding of the ideational and ideological space as it results to Russian foreign policy actions in the Middle East, most notably a military intervention in Syria. Not only are the former approaches impoverished, but they are also misrepresentative and to be blunt – off target. Therefore, I build upon and the existing body of constructivist and poststructuralist literature to develop my theoretical analysis. I also asses other IR literature to build a contextual understanding of Russia's role in the Syrian conflict. By layering the literature as mentioned above, I holistically analyze Russian official discourse under the existential pressure of securitization in order to identify hegemonic discourses and analyze identity production in the spirit of Laclauian poststructuralism.

I apply Campbell's analytical framework used to analyze US Cold War policy towards Russia in the context of the Syrian conflict. Instead of asking how Russian foreign policy serves Russian national interest, my thesis examines how through an "inscription of foreignness" discourses of danger within Russian "foreign policy helps produce and reproduce the political identity of the doer supposedly behind the deed." (Campbell, 1998: x)

As Russia continues its military intervention in Syria, Russia is speaking its security policy through its official discourse and subsequently re-producing identity. I look beyond analyzing official discourse as propagandizing or rejecting the Kremlin's words as "mere figures of speech designed for rhetorical purposes" as productions of identity worthy of analytical evaluation. (Morozov: 2008: 153) Buzan et al. explain that security discourse is like "placing a bet." The mere utterance of danger informs the discursive dimension. This MA thesis does not seek to see which cards Russia is holding because discourse analysis does not aim to investigate the secret intentions of securitizing actors. However, after nine years of official discourse since the onset of the Syrian conflict enough chips have been wagered, enough glances have been exchanged, and certainly, enough bets have been placed in the discursive world, thus, creating a rich analytical environment. Prominent discourses have risen and are now ripe for analysis.

The existing body of poststructuralist research empirically confirms that Russia has securitized politics domestically and abroad through discursive antagonism. This thesis examines those discourses in order to understand how discourses related to the Syrian conflict produce Russian identity through fear postulated domestically and abroad.

David Campbell's work, for me, brings together identity production and securitization, but he does not identify himself as a poststructuralist, but rather a constructivist. I don't want to distract the reader with theoretical differences that I cannot resolve. However, poststructuralism, especially in IR, grew out of the broad constructivist paradigm and there continues to be dialogue between the former and the less radical versions of constructivism. Furthermore, dividing scholars neatly into two clear camps of constructivism or poststructuralism is not easily achieved. Campbell, himself, makes a similar point "the distinction [between poststructuralists and critical constructivists] which in the first instance is difficult to make and contentious to suggest, not least because much critical work combines in a productive way the different positions. Individual scholars can easily occupy multiple positions." (1998: 223)

I draw extensively from David Campbell, who explained in *Writing Security* that in 1990, when Iraq invaded Kuwait, Iraq became a danger to the US. Similarly, when the US invaded Iraq in 2003, and NATO intervened in Libya 2011, Russia responded through

articulations of a threat to the international community. In the wake of the Libyan conflict and the Arab spring, Putin postulated a ‘threat of chaos’ from Western intervention, specifically the US. Western intervention in the Middle East does not directly threaten Russian soil, and there are no threats from the US insinuating they might roll tanks into Moscow or depose Putin. US military interventions occurred far from the Kremlin, yet, Russian attribution to the West, specifically, the US as backing the Color Revolutions in the post-Soviet spaces in conjunction with Western activities in the Middle East, as articulated by Russian officials, clearly contribute to a certain level of anxiety in the Russian identity construction, thus Russian leaders postulate Western interventions as a threat to the international community over the threats some view as inherent in these regimes in question (Saddam, Gaddafi, Assad).

Throughout my research, I do not judge what is or is not a threat to Russia because danger as conceptualized by Campbell “is not an objective condition. It [sic] is not a thing that exists independently of those to whom it may become a threat.” (1998:1) Moreover, as Ole Waever explains the purpose of the discourse analysis not to reveal “secret plans or attempts at manipulations.” Waever asserts that the analyst knows much is hidden, including intention, but what is possible and meaningful is to uncover how the actors relay the meaning through semiotics which ultimately reveals how “structures within discourse condition possible policies.” (2002: 27) Through Waever’s instruction, we can see not merely what is present, but what is possible without subscribing our own biases to the intention of actors, which is inherently something we can never know. Therefore, it is my suggestion that as it relates to Russian foreign policy and the production of identity in the Syrian context that articulations of dangers, their discursive elements are a worthwhile analytical endeavor.

The explanations for why Russia militarily intervened in Syria cannot be found in classical realism through the objective presence of danger. No state or non-state actor planned to invade Russia because of the Arab Spring, yet Russia postulates threat as if there is a clear and present danger in Syria. As it relates to military intervention, Russian officials explicitly say the military intervention is conducted in order to protect “national interests.” (Medvedev, 15.02.2016) Moreover, no non-state actor intended on invading Russia because of the establishment of the Islamic State’s caliphate in Syria and Iraq. A

successful establishment of the caliphate may have fixed potential threats (Islamic extremists) in place. This postulation of threat is not new discourse, it is a performative production of identity that is in essence a return to the Russian identity construction observed by Snetkov (2012) and other scholars in the early 2000s. Therefore, my analysis centers on the aftermath of both the Arab Spring and the rise of the Islamic State, when (1) Russia postulated threat and the presence of danger by characterizing to the public the potential of chaos if authoritarian regimes are overthrown, and (2) a domestic terrorist threat if foreign fighters who joined extremist opposition factions or the Islamic State return to Russia or the former Soviet space. For almost a decade, Russian leadership, in the context of the Arab Spring and specifically in Syria through their military intervention, repeated their position and defended their actions to their domestic population and the international community through articulations of threat. Whereas other authors investigate this matter through classical realism inspired by genuine fear, power, and resources, I investigate Russia's continuous process of identity construction in the Syrian context through a postulation of a threat to Russia sometimes articulated in the form of chaos (regime change) while other times in the form of terrorism inspired by radical Islam. Russia's official discourse and behavior in the Middle East reveals more about Russian identity production than it does about their military might, capabilities, or strategic objectives in the region or the world. It is my opinion, that there is a bias in foreign policy analysis that focuses on Russia's behavior to understand their behavior externally, but overlooks the performative nature of their identity production in the Syrian conflict.

Throughout the post-Soviet period, Russia emphasized non-intervention as the cornerstone of international law. In the Middle East, Russia stressed non-intervention in the case of Iraq (2003) and Libya (2011). While displeased with Western military intervention, Russia did not actively counter it through military intervention to protect sovereign state leaders in the conflict zones mentioned above. However, in Syria, Russian foreign policy, and their discourses, evolve from the former approaches in Iraq, Libya and the early years of the Syrian conflict and embraces an active military posture in defense of a sovereign. There are many possible explanations for why Russia engages in interventionist policy in Syria and passive foreign policy in the previous conflicts in the Middle East. Such explanations often center on material capabilities, but using the

capabilities requires discursive preconditions. Therefore, this thesis centers on the evolution of the discursive dimension.

1.1 Research Puzzle

Since the mid-1990s Russia's foreign policy attempted to block Western-led foreign interventions (Balkans, Iraq). In 2011 during the Libya conflict – Russia abstained and did not veto UNSCR 1973, the airspace over Libya was closed to protect civilians and then NATO launched airstrikes. Before these hostilities, the Russian Ambassador to Libya, Vladimir Chamov, however, sent a telegram of concern to President Dmitry Medvedev expressing that “siding with the West against Libya would essentially amount to a betrayal of Moscow's interests.” (Cimmino, 2011) At this time, Medvedev seemed to be balancing diplomatic relations with the West and was not blocking their actions. To further dramatize the matter the Ambassador Chamov was dismissed by President Medvedev prior to the UN authorization of NATO's military intervention. The aftermath of the Libyan conflict and Russia's abstention from their usual blocking position as exhibited through the Iraq and Kosovo conflict was a departure from their usual position. When the NATO campaign eventually led to the ousting of Gaddafi, Putin and Lavrov were unsurprisingly unsettled. “After the initial shock of the Arab Spring uprisings and dismay over the forcible overthrow of the Libyan regime, Putin has blocked diplomatic efforts to legitimize or assist the overthrow of Assad.” (Allison, 2013: 813) The central puzzle is to understand why roughly four years after blocking Western and Regional (Middle East) attempts to remove Assad – Russia doubled down on their support to the Assad regime by militarily intervening in Syria in September 2015. What discursive preconditions exist in the Russian discursive realm which allows almost a decade of support for Assad, including a commitment of resources in the form of military intervention? The year 2015 is significant because from the onset of the Arab Spring in 2011 until 2015, Russia became more vocal and active but refrained from a military intervention across the Middle East, but it was not until 2015 Russia launched an overt military campaign. Concerning this temporal divide, my case study is divided between March 2011 – September 2015 and September 2015 – January 2020. The first period covers the aftermath of the Arab Spring in which I identify and analyze the discourse ‘threat of chaos.’ The second period covers the overt Russian military operation in Syria

which becomes actively discussed in 2015. I identify the hegemonic discourse during this period as the ‘threat of terrorism.’ This divergence from traditional policy posture and how Russia postulates danger necessitates further investigation that can be better understood through poststructuralist analysis on identity production. As Waeber explains, the “security and high politics form the existential pressure that makes the theory [poststructuralism] work.” (2002: 22)

In poststructuralism, there is an understanding that foreign policy is intrinsically an identity-building practice. Discourse analysis provides a vehicle through which foreign policy as a practice of identity construction can be explored. Furthermore, foreign policy is first and foremost a discourse, anything that materializes such as military action can be analyzed as an identity-building practice through poststructuralist discourse analysis.

The existing research about Russian interventions in the Middle East, especially in the misses the discursive dimension. My research asserts that after nine-plus years of discourse and physical action on the ground, there is ample data available for analysis. Therefore, this research contributes to the literature on the understanding of Russian security policy through a poststructuralist discourse analysis framework.

The main research question is: how can the Russian discourses which relate to the Syria conflict be explained as productions of identity? This case study was chosen in the context of the Syrian conflict, however, the aim is not explain the causes of the Russian military intervention. Instead, my thesis is written, to “articulate an understanding of the condition of possibility for the specific decisions” that led to specific foreign policy decisions, culminating in a military intervention as a particular moment of Russian foreign policy strategy. (Campbell, 2005: 947) My motivation to conduct this research is exploring how Russia’s foreign policy could, following Campbell, “be understood as a political practice central to the constitution, production, and maintenance of ... identity.” (Campbell, 1998: 8) As Campbell articulates the traditional IR theories (for example realism, liberalism, Marxism) are “committed to an epistemic realism — whereby the world comprises objects whose existence is independent of ideas or beliefs about them — both of these understandings maintain that there are material causes to which events and actions can be reduced. (1998: 4)

Furthermore, I make an empirical claim that Russian discourses as it relates to the Syrian conflict are postulations of danger – in some cases, they are articulated to the international audience as international anarchy and domestic audience as domestic terrorism. My research is guided by the theories of Laclau, Campbell, Butler, Waever and Buzan et al., who have previously established a robust theoretical framework for the research of identity construction, production, and performativity in security studies. The theoretical framework of identity construction/production is the principal component within my research because it is through poststructuralism that we can unlock the “why” in the research puzzle. Why did Russia diplomatically shield the Assad regime beginning in 2011, why did Russia launch this military intervention into Syria 2015, why might the Russian population be complicit with this intervention? How can the hegemonic discourses present in Russian official discourse towards the Syrian conflict illuminate Russian identity production?

1.2 Project Design

My research design follows the framework as explained by Lene Hansen which includes four significant parameters (1) number of selves, (2) intertextual modules, (3) temporal perspective, and (4) number of events. (2006: 66) My research design includes one event in the sense that it is a case study on the Russian intervention in Syria, which covers two time periods and analyzes the development of the discourse throughout (1) Construction of the ‘Threat of Chaos:’ Post-Arab Spring Reflections 2011-2015 (2) Construction of the ‘Threat of Terrorism:’ Post-Russian Military Intervention Reflections 2015-2020.

Following the introduction, my thesis moves on to the theory, methods and data chapter. This thesis explores key theoretical concepts such as conceptualizing poststructuralism. This thesis also explores securitization theory through the lens offered by Ole Waever, as well as identity construction through the theories of Waever and Campbell. The topical conceptualizations of poststructuralism and critical dimensions of the theory are guided by the work of David Campbell, who weaves together both identity construction and security discourse. As Campbell states “our political imagination has been impoverished by the practices associated with the paradigm of sovereignty.” Campbell explains that security can be understood beyond the traditional sense of deployed instrumentalities by

the state and it can function to “instantiate the subjectivity it purports to serve. Indeed, security (of which foreign policy/Foreign Policy is a part) is first and foremost a performative discourse constitutive of political order,” Campbell elaborates “after all, securing something requires its differentiation, classification and definition. It has, in short, to be identified.” (Campbell: 1998: 199)

In a realist sense, some could argue that Syria shares similar characteristics with Russia’s Northern Caucasus because both locales represent a threat of state collapse and of Islamic extremism. While this argument is logical, it is inadequate to stop the analytical process there. The parallels between Russia’s Northern Caucasus and Syria demands a more in-depth investigation through the linkage of identity, foreign policy and security.

Following the theory, methods and data chapter, my thesis moves on to the literature review. For the literature review, I begin with a summary on poststructuralist literature focused on Russia – while this literature does not discuss the Middle East or Syria in great magnitude it establishes the tone of the discursive systems of Russian official policy discourse. Following the literature review, I move onto my case study which is combined with the data analysis in order to compare previous academic contributions which analyze Russian foreign policy and identity towards the Syrian conflict, assess their reliability, eliminate them or integrate them if possible before moving on to other possible explanations. This thesis reviews the relevant research which relates to Russian security discourses. Analysis of Russian security discourse often examines the Arab Spring writ large, other times academic literature focuses on Syria before the military intervention and concentrates on prominent discourses like ‘sovereign democracy,’ or ‘international terrorism.’ In other cases, Russian security discourse deals with negotiating the Northern Caucasus and Islamic extremism within the domestic context. Ultimately, I arrive at two hegemonic discourses of danger which Putin and Lavrov postulate: (1) ‘Threat of Chaos’ (from Western intervention) (2) ‘Threat of Terrorism.’ Through the analysis of deep antagonism with the West, and demarcations within the Russian identity discourse we can observe securitizing practices as conceptualized by Buzan et al.’s and by applying Campbell’s analytical framework from 1998 *Writing Security*, I conduct a comprehensive analysis of the hegemonic discourses, differentiation within them and their evolution as

they relate to discourses of danger as Russian identity production in the context of the Syrian conflict.

1.3 Limitations

A longitudinal study of Russian security discourses throughout multiple events such as involvement in Abkhazia, Ossetia, Transdniestria, Crimea, and Eastern Ukraine could certainly illuminate patterns in the discourse. The literature I reviewed often alludes to the events above, but this is beyond what one Master thesis can achieve. Another limitation in my research is that full historicity of Russian identity is beyond the capacity of an MA thesis. Campbell, whom I perform this research in the spirit of, was able to trace the American identity from its conception in Europe and through hundreds of years on US soil. Despite this limitation, in my work, I find striking parallels between Campbell's examination of US identity production in the context of the Cold War and Russian identity production in the context of the Syrian conflict.

2. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Theory: Security, Identity and Discourse in Poststructuralism

This section serves as a basic introduction to the philosophy of poststructuralism. In these paragraphs, I explain some of the core concepts: *discourse*, *articulation*, *hegemony*, *nodal points*, *performativity*, *subject position*, *intertextuality*, *antagonism*, *dislocation*, *crisis*, which are used for analysis in the case study portion of my thesis.

Discourse. Discourse can be understood as a system “producing a set of statements and practices that, by entering into institutions and appearing like normal, constructs the reality of its subjects and maintains a certain degree of regularity in a set of social relations.” Discourses “are systems of meaning-production that fix meaning, however temporarily, and enable actors to make sense of the world and to act within it.” (Dunn and Neumann, 2016: 4)

Articulation. “The way identities are fixed is through their articulation as part of a discourse, while articulation is not a purely linguistic term but encompasses the whole sphere of social relations.” (Stengle and Nabers, 2019: 256) *Articulation* is how “people give meaning to the world around them by combining and connecting certain words, objects, ideas and concepts in the specific ways when they speak or act.” (Jacobs, 2019: 298) Jacob explains that the meaning of articulations does not follow from the material world. *Articulations* only have meaning within existing discursive structures, but they do not necessarily have the same meaning.

Hegemony. Laclau describes *hegemony* as “discursive struggles about the ways of fixing the meaning of a signifier like democracy.” (Laclau, 1991: 436) *Hegemonization* occurs when certain discourses are able to establish themselves as a particular way to view the world and as universally valid. (Stengle and Nabers, 2019: 255) Constitutively, *hegemony* is free of prior determination” because “society has no definitive or natural form.” (Jacobs, 2019: 297)

Nodal Points. *Nodal points* are privileged signifiers; they are, in essence, the “horizon for subjects to identify and associate their demands.” (Stengle and Nabers, 2019: 258) For

example, security, as *nodal point* “carries weight from past discursive struggles.” (2019: 259)

Performativity. “The ‘*performative*’ dimension of construction is precisely the forced reiteration of the norms.” (2000: 432) The understanding of performativity in identity studies is primarily attributed to Judith Butler who conceptualizes performativity in relationship to gender “gender is no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed, rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts.: (1988: 519) Laffey conceptualizes Campbell’s foreign policy and performativity by explaining that foreign policy is a “specific kind of boundary-producing political performance that draws upon available modes of representation in order to produce a particular mode of subjectivity.” (2000: 431) This is the moment of representation employed to repair the dislocated structure. It is important to note that repairing the dislocated structure is ontologically impossible. (Stengle and Nabers, 2019: 259)

Subject position. “What defines a particular subject is the relative relationships between it and other subjects. Often these relationships are established through the construction of *subject positioning* based upon opposition or similarity.” (Dunn and Neumann, 2016: 114)

Intertextuality. “Each linguistic expression carries weight from previous relations with other linguistic expressions (understood as intertextuality).” (Dunn and Neumann, 2016: 46) Examples of intertextuality include the liberal world order or the unilateral order – they are key concepts within the discursive struggles used to signify.

Antagonism. The construction of dichotomies are forms of *antagonisms*. Laclau “sees *antagonism* both as the fundamental ontological basis of all hegemony and as the most important activity in real-life politics.” Furthermore, *Antagonisms* “prevent the dislocated nature of all structure from destabilizing the discursive structure they articulate.” (Jacobs, 2019: 305)

Dislocation. “*Dislocation* represents the absence of ground, of social foundation, and it rests within the subject as well as within the social whole.” (Nabers, 2019: 273)

“Dislocation is both precondition and result of the antagonistic construction of social identity.” (Marchat, 2014: 277) “*Dislocation* is really a deepening of the notion of antagonism. (Interview with Laclau, Hansen and Sonnichsen, 2014: 258) *Dislocation* can “be understood as dramatic shifts within allegedly stable discourses of national uniformity.” (Nabers, 2019: 269)

Crisis. For the purpose of this thesis, I embrace the notion that *crisis* is not exogenously produced, but somewhat inherent to the reality of foreign policy – a crisis is produced entirely in discourse. (Nabers, 2019: 263). In order to be consistent and deliberate with respect towards other poststructuralist authors, I refer to the Syrian conflict as a conflict and never as a crisis – the crisis lies in the dislocation of official Russian discourse. “*Crisis* can be seen as a permanent attribute of the social, not some transitory condition that appears from time to time.” (Nabers, 2019: 265) Identifying crisis “as a permanent attribute of the social” thus “requires the study of dislocated social structures.” (Nabers, 2019: 276)

Now, I move from the micro conceptualization of elements of discourse to a broad conceptualization of poststructuralism by Dunn and Neumann (2016), “the defining trait of poststructuralism is the ontological claim is that the social world is in flux and cannot be grasped by maintaining a fixed point outside discourse.” (2016: 41) I utilize this quote to set the theoretical context. Poststructuralism strictly enforces that inability to fix the social world, and thus relies upon the discursive world for analysis. Furthermore, in the security realm, the intensity of high politics is always at play, which, according to Waever, presents the existential pressure to make discourse analysis work. I assert that these qualitative methods for researching security can provide insight, but it is through the philosophy of poststructuralism that we can genuinely explore that character of a state and their identity.

This research effort aims to provide an alternative account of the Russian foreign policy in Syria that includes deeper insights than the existing analysis provided by other IR theories which hinge their research on the material world. Dunn and Neumann stress that “poststructuralists are not rejecting a real-world in which objects exist independent of our knowledge, rather it is only through discursive meaning-making that these objects

become known and knowable to us.” (2015: 40) The critical point in my research is that all objectivity is discursive; the matter is not differentiated within itself; all we can name exists only in discourse.

The conceptualization of identity and security for this thesis hinges on David Campbell’s operationalization of theoretical framework which characterizes the construction of national identity as a continually evolving process. Campbell asserts that identity is always in construction and articulates the need for continually evolving presentations of danger and the unfinished nature of security: “Should the state project of security be successful in the terms in which it is articulated, the state would cease to exist. Security as the absence of movement would result in death via stasis.” Campbell continues and highlights the paradoxical relationship between the state and security. “Ironically, then, the inability of the state project of security to succeed is the guarantor of the state’s continued success as an impelling identity.” (1998: 12) David Campbell’s work searches for “an alternative account of postwar United States foreign policy employing the metatheoretical insights of the interdisciplinary debates in the social sciences concerned with issues of interpretation.” (1998: 23) The above is the theoretical foundation for my research, and in the next section, I conceptualize security, identity and discourse analysis.

2.1.1 Securitization Theory

This section provides a brief overview of securitization theory. In *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, Buzan et al. explain the evolving conceptualization of *security* within the context of other international relations theories. Security studies often take a realism approach, as was prominent in the mid-twentieth century and directly relate security to survival. Securitization is conceptualized as a process which occurs “when an issue is presented as posing an existential threat to a designated referent object.” In the case of my research, the designated referent object is the state.

The significance of security or the existential threat is that the “invocation” or utterance of security alone has led to the state’s taking extraordinary measures to negotiate security. (1998: 21). Buzan et al. explain that securitization is similar to politicization and that essentially, they are both stages of a process in postulating an issue or a threat (1998: 24). Theoretically, anything can be securitized, but this process does not hinge on a political

one. The main criterion that Buzan et al. link security to a projection of an existential threat as seen by the state. If one can argue that the threat outweighs standard political logic and must be handled “through extraordinary measures”, then this can be a security issue. To bring this understanding to totality Buzan et al. assert that “security is thus a self-referential practice” it is through securitization that “the issue becomes a security issue.” Perhaps, the most apposite aspect of this conceptualization my research is Buzan et al.’s claim is that danger cannot be objective and does not need to be real “not necessarily because a real existential threat exists but because the issue is presented as such a threat.” (1998: 24)

Essentially securitization becomes a formula:

Existential threats + Breaking Rules = Legitimization of Breaking Rules (Securitization).
(1998: 25)

Buzan et al., describe the process of a successful securitization or the formula suggested previously as steps or components: (1) “existential threats” (2) “emergency action,” and “effects on interunit relations by breaking free of rules.” (1998: 26)

Furthermore, Buzan et al. characterize securitization as intersubjective and socially constructed. The reason for this is derived from the referent object’s (in this case the state’s) legitimacy and the belief that this ‘legitimacy’ should survive, which means actors can refer to the state’s legitimate need to survive, and consequently get others to “follow or at least tolerate actions not otherwise legitimate.” This process does not occur in isolation, but rather securitization is a “social quality, a part of a discursive, socially constituted intersubjective realm.” Buzan et al. elaborate on the concept explaining that the successful securitization is not determined by the agent who speaks “security” but instead by the audience of the specific speech act. The audience must accept the security issue as an “existential threat to a share shared value.” Consequently, “security (as with all politics) ultimately rests neither with the objects nor with the subject but among the subjects.” (1998: 31)

2.1.2 Identity Theory

This section explains the concept of identity. Campbell describes identity as “an inescapable dimension of being. Nobody could be without it. Inescapable as it is, identity—whether personal or collective— is not fixed by nature, given by God, or planned by intentional behavior.” Therefore, states have an evolving identity, and this identity is “constituted in relation to difference.” Furthermore, the difference is neither “fixed by nature, given by God, or planned by intentional behavior. The difference is constituted in relation to identity. (Campbell, 1998: 9) So, when we examine identity reproduction, we have to acknowledge fluidity and uncover differentiation. Buzan et al.’s statement that “security (as with all politics) ultimately rests neither with the objects nor with the subject but among the subjects.” (1998: 31) situates the connection between security, discourse analysis and identity. Some actors have an agency to “speak security”, and the legitimacy of the speech act does not rest in the securitizing actor, nor does it rest in the resonance of the collective recipients, but as Buzan et al. offered it rests “among the subjects.” Through employing the word “among” and the plural form of “subject,” Buzan et al.’s word choice invokes a particular fluidity of the securitization, discourse analysis and identity construction. We can see how securitization and identity construction relates to one another through Campbell’s conceptualization of foreign policy as identity construction in the following explanation: “Foreign Policy is concerned with the reproduction of an unstable identity at the level of the state, and the containment of challenges to that identity.” The foreign policy operates in a constant domain of entrenched contingencies and resistances, and the representation of danger is ever-present in the sharpening of the identity through the venture of foreign policy. (1998: 71)

Perhaps, the most theoretically salient dimension of Campbell’s conceptualization of security in identity construction arises when he says, “the constant articulation of danger through foreign policy is thus not a threat to a state’s identity or existence: it is its condition of possibility.” The state can only exist due to constantly re-articulating danger, in particular through foreign policy. Therefore, foreign policy is a discourse of danger. Waever conceptualizes possible patterns in discourse construction as “Thus, instead of customary image of political speech as haphazard and offhand, we substitute an idea of politics as a constant and relatively tight loop, where the political argumentation on a

specific issue is strongly depended on the basic conceptual logic which is available in a society, and at the same time reproduces and modifies this conceptual code, thereby setting the conditions for the next political struggle.” (2002: 31) The conceptualizations by Campbell and Waever bring us back to the notion by Buzan et al. that security becomes a self-referential practice, and within this, it is my position that we can observe and dissect identity production, Through my experience analyzing Russian official discourse I see patterns consistency as identified in the hegemonic discourses. Within those discourses, I observe and analyze demarcation and differentiation between Russia and others.

2.1.3 (Re) Connecting the Theories: Security, Identity and Discourse Analysis

My research builds on a crucial nexus between Russian security discourse and identity and securitization theory. This section aims to explain the significance of integrating these three theoretical concepts. Buzan et al. assert that “securitization can be studied directly; it does not need indicators.” The way to achieve the aforementioned is through “discourse and political constellations.” (1998: 25) To understand securitization, one must also understand securitizing actors, functional actors and the referent objects. Referent objects are “things that are seen to be existentially threatened and have a legitimate claim to survival.” A referent object can be the state or identity of the state. Securitizing actors are actors with the ability to declare something a referent object which is existentially threatened.

In my case study, securitizing actors are Russian officials such as Putin and Lavrov have the ability to declare the referent object – Russia (the state) existentially threatened. There are also functional actors who influence decisions as well as affect “the dynamics of the sector” but they are neither a referent object nor a securitizing actor – in my case study I asses the functional actor to be the UN. (1998: 36) An analyst may identify securitization when the audience is made to “tolerate violations of rules that would otherwise have to be obeyed,” and thus allows the securitizing actor to break free from the procedure which would have otherwise been subject to the public domain through debate or collective government procedures. (1998:25) Buzan et al. explain that when conducting security analysis, the job of the analyst is not to identify the real threat, but rather to grasp the act of securitization which is when an agent dramatizes an issue in order to give it “supreme priority.” Therefore, “constructing a shared understanding of what is to be considered and

collectively responded to as a threat.” The utterance itself of the threat is a speech act and “by saying the words, something is done” securitization is “like betting, giving a promise, naming a ship.” (Buzan et al., 1998:26)

2.2 Methodological Approach: Discourse Analysis

Dunn and Neumann provide the conceptualization of poststructuralist discourse analysis in their 2015 work *Undertaking Discourse Analysis for Social Research*. Dunn and Neumann characterize text as a central insight to poststructuralist discourse analysis: “everything can be studied as text—as phenomena linked together by a code.” (2015: 39) Dunn and Neumann offer conceptual insights on how to understand the origin and evolution of discourse analysis. The structuralist de Saussure is credited for characterizing the differentiation between *langue* (language understood as a relational system) and *parole* (the spoken word, the specific act of language). (2015: 25) According to Dunn and Neumann’s description of structuralism according to de Saussure “structuralism’s prime thought was the relational system in the form of a fixed grammar was hidden and latent in the social domain, and that this determined how manifested social interactions were structures.” (2015: 25) Following de Saussure, discourse analysis then emerges out of a critical reading of structuralism. Further evolution occurs through Bakhtin’s development of “trans-linguistics” who became primarily concerned with what is now referred to as intertextuality. Bakhtin embraced a strong opposition to de Saussure’s structuralism because his position, ethical in nature, was that that “it is in the use of language that one may localize dialogical relations, between people, and such relations exist between people, between people and text and between texts within people.” (2015:25) The concept behind this statement is known as intertextuality. Intertextuality is the relations between discursive struggles, and in my case study, the Russian official discourse clearly exists within the system of discursive relations with the West. Through references to United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs) to allusions to past US presidential speeches, Russian identity is articulated through a discursive web of intertextuality.

The conceptualization of identity and linkage with security is derived from David Campbell’s 1998 *Writing Security*, while the conceptualization of the poststructuralist

discourse analysis for this thesis centers on the writings of Dunn and Neumann as well as Ole Wæver. My research focuses on a security discourse analysis which Wæver claims situates the study appositely for research opportunities “security and high politics form the existential pressure that makes the theory [post-structuralism] work.” (2002: 26) Ole Wæver illuminates that the opportunity within discourse analysis is to identify “which codes are used when actors relate to each other. (2002: 26-27).

To practically achieve an examination of discourse analysis my research design follows the framework as explained by Lene Hansen which includes four significant parameters (1) number of selves (2) intertextual modules, (3) temporal perspective and (4) number of events. (2006: 66) For my methodological approach, I include a single case study that includes a oneself Russia. The *temporal perspective* (Hansen 2006:69) that I chose a one event case study which is the Syrian conflict due to the “striking character” of the first Russian military intervention in recent history outside of Russia’s near abroad. My research design includes one event, which covers two time periods within the event and analyzes the development of the discourse throughout (1) Construction of the ‘Threat of Chaos:’ Post-Arab Spring Reflections 2011-2015 (2) Construction of the ‘Threat of Terrorism:’ Post-Russian Military Intervention Reflections 2015-2020. My case study is theory affirming and contributes to academic literature in this sense because it is one of the first pieces to explore Russian identity production through the prism of poststructuralist theory in a longitudinal examination of the Syria Conflict.

This thesis offers an understanding of the production of national identity through discourses of danger. Hansen describes three models for discourse analysis: (1) “official discourse and intertextual links made within it as its analytical focus,” (2) “[broader] scope of analysis to include the wider media debate, oppositional political parties, and corporate groups,” (3) “[further analysis] through studies of popular culture and marginal discourse.” (2006:66) My thesis includes model one of Hansen’s aforementioned models.

Through model one, I select texts from the official policymakers and representatives of the Kremlin such as President Putin, Medvedev, Lavrov, Shoigu as primary sources and analyze intertextuality through secondary sources such as academic works of literature, think tanks and carefully selected texts from journalist outlets. The decision to prioritize

official discourse as the object of analysis is an epistemological consideration derived from poststructuralists who advocate that the most prominent discourses which reveal the most significant codes between one another tend to originate from those who yield power in the society or state. Since, this is a discourse analysis centered on state security and decision to deploy state material resources, the logical source to draw discourse from is state officials.

The empirical material includes data collected for model one through official government representatives through textual resources such as the policy statements, speeches, press releases, interviews with journalists which are official documents originating from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I then decode the text in order to assess the stability of the discourses. The aforementioned analysis enables the illumination of Russian identity production over nine years of the Syrian conflict.

2.3 Text Selection

First, it is important to establish that text is data for discourse analysis. Data collection for poststructuralist discourse analysis is methodologically rigorous despite differences in approach between traditional research methods and poststructuralists. The former search for measurable observables in the social environment, whereas the latter (poststructuralists) practicing discourse analysis look at the physical and linguistic world together. Dunn and Neumann conceptualize this difference by explaining “while social science[s] traditionally regard data as made up of observations, discourse analysts relate to discourse, understood as merged text and social materiality.” (2016: 29) This is particularly important for this thesis because at the heart of this thesis is a case study that is about a physical security event (a military intervention). However, the analysis pursues a reality that is supra-material and which must be uncovered through interconnected representations embedded in the discourse. Dunn and Neumann explain that Foucault and other postpositivists “bracket the nonsocial world or worlds—the pure materiality is simply not the referent object of discourse analysts—and instead devote interest to its representations.” (2016:30)

Lene Hansen (2006:74) offers valuable guidelines on text selection for poststructuralism discourse analysis and emphasizes that under poststructuralism epistemological and

methodological importance is reserved for primary texts. Therefore, this thesis prioritizes primary texts by Russian politicians and foreign policy practitioners throughout the analysis. These texts must be frequently quoted and provide “nodes within the intertextual web of debate.” These guidelines nest well with Buzan et al.’s criterion for identifying who is a *securitizing actor* worthy of analysis “someone, or a group, who performs the security speech act. Common players in this role are political leaders, bureaucracies, governments, lobbyists and pressure groups.” (1998:40) It is also essential that the chosen texts provide more of general background for “more quantitative identification of the dominant discourses.” When appropriate, this thesis includes key secondary sources which contribute to the either the theoretical or empirical context.

The text selection for this Master’s thesis adheres to the selection criteria laid out by Lene Hansen (2006:76) (1) “they are characterized by the clear articulation of identities and policies (2) “they are widely read and attended to;” (3) “and they have formal authority to define a political position.” This criterion ensures that the text selected contribute to the formation of dominant discourses and based off of their medium which are in most cases political authorities, the texts, as a consequence, yield the likeness of “status and power.” Following Hansen’s guidance, but conceptualizing deeper with Buzan et al. for the purpose of securitization theory, the analyst acknowledges that while the text is data, and the agency of the actor prioritizes the significance of the text “one cannot make the actors of securitization the fixed point of analysis—the practice of securitization is the center of analysis.” However, the consideration of who is “more or less privileged in articulating security” is essential, therefore the study of “securitization is to study the power politics of a concept.” (1998: 32) This conceptualization of actors with agency capable of making a speech act perceived as legitimate connects this master’s thesis to the methodological dimension of the text selection.

The text selection follows Lene Hansen’s three models of intertextuality this research analyzes the discourse on the Russian military intervention in Syria starting in March 2011 through January of 2020. The data was collected for model one through official government representatives such as Vladimir Putin and Sergey Lavrov through textual resources such as the policy statements, speeches, press releases which are official documents originating from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and considers these primary

sources and includes secondary sources from academic articles from Russian foreign policy experts and analysts.

To summarize the practical execution of the research project, I compiled all of the data (text) onto a single document. I analyzed the texts and made a note of interdiscursivity and intertextuality. I labeled each speech by date, location of delivering, source, and URL for organizational purposes. I copied entire speeches onto my working data collection document for the purpose of offline keyword research as well. The data collection alone yielded 219 pages with text from over 50 speeches, addresses, remarks to the press which and excerpts from relevant articles which shed light on the moments of which particular discourses were delivered. Saturation was reached after I exhausted my searches on the Kremlin and Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, gathering over 50 official speeches, remarks, and interviews were gathered and their messages remained relatively stable towards the Russian military intervention into Syria. I organized the data thematically by discourses present; in some cases, one speech contained multiple discourses. Then I analyzed the relevancy of the text in relationship to the discourses. I identified the hegemonic discourses from the primary text and coalesced this with literature review and treated academic literature as secondary sources, thus combining the primary texts with secondary texts.

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW: POSTSTRUCTURALIST LITERATURE ON RUSSIA

3.1 Genealogy of Russian Foreign Policy through the prism of poststructuralism

Before embarking upon the specific case study of Russian discourse analysis in the Syrian conflict, I build upon existing poststructuralist literature on Russian foreign and domestic policy. I organize this section by initiating a conversation on Russian identity, and then I categorize the remaining sections by poststructuralist reflections on some of the significant challenges or conflicts in the Russian identity construction experience.

Russian identity is a contested concept, but most analysts agree that it should be. Bobo Lo said “there is no Russian worldview. In a diverse, highly educated, and argumentative society, there are multiple views of the world, just as there are different understandings of the “nation.” (Lo, 2015: 39) Furthermore, the notion of the ‘elite’ is commonly discussed in poststructuralism texts. The elite have slightly different characterizations based on the scope of the literature, the elite themselves are divided into different social and opposing camps – therefore, an initial starting point to unraveling Russian identity is that it is in essence – an argument within an argument. I will attempt to unravel this so that I can better set that stage for the subject position as I move forward to the case study.

This section covers the ‘conservative’ turn in Russian society. As other authors commonly observed, Russia was void of a unifying identity after the fall of the Soviet Union. In order to understand the subject positioning of the Russian identity and the ‘conservative’ turn which is often discussed in Russian identity studies, one must understand some of the historical worldviews which are present in the Russian discursive system; thus I turn to the historical role of the *Katechon*.

Katechon is used to conceptualize the notion of Russia as a protector of order in the world. In her 2014 article *Contemporary Russia Messianism and New Russia Foreign Policy*, Maria Engström unveils the eschatological dimension of Russian domestic society and how it interacts with Russian foreign and security policy to explain the growing ideological gap between Russia and the West. (2014: 356) Engström describes the new conservative narrative in Russia as containing strong messianic tones in parallel with anti-

Western (American) sentiment. Engström provides a summary of the genesis of *Katechon* within the Biblical context, which is captured in the Book of Daniel (Old Testament) and Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians (New Testament). There is a widespread belief that Moscow is the third Rome in Christian eschatology, which means Moscow must protect the world from the anti-Christ. (2014: 363) This extremely conservative narrative has deep parallels to the far conservative right in the US as Engström observes. This is the same far-right in the US which in large scale supported the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq. So, this narrative begs the question – why do some Russians support this narrative? The answer, perhaps, can be illuminated through understanding the struggle for hegemony and perhaps the emancipation from hegemonic Western discourses. Engström summarizes her assessment on contemporary Russian messianism as championed by its supporters as “an alternative doctrine of American exceptionalism and as an important ideological tool for openly challenging Western hegemony and creating a new polycentric world order.” (2014: 357) As it relates directly to the Syrian conflict, the ideology of *Katechon* positions Russia as a “world restrainer,” with the role of the peacemaker. (2014: 373)

Following a similar line of thought, but less eschatologically infused, is Elizaveta Gaufman's article of Russian identity through the concept of the pastorate. Gaufman employs a Foucauldian poststructuralist analysis to assess the nature of authoritarianism critically. Gaufman operationalizes four leading indicators that define pastoral powers: (1) references to transborder sovereignty, (2) securitization discourse, (3) direct involvement, and (4) sexualization of the figure of the pastor. (2017: 74) In this study, she observes that territory is not about land, but the flock. She explains that Russia's modern pastorate “transcends state borders and offers a vision of a state based on non-worldly bonds.” (2017: 75) Similar to the ideology of the *Katechon* mentioned above the pastor provides protection for the flock, the people, and leads them to salvation. The power of the pastor is beneficent in nature. Thus anything he does is to safeguard the flock. This dimension of the pastor takes on a securitizing perspective which can be observed through biopolitical legislation such as abortion, same-sex marriage, or bans on imported goods. (2017: 76) Another interesting observation by Gaufman is that the flock literally cannot be trusted. After mass demonstrations as a result of perceived election fraud in May 2012, legislation was passed to prevent further citizen protest. (2017:80)

Direct involvement or individualizing power manifests through an intimate and confessional relationship. In Putin's mass media campaigns, he is often seen providing acts of service for the everyday Russian, which include providing puppies or medical assistance to disabled children through "godlike interventions." (2017:83) The masculinization of power can be famously observed not only in Russian media, but internationally as Putin is seen riding horses and bears and fishing shirtless. The masculinization of power can also be observed in the relationship between Ukraine and Russia.

Ukraine is portrayed as a prostitute of false European values, a damsel in distress, in need of saving by Russia. (2017:83) It is impossible to understand the depth of Russian society "buy-in" to these simple concepts, and the protests and opposition movements reveal discursive boundaries. However, these discourse certainly are unavoidable within the Russian social sphere, and Gaufman's article reveal the pastoral dimensions of the discursive systems at play in Russian social and political space. Guafman and Engström both analyze Russian identity through poststructuralism. This reveals the conservative and sometimes spiritual characteristics of the Russian elites and how they produce identity in the social and political sphere. Through Engstrom's analysis, we can understand the concept of the Katechon as a protector for world order, and through Guafman we can see the personalization and masculinization of power under Putin's Russia.

The examination of the 'conservative' nature of Russian identity or the 'conservative' turn provokes other vital questions as mentioned above, such as, is this the subject position of Russian society, or is this the position of the elites, who use a conservative discourse to concentrate power? In Morozov's book *Russia's Postcolonial Identity*, chapter four, *Normative Dependency: Putinite Paleoconservatism and the Missing Peasant* he assesses that there is no reason to claim that the people share the officially promoted conservative values. He assesses that "the Kremlin openly embraced conservative ideology not because there are fewer liberals in Russia now than in the 1990s," instead of the liberal audience "discursively repositioned as a fifth column acting on behalf of hostile outside forces." (2015: 118)

Furthermore, according to Morozov, there is an emptiness at the of Russian national identity discourse, and this emptiness “bodes ill for the future of Russian– Western relations: it seems that antagonizing the West is the only source of Russia’s self-confidence.” (2015: 105) In essence, Russia is discursively stuck in a rut of a positive viscous identity struggle fueled by an emptiness within Russian identity and resentment towards the West. “Any ‘reset’ forces Russia to see itself for what it is – a dependent country whose only hope consists in trying to ‘catch up’ with the hegemonic core. The vicious cycle of deferred Europeanisation starts again, leading to resentment and eventually a new round of antagonism.” (2015:134) This discursive dimension of antagonism is present throughout the empirical analysis of the case study.

3.2 The Fall of the Soviet Union

The fall of the Soviet Union led to a vacuum in the Russian identity. In *Parting of Ways* Torbakov explains that the Russian national identity was “rendered virtually placeless” and describes an allegory of multiethnic terrain of the Soviet Union by comparing it to a communal apartment. In this communal apartment, every minor ethnicity occupied a room, except the Russians who occupied the kitchen, the foyer, and the corridors. After the Soviet Union fell, every ethnic minority still had their own space, except the Russians who were in everyone else’s way. (2015: 439) Torbakov describes the emergence of two prominent elite identities: Rossiiski – those who gravitated towards Europe and Russkii – those who favored a concept of the ‘Holy Rus.’ Many different poststructuralist writers have attempted to characterize Russian identity, including various breakdowns within the elites or within the religious community. Ultimately, the Russian identity is a “space of endless contestation.” (Torbakov, 2015: 456)

In Viatcheslav Morozov’s *Sovereignty and democracy in contemporary Russia: a modern subject faces the post-modern world* he explains that “after the collapse of the soviet union, Russian society found itself in a situation of utter indeterminacy with the old structures of meaning swept away by revolutionary change, and the urgent need to define the very foundations of a political community.” (2008: 158)

This initial conclusion on Russian identity should not discourage the analyst from pursuing research on Russian identity, because this contestation and differential

articulatory practices are in some ways the perfect space to launch a poststructuralist discourse analysis from, or perhaps for Russia the perfect place from which to launch a strategy for radical social change. As Laclau and Mouffe explain “the plurality and indeterminacy of the social seem to us the two fundamental bases from which a new political imaginary can be constructed, radically libertarian, and infinitely more ambitious in its objectives than that of on the classic left.” (1985: 152) While Russia has not pursued this level of discursive emancipation in the political and social space, the opportunity remains. The theoretical framework of Laclau and Mouffe provide sufficient analytical tools to turn the kaleidoscope of IR theories to evaluate Russian identity production through the philosophical terrain of poststructuralism.

3.3 The Northern Caucasus

The Northern Caucasus dimension leads to unusual identity configurations within the Russian discursive sphere. Torbakov explains that “some of the leading nationalist ideologies, such as Valery Solovei foresee the secession of Northern Caucasus, Russia’s classical imperial possession, as well as the possible loss of other non-Russian territories.” Torbakov quotes Solovei as saying the loss of territory could happen “in our lifetime” and that there is a psychological alienation towards the Northern Caucasus which is “but a prelude to political separation.” Torbakov further explains that other liberal-minded commentators, such as Vladislav Inozemtsev, also perceive the republics of the Northern Caucasus as a “hindrance to [Russia’s] national development. (2015:45) The notion of alienation between greater Russia and the Northern Caucasus will resurface as a demarcation within the discursive as I move deeper into the case study and interrogate the discursive terrain towards foreign fighters in Syria who often hail from Chechnya.

As this literature review, turns to the Northern Caucasus, I want to highlight the article *When the Internal and External Collide: A Social Constructivist Reading of Russia’s Security Policy*. While, Snetkov, is not a hardline poststructuralist, but rather a constructivist, her work provides an alternative to postpositivist approaches. It illuminates bias she assesses exists in IR studies “towards the study of the external, rather than internal security issues,” Snetkov’s account emphasizes the “significance of the internal-external security nexus and its inter-relationship with Russia’s state identity in the

development of Russia's security policy in the 2000s." (2012: 522) A brief summarization of Snetkov's analysis of official Russian discourse, informs the reader that the predominate threat used to construct Russian identity in the early 2000s was 'terrorism.' The 'threat of terrorism' was postulated and often blurred the Chechen separatists with international terrorists in Russian official discourse. "Both the Chechen incursion into Dagestan in August 1999 and the apartment bombings in September 1999 were placed within this wider image of international terrorism rather than constructed as isolated domestic security incidents." Russian officials postulated the perpetrators of these acts as an "alliance of Islamic terrorists and former Chechen separatists set on attacking Russia and the rest of the civilized world." (2012: 525) These presentations of threats enabled Russian officials to consolidate power domestically while opening up a discursive avenue with the West as part of a broader anti-terrorism coalition. The 9/11 attacks in the US reinforced this discourse of the 'terrorism', but inevitably as Russia was not integrated as an equal into the hegemonic world order dominated by the West, resentment built, and so did anxieties. In the latter half of the 2000s, the Color Revolutions in the post-Soviet states increased anxiety in Russia, and the presentation of the 'other' as a terrorist dwindled, while the presentation of the 'West' as an antagonist other increased. Snetkov concludes that by the late 2000s the threat of international terrorism remained present in the discursive space, but its priority diminished, and it carried less weight as it did in the early 2000s, "nor did it function as the lynchpin of its state identity now that Russia had rebuilt itself." (2012: 538)

As it connects to my case study on the Syrian conflict, it appears the 'threat of terrorism' as a hegemonic discourse is present in the Russian discursive system since the early 2000s. When the Syrian conflict began, Russian officials such as Medvedev, Lavrov, and Putin continued with their same discursive practice of blurring and conflating who are 'terrorists' and the threat of terrorism throughout the Syrian conflict. This threat postulation increased with fervor during the year 2015, the same year as the Russian military intervention, saying explicitly that Russia is in Syria to "protect national interests' and that Russian national interests are to defend against terrorism. Which leads me to my assessment, that there appears to be an inverse of the pattern or perhaps a repeat of what Snetkov observes. The difference in articulation in 2015 is that Russia is no longer facing an internal threat of terrorism, but an external. Whereas, in the early 2000s, the

internal threat to Russia was postulated as an external threat to the broader international community. As revealed in the case study, the threat to homeland remains and is articulated frequently in the Russian discourse, but the threat source is contrived as emanating from externally from Russia, in Syria. This observation of Russian official discursive repetition from the domestic context in the 2000s, which then resurfaces in the Syrian conflict context, is the justification for this case study.

3.4 Libyan Conflict

The Libyan conflict is an intertextual dimension of the discourse of the Syrian conflict. Makarychev (2011) explains that *Russia's "Libya Debate"* revealed a lack of uniformity across Russia's elites. For example, Medvedev described the Arab Spring as a result of authoritarian rule that was not provoked by external support, whereas Putin famously described the military operation against Gaddafi as a "colonial military invasion." (2011:1) Makarychev explains that Russia's Libya debate was less about Libya and more about "Russia and its repositioning vis-à-vis the West." (2011:2) The official discourse surrounding the Libyan conflict is a discursive encounter which illuminates antagonism from two opposing camps about Gaddafi as "either a tyrant or an example of principled resistance to the US-led world order." (2011: 3) As Putin returns to Kremlin as president in 2012, shortly after the UN abstention and subsequent NATO operations, there is a deepening in the antagonism towards the West. An inevitable dislocation emerges as Russia continues to subvert the positivity of prominent Western discourses which interpreted the Arab Spring as revolutionary, and perhaps positive in the normative sense of the word. Furthermore, as it relates to my case study and official Russian discourse throughout the Syrian conflict, the Libyan conflict is seen as one data point in broader cascading dissent of state authority. The Libyan conflict and Syrian conflict are both conflicts within the broader Arab Spring. Whereas the broader international community, might see the Arab Spring as isolated to the Middle East and North Africa, Russian official discourse often articulates a relationship between the Color Revolutions and the Arab Spring. Thus, the Arab Spring breeds similar anxiety for Russian officials as externally sponsored regime change. Returning to Snetkov's observation, that the hegemonic discourse dominated the latter half of the 2000s as a 'threat of chaos' emanating from foreign interventions, I see this anxiety, and reflective discourse of the

‘threat of chaos’ (from the West), as remaining hegemonic during the onset of the Arab Spring and throughout the Arab Spring. However, as mentioned above in 2015, I see the re-emergence of the ‘threat of terrorism’ also returning, both discourses include deep antagonisms towards the West.

3.5 The Annexation of Crimea

Through the purview of antagonism between Russia and the West, the Russian military intervention in Syria makes for an interesting case study because it comes a year after admonishment from the West on Russia’s annexation of Crimea and support to separatist movements in Eastern Ukraine. Poststructuralist philosophy through the analysis of biopolitics has been applied to Russian politics in recent years. These interpretations of Russian discourse offer insights into Russian identity production and securitization of certain issues at home and in the near abroad. In *The State and Human Body in Putin’s Russia* Sergei Medvedev focuses on the Russian use of biopolitics. Sergei Medvedev presents the annexation of Crimea, as well as support to the separatists in Donbas, as a natural biological action similar to reclaiming a severed body part. Donbas was characterized in Russian propaganda as the “heart of Russia.” (2019: 5) Medvedev encapsulates the findings of his research by saying that through the use of biopolitics, Russian leadership created a war of values with the West to try to form a new domestic character.” (2019: 6) The use of biopolitics in poststructuralism serves as a securitizing practice for Russian officials. Biopolitics are employed through discursive articulations in conjunction with securitization and parallel legislation or in the case of Crimea and Ukraine, the Kremlin justifies their securitizing methods in the form of bold foreign policy measures. As Buzan et al. discuss, securitization is a self-referential practice, thus something that was not previously a security issue, then becomes a security issue. According to Medvedev, an increasing wave of biopolitical initiatives was deployed “in the wake of the crushed “Bolotnaya” opposition movement in 2011-12 that sought to discipline society and reorient the focus off “electoral politics to unexpected but intriguing fields like sexuality, hygiene, and food security.” (2019: 2) As it relates to my thesis and case study “Biopolitical normalization thus raises the bar of sovereignty, a core concept of Putin’s presidency.” In the mid-2000s the Kremlin embraced the hegemonic discourse of ‘sovereign democracy’ and in 2008, during the time of the Russia-Georgia

war, the Kremlin strengthened this discourse with the concept of ‘territorial sovereignty.’ Essentially, “biopolitics is yet another territorialization of state sovereignty, this time placed inside the human body.” (2019: 3) As I move towards the case study, the official Russian discourse performatively reinforces discourse of ‘territorial sovereignty’ concerning Syria and what must be restored to the rightful owner (as Russia sees it) of the territory – the state, as represented by the Assad regime.

3.6 Summary of Poststructuralism Literature on Russia

According to poststructuralism, no identity is fixed, all identities are fluid, and the work of the state is never finished in the realm of identity production. Russia’s absence of a fixed identity (unfixity) is not unique, but in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union appears to be in a state of unfixity of a higher degree. Some scholars have characterized Russian identity as suspended or containing elements of emptiness. I am inclined to agree that there is not only contest within the Russian identity (just as there is in a US identity), but there is also a void. This void leads to the performative identity construction, but again as many other scholars have offered, the elite have no language to articulate discourse through except a Eurocentric language, which further leads to oppression within the Russian discursive system. Eventually, this oppression leads to resentment, and resentment leads to antagonism. “Russia’s development in modern times has been characterized by oscillation between an attempt to internalize global hegemonic order (by trying to follow norms of ‘civilized’ foreign policy conduct, pursuing domestic reforms or both) and counter hegemonic resentment.” (Morozov, 2018: 35) Through the analysis of official Russian discourse in the Syrian conflict postulation of fear and articulation of values, we can see how Russian discourse is full of antagonisms towards the West and demarcation towards the Northern Caucasus through differentiation. As Laclau and Mouffe explain values are relative to other values, and “values are values of opposition are defined only by their difference.” (1985: 106) As Russia constructs their identity, this construction is done through values, values that are largely in opposition to the West. Thus, in the three decades that follow the Cold War – a new war emerged in the discursive space. This war plays out domestically in Russian securitization initiatives and abroad as Russian performatively produces identity in the discursive space of the Syrian conflict.

4.0 CASE STUDY: RUSSIAN IDENTITY PRODUCTION IN THE SYRIAN CONFLICT

Prior to collecting data, I examined academic literature which analyzes Russian security discourse and other critical theories which evaluate Russia's actions in the Middle East. My case study integrates data analysis of official Russian discourse and relevant secondary texts from academics and selected practitioners and think tanks.

Before diving in further, I want to offer some additional context on the Syrian conflict and the lead up to the Russian military intervention. The Syrian Conflict officially began in March 2011, and after Russia's initial diplomatic support of the Assad Regime in 2011, the protracted conflict in Syria continued to grow mired by internal and external actors. In 2014, the US launched multiple cross border operations from neighboring countries to train and equip partner forces to fight the Islamic State, who by 2014, were controlling large swaths of territory across Iraq and Syria. In 2014, between Jabat Al Nusra and Al Qaida elements in the Opposition controlled territory of Syria and the Islamic State gaining in the ground in the South and East of Syria an understanding of "international terrorism" was growing by the West, Russia and as emanating through propaganda from the terrorist organizations themselves. International terrorism as it relates to Russian domestic security and counterterrorism combined with other contextual conditions such as material interests (ports and oil) and the concept of the 'Right to Protect,' 'sovereign democracy,' 'territorial sovereignty' all aligned to create a context with conditions of possibility for Russian military intervention. Existing literature addresses the above considerations but does not synthesize them into a greater understanding of how Russia's discourse evolved from one which primarily postulates the 'threat of chaos' from Western intervention to one that postulates a 'threat of terrorism' to the homeland. The following sub-sections take a critical look incentivizing dimensions of Russia's foreign policy throughout the Syrian conflict. At the same time, these next sections are not the analytically salient portion of my research as it relates to Russian identity production I chose to incorporate them in order for my research to be considered a comprehensive analysis of Russian foreign policy dimensions in the context of the Syrian conflict. I to briefly offer a topical literature review and any subsequent empirical findings from

primary and secondary sources as a process of elimination to relieve the reader from any distraction in their role in the Syrian intervention or as an element of identity production.

4.1 Alternative Explanations: Securing Tartous Naval Base

Russia's quest for material resources and strategic advantages has been batted around by think tanks and in the media. Dannreuther's assessment that protecting Tartous Naval Base, the only remaining naval base outside the former Soviet Union, is neither one of the main motivating factors and did not tip the scales in order to support or provide any causality for launching the Russian military intervention into Syria. In Dannreuther's words "its importance is more rooted in nostalgia than the actual needs and demands of Russian naval power." (2014:88)

I agree with Dannreuther's analysis that Russian military bases in Syria play a minimal role in the foreign policy explanations for why Russia is so active in Syria. While there might be some ideational considerations tied to legacy relationships between the Soviet Union and Syria, I do not see this a profound motivation for Russia to either defend the Assad regime or militarily intervene in Syria. The official Russian discourses do not indicate any sort of fixation on the bases, but when mentioned they articulate their plans for the bases with pragmatism. Therefore, I extend this thought to Khmeimim Air Base as well, which was significantly built up after the military intervention. I do not assess the physical infrastructure of Tartous and Khmeimim to be deeply connected to a grand strategy for Russia but instead, a means to an end for broader identity production in Syria as seen through the hegemonic discourses I analyze.

The official discourses that I found which discuss Tartous and Khmeimim approached both bases from a position of security, but neither indicated that securing these bases was a motivation for defending Assad internationally or for entering into the Syrian conflict. Instead, an uncontroversial objective of securing the bases offers an active posture in the fight against terrorism. In one instance, roughly three months after the onset of the military intervention, Putin says "our maritime base in Tartus and our aviation base at the Hmeymim airbase – will function as before. They must be protected securely from land, sea and air." (Putin, 14.03. 2016) Then almost a year and a half later Putin says "In Syria, two Russian bases – an airbase in Khmeimim and a naval facility in the port of Tartus –

will remain and operate permanently. This is an important factor in defending our national interests as well as ensuring Russia's security in one of the key, strategic sectors." (Putin, 28.12.2017) Whereas Putin directly says this base will be used strategically and to protect Russian national interests, the bases themselves offer little insight into Russia's motivation to protect Assad or military intervene.

I assess that an alternative discussion of the Russian military intervention to expand their influence through the protection and acquisition of bases in Syria is insufficient. Furthermore, from a poststructuralist perspective, when I collected and compared data surrounding the bases, I did not identify any discursive pattern which could provide theoretical insights into Russian identity production in Syria. However, because the naval bases and now the Army base is often touted in IR circles as incentivizing elements, I felt a short discussion on them is necessary before discussing my empirical analysis in later chapters.

4.2 Alternative Explanations: Advancement of Military Efficacy

In 2008, the Russian military went under significant reforms in the wake of the Georgian conflict. These reforms included major structural reorganizations under Anatoliy Serdyukov. These reforms and the much-debated Gerasimov Doctrine have been discussed by academics and think tanks. In Roger McDermott's *Does Russia Have a Gerasimov Doctrine* he investigates Russian military advances and reforms and highlights that through the Syrian military intervention one of the most remarkable advances is the ability to train the Syrian Arab Army as proxy forces through the application of new or advanced technologies and systems and partnering closely through air and sea operations. (2016:103) Anton Lavrov covered the "Russian Military Reforms from Georgia to Syria," where he explains that the capacity of the Russian military has modernized and improved efficacy in terms of personnel, command and control systems, equipment modernization, improved situational awareness and precision weapon systems. (2018: 6)

Within the security community, it is widely accepted that "war" can be useful for the economy as well as good for the "troops." The deployment of troops alone cannot justify military intervention. Deployments may enable force readiness, and a state of

preparedness helps maintain the preparedness of personnel and military equipment as well as the modernization of technology. I agree with both Lavrov and McDermott that Russia has taken great strides to improve its fighting capability since 2008. Through the official Russian discourse below, we can see the theme of military efficacy, but I do not see this articulating into any form of meaningful identity production.

Here is a very “tactical” level statement by President Putin that explains the benefit of real-world combat action. In an exchange between President Putin and Sr. Lieutenant A. Vedyashchev following a bilateral meeting between Assad and Putin at Khmeimim Airbase they discussed the practical experience that military deployments bring to armed service personnel Sr Lieutenant A. Vedyashchev told President Putin “the training range is for learning things. Here, it is real work, and the experience that you gain while doing actual work cannot be obtained in civilian life.” Putin responded “True. At a training range, you only shoot at targets, but here you are targets as well. It is a big difference.” (Putin, 11.12.2017)

Russian Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu exemplifies this increase in efficacy when he visits the National Defense Control Center to meet with Russian Aerospace Forces in December 2015, approximately two months after the military operations formerly began. In this press release Defense Minister is providing a battle update to President Putin where he discusses a “massive air raid on ISIS facilities on the Syrian territory.” Then he lists a range of weaponry employed to fight in Syria “long-range Tu-160, Tu-95MS and Tu-22M3 strategic bombers have been brought into the operation from the Russian territory.” After discussing the success of decimating ISIS positions in Raqqah and Deir ez Zor and then terrorists’ targets in Aleppo and Idlib, he provides an operational summary to demonstrate military efficacy, “overall, for the first day of the air operation we have planned 127 combat missions to hit 266 terrorist positions. By now we have carried out 82 flights, destroying 140 terrorist positions. The operation continues.” (Shoigu, 17.12.2015) During the same brief at the National Control Center, Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov provided an additional update about completed operations over the past 48 days “the Russian aviation group has made 2,289 sorties and delivered 4,111 missile strikes on the terrorists’ main infrastructure facilities, munitions depots and manpower locations. In the course of combat action, 562 command centres have been

destroyed, along with 64 terrorist training camps, 54 arms and ammunition production plants and other facilities.” (Gerasimov, 17.12.2015)

Over the past five years, Russian official discourse towards the military efficacy unsurprisingly remains the same – the military is modernizing and increasing their capabilities. In 2017, while speaking to the military academy in Moscow Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov describes the “qualitative change in the Russian Armed Force’ capabilities in recent years.” In what appears to be a slight against the past, he notes that Russian Armed Forces can “only be used in strict compliance with international law and its commitments – not to conquer, and not to export political ideas.” Lavrov explains that military might is not flaunted and not for any form of colonialism “but to defend our most vital interests, when all other means have been exhausted, or to help our allies and friends at their request, as is happening today in Syria at the invitation of the country’s legitimate government.” (Lavrov, 23.03.2017) Lavrov’s statement can be seen as an articulation of an element. The analytical value in this statement is in what Lavrov does not transparently state, as he says Russia is in Syria legitimately, Lavrov infers US actions in Syria at the time are illegal, he is discursively forming an antagonism through by articulating an element which implies differentiation – that Russia is in Syria legitimately, while others are not. Lavrov, also reiterates the discourse of the ‘threat of terrorism’ indirectly when he says Russian Armed Forces are defending “vital interests.”

At an awards ceremony with the Armed Forces, Putin emphasized that “48,000 Russian soldiers and officers took part in the operations in Syria in a little over two years.” In addition to Russian soldier participation in the Syrian campaign, Putin also discusses the modernization of the force and efficacy of their actions. “Aerospace Forces pilots flew 34,000 sorties and launched 166 high-precision strikes against terrorist facilities.” After providing the quantitative date, Putin then offers a qualitative description of the increase in efficacy and prestige by explaining that for the past two years of Syrian Russian forces have “radically changed.” Putin characterized the Armed forces as “modern.” Putin claimed that world had seen this increase in Russian military capability, and while this is important, the most critical dimension is that “our people have seen it” and “this is very important because people must feel protected; they must feel that their security is reliably guaranteed.” (Putin 28.12.2017)

During a visit to a military command post in Syria Putin's discourse emphasizes that the military Putin emphasizes military efficacy by asserting "Military police are effective in the Golan Heights, in Palmyra, Aleppo, and other important regions of Syria. Pilots of the Russian Aerospace Forces conduct reconnaissance and provide air support to the Syrian army. Joint operations help eliminate the more dangerous terrorist commanders, which is what the Special Operations Forces have successfully accomplished. Off the coast of Syria, the Navy personnel are continuing to successfully defend our national interests in the Mediterranean and defend our national interests in the Mediterranean successfully." (Putin 07.01.2020)

From a poststructuralist position, I must note the use of the word "terrorist." In poststructuralist circles this is widely considered to be a *nodal point*, the use of this word carries weight from previous discursive struggles but is also somewhat conflated across various opposition camps based on subject positions. Specifically, Russian official discourse often uses "terrorist" interchangeably with the armed political opposition of Assad. This is not a useless articulation as it is one of the observable dislocations in the discursive realm which blurs the lines between various "opposition" actors and begins to divide the discursive terrain into opposing camps. These opposing camps can be seen as pro-Assad and anti-Assad, and of course, the camps themselves are not monolithic

While it might be stated that the military reforms of 2008 enabled the Russian military to intervene in Russia, I find the justification for intervention as related to military reforms or for the benefit of military efficacy to be void of analytical benefit. However, while discussing military reforms and efficacy, the antagonism towards the West and references to protecting vital interests are mentioned, but not with the same saliency that is illuminated in the empirical findings. In the discourses of danger portion of my thesis, I find postulations of threat in discourse related to the defense of the homeland to yield greater empirical value into the identity production of Russia in Syria. As mentioned above, I also see these articulations of 'terrorism' as nodal points which begin to set the discursive horizon for and position the relevant actors with respect to the production of hegemonic discourses as related to the Syrian conflict.

4.3 Alternative Explanations: Resource Driven Interests

This is the final section prior to the start of the actual case study. This section focuses on the delicate balancing act Russia faces in the IR realm in the Middle East. When examining the resource dimension of Russia's military intervention in Syria, the discourse analysis does not illuminate a strong case for Russian presence in Syria based on material or resource gains. The relationship with Turkey proves to be fragile and strategic. As a researcher, one of the most curious dimensions of the Syrian conflict that I observed is the tense relationship between Turkey and Russia. Russia is continuously pursuing multilateral dialogue through the Astana process, but Turkey is continuously supporting the armed opposition strongholds. Furthermore, Russia does not shy away from naming these places as 'terrorist' locations and on multiple occasions does this directly during meetings or directly after troika meetings between the three guarantors of the Astana process – Russia, Turkey and Iran. While we are still not at the empirical analysis section of this thesis, I incorporate this section because the nodal point 'terrorism' and 'terrorist' are frequently articulated when Russian officials are in the presence of Turkish officials. While there is evidence of antagonism in Russian discourse towards Turkey, which I will make clear, the degree of antagonism is less severe, especially in the context of more considerable discussion beyond armed actors in Syria.

In Dannreuther's article *Russia and the Arab Spring* he also explains this paradox "from the economic perspective, it is actually with Middle Eastern countries who have strongly supported the opposition against the Assad regime that Russia has the strongest and most significant economic relations." Turkey has been a staunch supporter of the political and military opposition, meanwhile, balancing their position in NATO and close economic ties with Russia. "Turkey has always been Russia's most important trading and economic partner in the Middle East with trade rising from about \$4 billion in the 1990s to USD 15 billion in 2005 and USD 34 billion in 2012." Although there is some oil in the fields of Deir ez Zor, Syria, more importantly, for Russia the natural gas exports "accounts for 63% of Turkish natural gas imports thanks to a dedicated gas export line between the two countries—Blue Stream—which started supplying gas in 2003." (2015: 89)

On multiple occasions, Russian politics to include their role in the Syrian conflict jeopardized these relations. The Russian annexation of Crimea concerned Turkey because of their relationships with the Crimean Tartars, the Turkish Prime Minister explicitly condemned Russia for supporting Assad, and the Russian Ambassador to Turkey was shot during a public event, yet, Russian and Turkish economic relations have remained intact. A year after the Russian Sukhoi Su-24 was shot down (24 November 2015) and less than three months for the assassination of a Russian Ambassador (19 December 2016) During a statement to the press following an Astana process meeting between Turkey, Iran and Russia, Putin discussed the strengthening of economic ties between Turkey and Russia in the form of military arm's sales. "Our military technical ties are growing ever stronger." (Putin, 16.09.2016)

I concur with Dannreuther's assessment that the Russian military intervention risked more potential economic loss than potential economic gain with Turkey on the other side of the conflict supporting Assad's opposition. This shows us that perhaps the "a realist or geopolitical analysis is insufficient for understanding why Russia acted the way it did...to understand, this requires recognition of the role that ideational and ideological factors played." (2015: 89) Although material resources are always a consideration in conflict, I do not believe that the resources are the driving factors for Russia's military intervention in Syria.

During a press statement with the media after a trilateral meeting between the guarantor states of the Astana process Putin invoked strong language, in a more substantial excerpt which conveys the presence of extremist in the contested opposition town of Idlib, Putin highlights a willingness to "neutralize a terrorist threat anywhere we see it." This statement delivered in front of Turkish national leadership who are openly supporting, arming, transporting and equipping opposition forces in this same area. "Russia is resolved to support the Syrian army during local operations aimed at neutralizing the terrorist threat anywhere we see it. Moreover, the ceasefire regime never included terrorists." Putin also described Russia's actions in Syria as an "uncompromising struggle against terrorist groups." (Putin, 16.09.2019)

During the 4th troika, Astana meeting in Sochi Putin utilizes strong language to convey his desire to completely rid Syria of terrorist strongholds by stating that the “troika leaders reiterated that neutralizing terrorist groups in Syria is a top priority,” and that “aggressive raids by militants should not go unpunished.” Putin also urges consensus on “final de-escalation in Idlib.” Then says that ceasefire does not need to “accept the presence of terrorist groups in Idlib.” Finally, he says that the troika should take “practical steps” on how to “eradicate the terrorist stronghold completely.” (Putin 14.07.2019) “Our problem is that we want Syria’s territorial integrity to be ensured. First of all, Manbij must be freed from the terrorists. We should not give a single plot of land to the terrorists in Idlib. The people of Syria are the lawful owners of these territories.” (Putin 14.07.2019) The attempts of tri-lateral negotiations with Iran and Turkey provides compelling political theatre in a protracted conflict, especially considering Russia’s antagonism with the West, in which NATO is a dimension of, and Turkey is a member of. Again, Russia uses the word ‘terrorism’ as a conflated conceptualization of any entity in Syria which opposes Assad establishing a nodal point for a broader hegemonic discourse.

We are working to implement a contract to supply the S-400 Triumf air defence system. Talks are underway on new promising weapon systems.” (Putin 16.09.2016) Three months later, while speaking at an exhibition in Ankara, the Russian Ambassador to Turkey – Andrei Karlov was assassinated by an off-duty police officer who yelled: “this is for Aleppo.” At a Kremlin meeting with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Director of the Foreign Intelligence Service Sergei Naryshkin and Director of the Federal Security Service Alexander Bortnikov, Putin summarized the incident “Tragic news has arrived from Turkey, where Russian Ambassador to Turkey Andrei Karlov was brutally murdered,” and then explained that “this crime is undeniably a provocation aimed at derailing the normalization of Russian-Turkish relations and the peace process in Syria, which is actively promoted by Russia, Turkey, Iran and other countries interested in settlement of the internal conflict in Syria. There can be only one response – stepping up the fight against terrorism – which the criminals will find out firsthand.” (Putin, 12.12.2016)

On November 24, 2015, a Turkish Air Force F-16 shot down a Russian Su- 24, the following day Lavrov conducted an interview with foreign media and condemned the

attack and accused the Turkish military of premeditation describing the incident as a “planned provocation.” Lavrov referenced Putin’s discussion the day prior about foreign fighters indicating that “there may be hundreds if not thousands of Russian militants in the region where only Turkmen allegedly live.” Lavrov insisted that “these militants directly threaten our security and the security of our people.” (Lavrov, 25.11.2015) Lavrov said that the attack from Turkey came after Russia began using precision strikes to make serious gains against the Islamic State infrastructure and their illegal oil trade in the region. (Lavrov, 25.11.2015) This official discourse directly relates to the hegemonic discourse of ‘threat of terrorism’ as it relates “Russian militants” who are foreign fighters from Russia and who “directly threaten our security,” this is explored in greater depth, but this demonstrates how the hegemonic discourse of Russia in the early 2000s resurfaces in the Syrian in conflict, especially in 2015.

I was hard-pressed to find the official discourse on energy policy or opportunities in Syria. Whereas, I never hinged my research on the belief that oil was the motivation to enter the Syrian conflict, I did hope to understand the role of oil in Syria through Putin or Lavrov. Putin appears to use meetings that focus on Syria to discuss other strategic opportunities with Turkey. During a press statement with the media after a trilateral meeting between the guarantor states of the Astana process, Putin said: “We are implementing strategic energy projects, including the construction of the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant and the TurkStream gas pipeline.” (Putin, 16.09.2019) The Turkish dynamic proved to be incredibly complex and dramatic and somehow anticlimactic at the same time – even in the midst of shot down aircraft and assassinations Russia and Turkey always managed to overcome turbulent events that they found themselves on opposing sides of.

While resource-driven explanations provide insight and present themselves in the discursive realm, my conclusion is that they are analytically shallow. From, the poststructuralist perspective, what we can draw from resource relations and Turkish dynamics is that while a deep antagonism with the West is present in Russian discourse, this antagonism is not extended towards Turkey with the same depth as it is towards the US, despite Turkey being a member state of NATO, which in other instances is quite prominent discursively situated as a Western entity. However, as I analyzed all of the data (Russian official discourse) in the in context of the Syrian conflict, the hegemonic

discourses were observable and frequently reiterated in the form of ‘threat of chaos’ and threat of terrorism.’ Despite this, I aimed to still research alternative assumptions about Russian foreign policy action towards Syria. For this reason, I reviewed the above considerations, integrated these alternative explanations with academic literature, when possible identified elements of the hegemonic discourses. The remaining sections of my thesis include what I assess to be the most analytically salient examples of hegemonic discourses, which reveal Russian identity production in the Syrian conflict.

4.4 Discourses of Danger

In the following sub-sections is a diachronic account of Russian discourse towards the Syrian conflict which study two prominent discourses respective their hegemonic presence in the Russian discourses of danger in respect to the Syrian conflict as well a third discourse as it relates to Russian domestic identity: (1) construction of the ‘Threat of Chaos:’ Post-Arab Spring Reflections 2011-2015 (2) Construction of the ‘Threat of Terrorism:’ Post-Russian Military Intervention Reflections 2015-2020. The official Russian discourse is bracketed by time, but the secondary texts which I use to analyze these texts are not bound to these divisions of time.

My research frame unveils the performative nature of Russian identity production in Syria. Snetkov (2012), as mentioned previously, takes a constructivist approach to understanding Russia’s security policy under Putin. I assess there to be enough similar ideational similarities in our pursuit of understanding Russian identity through the prism of counter-terrorism to include her analysis in my research. (2012: 524) This approach ties together Russia’s articulation of internal security concerns with external security concerns. Snetkov observes a rupture in the “Putin regime’s conceptualization of Russian state identity” which moves from a weak state fixated on internal security threats and the fight against terrorism and then to a strong state whose main concern became the “Other” which is the West. Snetkov’s research elucidates the interconnectivity of internal and external security as an identity-building practice, which strengthens the case for those who want to pursue foreign policy initiatives in the security realm to understand Russian identity construction or in my case identity production. A crucial part of Snetkov’s research which relates to this thesis is Snetkov’s account of Putin who observes and

articulates the blurring of lines between a threat from international terrorism and threat from the West. This will become evident in my case study as well through the official discourse of Putin, Lavrov and Medvedev.

4.4.1 Antagonism with the West

In Snetkov's research, she observes key moment in the 2004 post-Beslan speech when Putin, through his articulation, identifies "unnamed" enemies outside of Russia trying to take a piece of Russia from Russia. Through this interlacing of a domestic terrorism threat, to an international terrorism threat from a domestic terrorism threat to 'Western' challenge of values and norms, Putin creates an intricate web of potential threats in his official discourse, which in return creates a myriad of possibilities. (2012: 531) Furthermore, Snetkov's position of the rupture in Russian discourse from internally focused on terrorism to externally focused on NATO further makes a case for why examining the Russian military intervention in Syria is a worthwhile endeavor. While NATO is not the organizing body in the Syrian conflict, it is understood as a 'Western enterprise' and the 'West' because the US and other members of a 'Western coalition' are present through military and diplomatic measures in Syria.

Putin postulates Western interference as a threat to the international world order as well as a threat to Russia and the former USSR states and subsequently rejects Western influence. Dannreuther addresses Russian elite suspicions towards NGOs which emerged in the mid-2000s. From Russia's perspective, Western-backed NGOs are employed abroad to interfere with foreign domestic politics and cultivate oppositions across the former Soviet states. This culminated into an assault to close to home for Putin when in 2011 and 2012 domestic discontent boiled over into open opposition towards the Kremlin as it "extended right to the heart of Moscow as large opposition rallies criticized the corruption and authoritarianism of the Russian political system." For the Russian authorities, the Arab Spring always represented a potential threat, that regime change should only be pursued internal measures of the state in question. Therefore, Russia's policymaking prioritized, ensuring the prevention of regime change through Western intervention. (2014: 82)

Official discourse by Sergey Lavrov embodies the same elite suspicions referenced by Dannreuther and other scholars. Morozov uses the mistreatment of NGOs as an illustrative example of a discursive inversion of oppression. Morozov's article explains "the discursive tensions that exist in the Russian identity politics, and more broadly, in the global debate about the future of democracy." (2008: 152) As it relates to NGOs, Morozov argues that "by mistreating the NGO activists, the Georgians, the Chechens, the liberal politics, etc.," Russian authorities engage in Laclau's concept of "representation inversion of the relations of the oppressor. Facing what it perceives as unjust western dominance in global affairs, on the one hand, and the disturbing uncertainty at home, on the other." As Morozov and Laclau explain this a discursive battle that could be won by exchanging the places of the oppressor and the oppressed. (2008:173)

During an answers and questions session with Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's at the Military Academy in Moscow with officers, Lavrov spells out his view on the role NGOs play in hybrid warfare and mentions the White Helmets, a Western-sponsored humanitarian organization, by name. Lavrov alludes to the Netflix film which won the Academy Award for Best Documentary Short. Lavrov alleges that the film is about an organization which "presents themselves as a humanitarian agency helping people attacked by bombs – particularly, in Syria." Lavrov alleges that the clips are staged and that their activities are "fake" and that evidence has been unveiled by journalists that "they only deal with developing falsified and provocative news while dragging Russia, Iran, the Syrian government and armed forces through the mud." This is an example of the objectification of Russia and their alliance in the Syrian conflict which speaks to the discourse of danger as emanating from Western disinformation tactics. As Campbell explains, this is "the objectification of the self through the representation of danger that Foreign Policy helps achieve." (Campbell, 1998: 71) Lavrov insisted that the White Helmets are directly assisting terrorists and extremists. Lavrov explained that anywhere he goes when trying to address this with his Western colleagues "the White Helmets are exempt from any criticism and seem to have a monopoly on the truth." He described this as a "trick" of which the US has many. (Lavrov, 23.03.2017). To further elaborate this point, Morozov explains that the subject position of the Russian elite is that NGOs represent a fifth column because they are financed abroad (by Western countries) and

because they impose Western values. (2008: 163) This animosity that Lavrov demonstrates towards the White Helmets in Syria is performative discourse as seen on the domestic front in Russia, when Russia passed legislation to amend NGO laws in 2006, making it more challenging to operate based on the premise that NGOs are agents of the West which seek to undermine Russian authority. I begin with this anecdote involving the White Helmets' to set the discursive context which is profoundly intertwined by a web of Russian postulations of a threat to Russian identity over the past nine years ranging from discourses of dangers articulated Western influence, international anarchy (chaos), threats to sovereignty, international and domestic terrorism. For Russian officials, the post-Arab spring world presented a myriad of threats worth postulating as Campbell states "for both insurance and international relations, therefore, danger results from the calculation of a threat that objectifies events, disciplines relations, and sequesters an ideal of the identity of the people said to be at risk." (1998: 3)

4.4.2 Discourses of Danger and the Northern Caucasus

In the 2013 article, *Mistaking Syria for Chechnya*, Fiona Hill takes a realist perspective acknowledging resources, access and fear. My divergence with Hill is that where she says 'fear' motivates Putin, she does not deeply characterize this fear beyond a classical realist approach. Whereas through poststructuralist analysis, we consider 'fear' as something that we cannot understand the objectivity or intentionality of, but rather the postulation. Hill offers an answer to "Why has Putin offered such steadfast support to Assad?" First, she acknowledges that the material interests are insufficient "on the surface, Moscow seems to profit from exporting arms to Syria, and it depends on the regime's goodwill to maintain Russian access to a naval facility at the Mediterranean port of Tartus." Then she acknowledges that there is more below the surface "but these are marginal and symbolic interests. Putin is really motivated to support the Assad regime by his fear of state collapse" still tethered to a realist perspective she says the collapse of Syria is a representation of the Northern Caucasus – "a fear he confronted most directly during the secession of Russia's North Caucasus republic of Chechnya, which he brutally suppressed in a bloody civil war and counterinsurgency operation fought between 1999 and 2009." In essence, she surmises that when "Putin looks at Syria, he sees Chechnya" and is driven by this fear. "Both conflicts pitted the state against disparate and leaderless

opposition forces, which over time came to include extremist Sunni Islamist groups. From a case study perspective, Hill's article aligns closely with my actor (Russia) and area of interest (Syria), and her security connections between Chechnya to Syria offer parallels worth consideration. However, her points remain bridled in the concept of genuine and unchallenged fear, not in the postulation of the danger of the official Russian discourse. Whereas Hill may see this as Russia's fear spilling into a contest of power, I see this as a postulation of fear as a performative production of identity.

Interestingly enough, just as NYT reporter amplified Putin's remarks about destroying Chechen militants in the outhouse in the wake of the 2017 Saint Petersburg attack, it is worth noting that Hill also referenced this threat by Putin. What emerges as a pattern is Putin's harsh verbiage uttered and then consequently revisited time and time. No one doubts that Putin will be "firm against terrorism." But what now must be reinforced is that when we research through the lens of poststructuralism, the emphasis is not on the actor, in this case – what Putin intends to do, but rather what does discourse do. The discourse of danger by Putin and Lavrov, in this case, evidence of identity production in Syria.

4.4.3 Demarcations and Islamic co-existence

Continuing along on the same geographic thought process of returning to identity production, I want to dedicate this portion of the literature review Russian identity as it relates to co-existence with Islam. As I move through the hegemonic discourses, I unveil the discursive element of demarcation as it relates to the differentiation between Russian identity and the West as well as between Russian identity and their struggle with Islamic co-existence. Russian and Islamic co-existence is an integral part of the Russian state identity. Without sounding pedantic, I want to say Islamic co-existence must be contemplated as a dimension of Russian identity. Therefore, in light of state control of territory, counterterrorism, international terrorism, and foreign military intervention, Russian co-existence and Islam must be considered. Laclau and Mouffe explain that there is always an impossibility for relations "it is for this reason that the co-existence of its terms must be conceived not as an objective relation of frontiers, but as reciprocal subversion of their contents. (1985:129) As I study the official Russian discourse, I see

an oscillation in the discourse, on one hand, it is harsh and unforgiving to a ‘terrorists’ from the Northern Caucasus, but on the other hand, it is carving out a pluralistic space for state accepted variant of Islam. To elaborate this point, I draw from Campbell’s *Writing Security* which explains that all states “are marked by an inherent tension” and face the demand to align the various domains of an “imagined political community to come into being – such as territoriality and the many axes of identity.” This demand on the state and inherent tension “can never be fully resolved because the performative nature of identity can never be fully revealed.” (Campbell, 1998: 12)

Academics such as Dannreuther and Tsygankov contribute to the conversation on Russian self-identification as a civilization that prizes multiethnic and multi-confessional toleration for Islam. Dannreuther explains that Russia’s experience from the 1970s onwards has been tumultuously intertwined with the struggle against Islamic extremism. “From the Soviet experience Afghanistan, the Islamist civil war in Tajikistan, and the insurgency in Chechnya in the North Caucasus,” the conflict in the North Caucasus mutated and evolved from a “nationalist secessionist” movement to a more “radical Islamist struggle.” As the relationship and threat with Chechnya evolved, so did Russian identity construction. Russia’s positioning and engagement with the Islamic world have led to an understanding of the fragility of social cohesion that is threatened by “radical social change.” (Dannreuther, 2015: 81) Tsygankov explains that Russia understands the need for “fruitful dialogue and cooperation” between the Islamic world and the West, and this requirement dictates that Russia cannot “support radical trends” between either world, but rather must function as a facilitator of dialogue and negotiations. (2013: 2) It is through this prism that we can understand why the “Kremlin supported the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan, but not Iraq.” (2013:6) The reason mentioned above elucidates why Russia maintains a position of mediator in the Middle East in order to maintain some semblance of stability and resist the region from erupting into a “war of civilizations” between the East and the West. (2013: 8)

Dannreuther explains that during post-Soviet development, “Putin developed a religio-political as well as coercive military dimension,” as part of Russia’s strategy to deal with Islamic extremists. Russia actively supports Muslim religious representation through political and financial means; this brand of Islam is regulated, hierarchal, moderate, and

Russian rooted. (2014: 92) Interestingly, when Lavrov conceptualizes Islamic ideology, he seems to address the challenge of Islam outside of the Russian model that Dannreuther references as well. First, Lavrov says that education is essential to build resiliency against recruitment for children in developing countries by “ISIS, Jabhat al Nusra, and other terrorist groups.” Then he says the kind of Islam that is taught and preached must be monitored. The reason is that Islam is absent of a pope or patriarch and lacks a “vertical chain of command to set the guidelines, fundamental postulates and course to be followed.” Lavrov extrapolates on the level of inconsistencies by often saying extremists’ imams take the helm of local communities, and within the same country, very different versions of Islam can be preached. He cites one specific Egyptian Islamic theologian who is broadcasted by Al Jazeera as an “absolutely disgusting extremist.” Lavrov says that “this knowledge should be untangled very carefully, without putting a bet on bombing someone, finding another Osama bin Laden and thus getting everything right?” (Lavrov, 30.12.2015) Lavrov articulates a certain antagonism towards Islam as a system that lacks order. The element (not articulated as antagonism) at play here is authority, whereas and conceptually, we can see that even in discursive structures on Islam, Russian officials articulate a threat of chaos as is hegemonic in their discourses towards the West. Lavrov is essentially saying, if only Islam had a system of authority, then Muslims could perhaps, actualize, correctly interpret their religion and behave properly.

Furthermore, Dannreuther explains that secularization is conceptualized by allotting space to religious identities, but in a manner which “extends beyond the Russian Orthodox church to include the other traditional religions, most notably Islam.” For example, Tartar Muslims are a recognized indigenous population in Russia and considered “co-constructors of the Russian state.” When referring to Russian people in a civic sense, “Rossiiski” is used over the ethnic “Russkii” to convey Russian identity through the careful articulation of multi-ethnic and multi-confessional identity. Russian multi-confessional secularism is a potentially more attractive export to the non-Western world, and Russia is not as “hyper-secular” in their approach, and is perhaps more aligned as a civilization as it with the Middle East as it belongs to both “Europe and Asia, the Christian and the Islamic worlds.” (2014: 92) Through my analysis of official Russian discourse, I observe that Russia carefully carves out a space for Islamic co-existence through articulations heterogeneity. However, all discourses have frontiers, and as official

discourses articulate heterogeneity, there are also oscillations back to antagonism articulated as segregation, and these sentiments are less inviting. As Campbell states, the identity of the state is an 'imagined community,' and thus, the identity of the state is derived from "ritualized performances and formalized practices," which "operate in its name or the service of its ideals." When we analyze "the modalities of foreign policy" defined as "discourses of danger and the multifarious ethical powers of segregation" we can see that they "are animated by the regulative ideal of normal/pathological, and which (particularly in the guise of Foreign Policy) establish a geography of evil that inscribes the boundaries of inside/outside." (1998: 130) It is my observation that within Russia's imagined community resides a boundary between Russia and Northern Caucasus, which is illuminated in discourses of danger within the Syrian context.

4.5 Construction of the 'Threat of Chaos:' Post-Arab Spring Reflections 2011-2015

This section examines the discursive environment in the wake of the Arab spring, the onset of the Syrian conflict (March 2011), and the events leading up to the Russian military intervention (September 2015) into Syria. The hegemonic discourse during this time is the threat of chaos that occurs from regime change. Putin and Lavrov postulate the danger of interference with the Assad regime and embrace a defiant doctrine of 'responsibility to protect' towards the Assad regime and an emphasis on maintaining a Westphalian world order concerned with the territorial integrity of states.

4.5.1 Contagious Intransigence of the Opposition

I begin this section with an excerpt from Lavrov speaking to journalists following a joint press conference with the president to the Republic of South Ossetia in Tskhinvali. After a reporter asked about the intransigence of the Syrian opposition despite concessions from the Assad regime Lavrov relayed his concern over the developments in the Middle East and insisted that military force against civilians is unacceptable, but so are foreign actors interfering in the process of dialogues between the state and the opposition. Lavrov insinuated that intransigence arose from insurgents expecting support from external actors and described these aspirations as "very dangerous sentiments. Unfortunately, they are contagious and appear among the protesters in other countries of the region in hopes that the worsening situation will compel the international community to come to their aid

and side with them.” Furthermore, he characterized these sentiments as an “invitation to a whole array of civil wars. It is irresponsible for governments to use force against their citizens, and it is irresponsible for the opposition to provoke the use of force by someone from the outside.” (Lavrov, 26.04.2011)

Roy Allison assesses that the prospect of regime change “touched a raw nerve at the top of the centralized Russian state.” The idea that Western powers might intervene and choose “one side of a civil war beyond the mandate agreed in the UN,” was particularly concerning. (2013: 797) At the onset of the Syrian conflict, we can see Russian official discourses deepening their antagonism towards the West. When Lavrov says, “someone from the outside,” he means the West. The international discursive system dominated by a neo-liberal conception of liberalizing values that are used to justify military intervention in order to protect human rights within sovereign boundaries, which can be seen through the conflicts in Iraq, Kosovo, and Libya. Lavrov’s discourse deepens the antagonism towards the West and points to the chaos that emerges out of such projects overthrow and new state creation. Morozov elaborates that “dislocation can provoke securitizing practices.” (Morozov, 2008: 152)

As I move forward in the case study, I explain how securitizing practices lead to a reinforced antagonism towards the West. As mentioned in the poststructuralist literature review, there is an existing body (no pun intended) of biopolitics as a dimension of poststructuralism. Following this vein of thought, there is another prism through which we can analyze Lavrov’s discourse. When he uses the word “contagious” in his postulation of fear, it feels reminiscent of the ‘Communist Contagion’ which was a geographical conception of a protractible political illness as revealed by Kennan’s long telegram which was leaked to the media in 1946 with a map of Iran, Turkey and Manchuria as “infected” and Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Afghanistan, and India as “exposed.” In US/Communism example, the US represents “the position of the doctor with the right if not duty to intervene,” (Campbell, 1998: 157) In the wake of the Arab Spring it appears regime change is the disease and Russia is in the position of a doctor trying to stabilize the patient(s). Biopolitics relates to the concept securitization, in this example, Lavrov is suggesting that Russia’s role is to protect the ‘territorial integrity’ of Syria which runs parallel with Russian domestic discourse as explained in the literature review, as

‘territorial sovereignty,’ I assess that this is an example of Russian identity production replicating itself in the discursive space of the Syrian conflict.

4.5.2 “Your Either With US or Against Us” – New War, Antagonistic Discourses

In a New York Times op-ed authored by Putin himself, he expresses a discourse of danger to the world order directly aimed at the American people as his specified target audience. It is beyond my analytical position to assess if this article was aimed at the broader international community in the 2013 article titled “The Syrian Alternative.” First, Putin postulates a collapse to the world order if the US pursues a military intervention into Syria without UNSC authorization “No one wants the United Nations to suffer the fate of the League of Nations, which collapsed because it lacked real leverage. This is possible if influential countries bypass the United Nations and take military action without Security Council authorization.” While actions are taken outside UNSC approval certainly have a delegitimizing effect on the United Nations, Putin’s discourse faces limitations because the US and Russia have both have precedence of violating UN norms. Putin insists Russia’s support is not to Syria itself, but rather international law. “We are not protecting the Syrian government but international law. We need to use the UN Security Council and believe that preserving law and order in today’s complex and turbulent world is one of the few ways to keep international relations from sliding into chaos.” This discourse is postulates a threat to the international system and articulates the risk chaos that could be caused by a US military intervention.

Within the same text, Putin acknowledges that Syria used chemical weapons, but still postulates that action against the regime represents a graver danger. He articulates a danger for the US – that if force is used against Assad, then perceptions of the US worldwide will diminish “millions around the world increasingly see America not as a model of democracy but as relying solely on brute force.” Through intertextuality, he quotes the famous and divisive rhetoric of the previous George W. Bush “you are either with us or against us,” which harkens of echoes from the past of a world with an axis of evil. Putin does this by using a “double-voiced discourse,” which also (re)contextualize the discourse for the Syrian conflict which was taken from a speech by George W. Bush on November 6th, 2001 in the wake of the September 11th attacks which was shortly

followed by decades of military operations in Afghanistan and then Iraq two years later. (Hodges, 2015: 45)

In this article, Putin advocates for international patience towards Syria and further postulates risk as he describes a world without international law as a world with nuclear armament “if you cannot count on international law, then you must find other ways to ensure your security. Thus, a growing number of countries seek to acquire weapons of mass destruction. This is logical: if you have the bomb, no one will touch you.” This statement conjures a form of antagonism based on resentment towards the West. The subject position of Russia begins to crystallize here as a peripheral country and as a country among an axis of resistance with two opposing camps. One camp is the ‘West’ with certain privileges to act outside of international order (the UN) and the opposing camps – non-Western states on the periphery who are oppressed by the West and left defenseless because of the West’s violations of international law. The consequence of this logic is that countries on the periphery must then resort to their own anarchic devices to defend themselves.

Putin consistently articulates a discourse of danger towards any violations of international law in the Middle East. (Putin, 12.09.2013) Putin appeals to the US audience while also differentiating the Russian position from that of US foreign policy, which from his position, is likely to intervene militarily in Syria and create chaos. As Campbell explains, “meaning and identity are, therefore, always the consequence of a relationship between the self and the other that emerges through the imposition of an interpretation, rather than being the product of uncovering an exclusive domain with its own pre-established identity.” (Campbell, 1998: 23) In the case of Russia and the West, Russia represents order, and the West represents the disruption of world order. This example elucidates the hegemonic discourse of the early years of the Syrian conflict and Russia’s identity production in its differential position towards the West.

4.5.3 Katechon of International Law

As discussed in the chapter on poststructuralist literature, there is a concept of Russia as the *Katechon*, the defender of order and protector from chaos. This discourse is

hegemonic throughout the course of the Syrian conflict as Russia resists Western intervention against Assad. However, this characterization of Russia's role in the world has limits, which can be observed in the Georgian-Russia war of 2008 and then again through the annexation of Crimea and support to separatists in Eastern Ukraine in 2015.

In their 2015 publication, Averre and Davies summarize Russia's aversion to Western intervention in Syria in the wake of the Arab Spring and the Libya conflict "Russia's attachment to what it promotes as the basic principles underpinning international law—sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of states unless authorized by the UNSC." They explain that this position "is rooted in a powerful narrative, based on 'political principle,' of repudiating forced democratization (in itself a form of intervention) and regime change, which can destabilize states." (2015: 824)

Through the analysis of the official discourse of Putin and Lavrov in the Syrian conflict, the Kremlin's staunch commitment to the supremacy of international law is observable, but it has limits. Allison contributes to the understanding of Russia by situating Putin with respect to his commitment to international order in the Middle East as well as his defiance of international order in the Near Abroad. (2014: 539) Allison built on the concept of international legal order and described Syria as a location where "Putin vehemently reinforced his position" that no cost or effort shall be spared to protect the sovereignty of a legitimate government. Allison says, "Russian actions in this zone will contradict the way it relies on and uses international law in the wider international system." (2014: 543) Averre and Davies build off and reiterate Allison's article, where he asserts that Russia is preoccupied with the concept of sovereignty in the Russian domestic state order, which materializes as an external policy discourse through their commitment to a global order which also values sovereignty of incumbent rulers. Averre and Davies acknowledge the appalling humanitarian abuses, which complicate Russia's adherence to international legal order and criticism towards the internationally recognized Syrian Opposition reducing them to the organization of external patronage, which is deeply intertwined with extremist organizations. (2015: 819-820) "The Syrian conflict illuminates divergent understandings of intervention and responsible protection" from actors such as Russia. Furthermore, the position to protect sovereignty in the Middle East and resist regime

change is further complicated by Russia's decision to intervene in South Ossetia in 2008, as well as the annexation of Crimea in 2014. (2015: 831)

I concur with Averre and Davies assessment that Russia's position is complicated by their discourses in the Middle East and Near Abroad, I assess this inconsistency to be limit in the Russian hegemonic discourse that purports foreign intervention leads to chaos. While this limitation is evident in the international context, it is able to survive within the domestic Russian discursive system because of the subject position. The subject position has already been explained as contested, as it relates to Crimea and Ukraine, components of Russian identity, do not consider Ukraine to be foreign. Following this logic, Russia's annexation of Crimea or support to separatists in Donbas "the heart of Russia" cannot be viewed as a foreign intervention limiting the Russian hegemonic discourse of the 'the threat of chaos' from the West, but rather a justified action to regain a piece of a severed body.

Averre and Davies summarize two key findings: (1) "Russia's legitimacy, and indeed that of other governments challenged by western liberalism rests on traditional moral and spiritual values safeguarded by the state, which should not be undermined by 'ultraliberal' ideology but has a central role to play." (2) "Russia's challenge to the legality of intervention as practiced in Iraq and Libya points to an inherent amorality in the liberal peacebuilding approach" because ultimately, the application of a higher sense of morality applied to international order leads to a heightening of conflict rather than diminishing. (2015: 828) There appears to be a consensus amongst academics and analysts that President Putin is committed to the international legal order with respect towards protecting a sovereign in the Middle East. Putin's behavior in the Near Abroad often challenges this understanding and might support some researchers to view Putin as having a cognitive dissonance to international legal order. Averre and Davis, as well as Allison, contextualize the legal framework of the UN and discourse analysis from Lavrov and Putin; I contribute to their analysis by demonstrating how the differentiation in Russian rhetoric between their prioritization of sovereignty over a moral necessity to intervene to protect civilians presents the optic to analyze the discursive dimension from a prism of identity production. Furthermore, through an understanding of "responsibility to protect" and adherence to international law and harkening back to Allison and Averre and Davies

assessment that the commitment to international world order is also tied to Russia's preoccupation to domestic order. "Putin's commitment to a global order which prizes the sovereignty of incumbent rulers remains to a large extent an external expression of his preoccupation with Russian domestic state order. It is an outlook rooted in the structure of political power in Russia, and it is shared by those in the elite who have been empowered by Putin's presidencies." (Allison, 2013: 818)

Putin connects protecting Assad to upholding 'international order,' in some cases, the concept of the international order is connected to the past and invoked through memory politics of the closures and compromises which emerged from the end of the second world war. In other cases, the protection of a sovereign is connected to preventing further chaos. Western Interventions do not pose a direct military threat to Russia. The West never insinuated that they would "intervene" in Russian domestic affairs, but Russia postulates threat as "social disorder." This social disorder is postulated on the international stage as well on the domestic front and manifests in the form of social and political control.

Similar to how Campbell analyzed the US foreign policy, I see Russia postulating a discourse of fear for the Russian state out of chaos in the Middle East. As Campbell explains "the source of danger has never been fixed" and accordingly "the contours of this identity have been the subject of constant (re)writing: not rewriting in the sense of changing the meaning, but rewriting in the sense of inscribing something so that that which is contingent and subject to flux is rendered more permanent. (1998: 31) Ultimately, throughout the Syrian conflict, both Putin and Lavrov speak discourses of danger towards any violation of international order. Through the lens of identity production and securitization, we can see how this nest within Michael Campbell's notion of the state's dependent relationship with threat for identity production. While objectively regime change and political transitions are generally messy, we cannot objectively say the Arab Spring or subsequent military adventures by West threatened Russia. However, the securitization of the Syrian conflict did not require real existential threat against Russia, because security is a "self-referential practice because it is in this practice that the issue becomes a security issue not necessarily because a real existential threat exists but because the issue is presented as such a threat. (Buzan et al., 1998: 24-35) The Russian administration presents a myriad of interrelated threats throughout the decade of the

Syrian conflict, which has discursive parallels with a decade of securitization practices, threat postulations, and identity construction present in the Russian domestic discourses in the decade before the Syrian conflict.

4.5.4 Terrorism and Invocations of the Great Patriotic War

Throughout the examination of over 50 speeches and interviews with the press from Russian President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, one speech frequently alluded concerning the Russian state's position on Syria. This speech is Putin's address to the 70th session of the UN General Assembly, which occurred on September 28th, 2015. Here in the presence of the international community, Putin postulates the danger posed by "power vacuums" in the Middle East and North Africa which "resulted in the emergence of areas of anarchy, which were quickly filled with extremists and terrorists." (Putin 28.09.2015) Putin continues to explain that tens of thousands of the militants fighting in the Islamic State were Iraqi soldiers abandoned on the street after the 2003 invasion. There is an interdiscursivity present towards the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, which made a gross miscalculation by dismantling the Iraqi military and not prioritizing a reintegration or transition for these forces. Putin also references the more recent NATO-led failure in Libya "whose statehood was destroyed as a result of a gross violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1973." Intertextuality here through the reference of UNSCR 1973 demonstrates that international intervention into the hot zones of the Middle East only leads to more chaos, this intertextuality carries weight from the previous discursive struggle over the Libyan conflict to the notion of intervention by the West in the Syrian conflict. After establishing the context, Putin moves on to the current plight – Syria.

Putin explains that "radical groups" fight in the "so-called moderate opposition" are supported by the West. Putin also articulates a conspiratorial claim that Islamic State is a weapon developed "against undesirable secular regimes," through this articulation, he further presents a danger in the form of opposition with the West because if the West doesn't agree with you, then they can develop terrorist entities to confront you. The address goes on to explain that after gaining a foothold in Syria and Iraq, the "Islamic State now aggressively expands." In this address, Putin condemns the West for what he

sees as a duplicitous approach to counterterrorism. Putin simultaneously differentiates himself from the West postulates the threat they create by making “declarations about the threat of terrorism” while “turning a blind eye to channels used to finance and support terrorists, including revenues from drug trafficking, the illegal oil trade, and the arms trade. (Putin, 28.09.2015)

Putin continues to differentiate Russian identity from the West by claiming their actions are consistent in their fight against all forms of terrorism. Putin claims that Russia counters terrorism through the provision of military-technical assistance to Iraq and Syria as partners who fight against terrorist groups. Returning to the discourse of ‘territorial sovereignty’ Putin admonishes the West for lack of cooperation with Assad “We think it is a big mistake to refuse to cooperate with the Syrian authorities and government forces who valiantly fight terrorists on the ground.” (Putin, 28.09.2015) Putin closes the address by encouraging the international community to rely on international law and work as a collective body to form a “broad international coalition against terrorism. Similar to an anti- Hitler coalition.” During this time, Russia held the presidential position of the UNSC and said that Russia would hold a ministerial meeting to analyze threats across the Middle East and coordinate a response “based upon the principles of the UN Charter.” Throughout the address, Putin emphasizes the sovereignty and legitimacy of the Assad government, referring to it not as Assad’s but as “the legitimate government of Syria.”

Putin also emphasizes that all assistance to “sovereign nations” should be “offered rather than imposed, in strict compliance with the UN Charter.” (Putin, 28.09.2015) I want to suggest that Putin’s UN address is an example of performative identity production seen through through differentiation from the West “tenuously constituted in time” and through a “stylized repetition of acts,” achieved through a “regulated process of repetition,” as described by Campbell in *Writing Security*. (1998: 10) This speech is rich with articulations worthy of analysis: antagonism with the west as it relates to foreign intervention, terrorism writ large, WWII, international law – sovereignty.

First, I address the matter of foreign intervention in Iraq and Libya. Putin clearly articulates a discourse of antagonism and resentment towards the West for their military

interventions in Iraq and Libya. This articulation can be seen as a moment in which, through antagonism, Putin is postulating the hegemonic discourse of the ‘threat of chaos.’

4.5.5 Convenient Conflations: Who or what is a terrorist?

Moving on to Putin’s remarks on terrorism, we must return to the point that terrorism is what discursive terms refer to as a privileged signifier or nodal point, which carries the weight of past discursive struggles. The discursive terrain of Syria shows the importance of interpretation based on the subject position as it relates to the understanding of ‘terrorist’ and ‘terrorism.’ To Russia, armed opposition forces in Syria are ‘terrorists,’ but for some time, these opposition forces were backed by the West and not considered terrorists. For the US, and for Russia, the Islamic State is ‘terrorists.’ However, much evidence has emerged that Turkey cooperated with elements of the Islamic State on the border of Turkey before launching military campaigns to eradicate Syrian Kurdish military elements from their border. For Turkey, the Syrian Democratic Forces, comprised of Syrian Kurds are ‘terrorists’ related to the PKK, however, the political apparatus of the PKK, which semi-autonomously governs the Syrian Kurds are both friends of the US and Russia.

This short, and perhaps crude, discussion of different flavors of terrorists within the discursive terrain of the Syrian conflict elaborates the complexity of nodal points, such as ‘terrorist.’ Never has the phrase “the enemy of my enemy is my friend,” been more apposite than in Syria. I elaborate on these classifications of terrorists in Syria to make the point the terrorism is already understood to be a privileged signifier and nodal point in poststructuralist literature, and one must look no further than the Syrian discursive terrain to find evidence of this claim. Despite the nuanced understandings of terrorism, Putin and Lavrov often use this word to form a nodal point in their construction of a hegemonic discourse, which as Snetkov (2012) explained, is conflated through Russian official discourse. It seems that when the international community is referring to ‘terrorism’ emanating from the Islamic State, Russian official discourse is referring to the Syrian armed opposition. However, when Russia is speaking about the ‘threat of terrorism’ to the homeland, they are often speaking of foreign fighters belonging to the

Islamic State. Terrorism is a nodal point that conveniently blurs meaning and is used to form a hegemonic discourse.

In Putin's remark about forming an anti-Hitler coalition, if I may paraphrase Morozov, is the recontextualization of the Soviet period and the Great Patriotic War. This articulation anchors Russian national identity in the Soviet past. In this discursive construction, the Great Patriotic War is a nodal point. This articulatory moment places Russia once again in the center of discursive struggle as a heroic force against a barbaric force (once the Nazism) and now the Islamic State. (Morozov 2008)

Finally, through the repetition of the articulation of sovereignty and legitimacy, Putin constructs the 'threat of chaos' through two nodal points: sovereignty and legitimacy. Throughout the discourses which construct the Syrian conflict, Russian official discourse anchors to sovereignty and legitimacy. This discourse can be seen as a continuation of Russia's hegemonic discourse of 'sovereign democracy.' Morozov describes 'sovereign democracy' in the Russian discourse as positioning sovereignty as "the universal value that Russia strives to protect, acting in the name of humanity." (2008: 171) This aligns with the notion of *Katechon* as described by Engström, which positions Russia as the Third Rome with a duty to defend the world.

4.5.6 (Pre)contextualization – the Military Intervention Begins

It is difficult to say when exactly the Russian military intervened in Syria. Intelligence analysts might say a military build-up was occurring before September 2015, as discussed in the research puzzle and methodology my case study is divided between March 2011 – September 2015 and September 2015 – January 2020 when the overt Russian military build-up in Syria becomes actively discussed. The first section of my case study focuses on the hegemonic discourse of the "threat of chaos" in the wake of the Arab Spring from March 2011 to September 2015. The day after Putin's address to the UN during an interview on The Charlie Rose Show Putin appears to be justifying the Russian military presence in Syria through legal terms, "as of today it has taken the form of weapons supplies to the Syrian government, personnel training and humanitarian aid to the Syrian

people. We act based on the United Nations Charter, i.e., the fundamental principles of modern international law.” Putin emphasized that, according to the UN, certain types of aid, including military assistance, “can and must be provided exclusively to the legitimate government of one country or another, upon its consent or request.”

Furthermore, Putin explains that in this specific case, Russia acted “based on the request from the Syrian government to provide military and technical assistance, which we deliver under entirely legal international contracts.” (Putin, 29.09.2015) On the same day in an interview with Russia Today, on September 29th, 2015, Sergey Lavrov makes a case for the protection of sovereignty. In this interview, Lavrov conceptualizes sovereignty by explaining the Westphalian system “The sovereignty of states, their equality as the main subjects of international relations, was substantiated and approved within the Westphalian system that took shape in Europe in the 17th century.” He then postulates the threat as posed by Western interventionist states by saying “a number of Western countries” are challenging this concept in order to secure the ability to interfere with other countries. Lavrov explains that “healthy conservatism with regard to the inviolability of the stabilizing foundation international law unites Russia with most countries of the world.” (Lavrov, 29.09.2015)

Similar to Putin, Lavrov uses interdiscursivity to reference the other case studies of “failed” transitions and regime change in order to present a possibility of a threat. “This is something, which happened in Iraq, happened in Libya, it happened in Yugoslavia before, and in all these cases, these countries did not benefit: Yugoslavia collapsed, Iraq is in crisis, and there is a danger that Iraq might also split, and we do everything to support the current Iraqi government, the efforts to promote national dialogue to rectify the mistakes made during the American invasion twelve years ago when they just dismantled all the structures of the state based on the Sunnis, based on the Ba'ath party.” (Lavrov, 29.09.2015) I am careful to avoid the cognitive domain and not reduce the official discourse of the Kremlin to mere propaganda by trying to peek too far into intentionality, but rather identity production. However, what I can say about Putin’s address to the UN, and his interview on The Charlie Rose show the day later, is that the timing of the speeches and what is internationally accepted as Russia’s intervention in the Syrian

conflict correspond. Therefore, what I can empirically conclude is that these speeches and interviews are an example of pre-contextualization. These examples of pre-contextualization are reminiscent of the major US news network – NBC carrying Colin Powell’s speech to the United Nations live in 2003 prior to the Iraq invasion. (Hodges, 2015: 49) This pre-contextualization reveals a professional and timely discursive strategy that clearly articulates the antagonism of the flawed Western intervention, as Russia embarked (perhaps descended) on their own military adventure into the Middle East.

4.5.6 Sustainment– Continued Antagonism Towards the West

While the case study is divided roughly between 2011 – 2015 and 2015 – 2020, and it is my analysis that two different hegemonic discourses are articulated throughout both periods. The discourse of danger as it relates to the Western threat of international order and the postulation of chaos never ceases to exist. It is simply layered (sometimes in parallel and other times below the threat of the Islamic State). Therefore, I want to conclude this portion of my case study with two additional presentations of a threat as it related to the need to adhere to international legal order. The Astana Process, in light of the continuous tension between Turkey and Russia, provides an exciting platform for Putin to speak on security matters in Syria and regionally as well. Throughout my analysis, I observed that following meetings for the Astana Process, Putin provides a press statement. In an instance, in 2019, Putin emphasized the structural necessity of the Astana law and used intertextuality for nesting his position in international law by referencing the UN Security Resolution. “We are convinced that this goal can only be achieved through political and diplomatic methods based on UN Security Council Resolution 2254. As the guarantors of the Astana process, our three countries stand for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria.”(Putin 16.09.2019) In this statement, the element of interdiscursivity is present when Putin directly connects the territorial integrity of Syria to the Astana process, which is nestled into the intertextuality of UNSCR 2254. In addition to emphasizing the importance of territorial integrity in his press conference with the guarantor states of the Astana Process, Putin highlighted the internationally unsanctioned presence of US forces in Syria. “Regarding the presence of the US Armed Forces, it is common knowledge that their presence on Syrian territory is illegal.

Furthermore, we hope that the decision to withdraw US service personnel from Syria, made by President of the United States Donald Trump, will be implemented completely.” (Putin 16.09.2019) Putin reinforces his position on territorial integrity one more time in this same press conference by insisting that Syria’s territorial integrity will be fully restored. This also refers to the withdrawal of all foreign troops from the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic. (Putin, 16.09.2019) These statements are curiously made in front of Turkish national leadership, who also have an unsanctioned presence in Syria, which notoriously supports Assad’s opposition. Furthermore, I assess that concern for the territorial integrity and the condemnation of illegal foreign presence on Syria’s soil remains connected to the broader discourse of chaos. This discourse relates to sovereignty, international law and as other researches apposite is connected to domestic security which connects to Putin’s postulation of threat over regime change as it relates to the interdiscursivity of Color Revolutions, the Arab Spring and the Bolotnya uprisings in Moscow.

In a speech to the Duma by the Minister of Defense Sergey Shoigu in 2017, Shoigu celebrates the accomplishments of the Russian Armed Forces in Syria as preventing the “dissipation of Syria” and interrupting the “chain of the colored revolutions replicated in the Middle Eastern and African countries has been interrupted.” (Shoigu, 22.02.2017) The articulation of intertextuality between the Color Revolutions of the post-Soviet states and the Arab spring is quite remarkable as this is quite late in the Syrian conflict. Furthermore, understanding the Russian elite subject position is that the Color Revolutions were inspired by agents of the West, we can see that this speech to a domestic audience reinforces the deepening of antagonism by the West and reinforces a postulation of threat of chaos by Western intervention.

In the previous section, I provided official Russian discourse to empirically analyze and conceptualize the hegemonic discourse of the ‘threat of chaos’ as it relates to Western intervention in the Middle East and continues along the discursive thread of international system dominated by Western oppression of Russia. This hegemonic discourse reveals a distinct ‘other’ in official Russian discourse and antagonism, as seen through resentment towards it. I discussed several nodal points that help situate the discourse through privileged signifiers such as ‘terrorism,’ ‘sovereignty’ and ‘legitimacy,’ which all derive

different meanings based on their subject positions. Furthermore, I have demonstrated Russian official discourses' reactivation of the past through their recontextualization in the modern struggle against 'terrorism' as reminiscent of their valorous image in the fight against Nazism during WWII. The hegemonic discourse of the 'threat of chaos' is largely framed globally to an international audience, but as evidenced in Shoigu's speech, it also articulated to the domestic audience as well. In the following section, I move deeper into the case study to unveil the hegemonic discourse of the 'threat of terrorism' which primarily focuses on the five years following the Russian military intervention in Syria.

4.6 Construction of the 'Threat of Terrorism:' Post-Russian Military Intervention Reflections 2015-2020

As argued previously, I assess that throughout the Syrian conflict, Russian discourse evolves into two hegemonic discourses roughly framed, but not wholly contained to time (1) the 'threat of chaos' (2) 'threat of terrorism' from extremists who operate under the banner of radical Islam. The identification of the second discourse is not novel, as previously noted Snetkov (2012) identifies these as present in the Russian domestic discursive space in the 2000s and Roy Allison also identified both of the discourses I analyze in 2013 towards Syria "Russian officials have frequently justified their position in the Syria crisis as a bulwark of international and regional order against the threat of state collapse, chaos and the spread of transnational Islamist networks." Allison also identifies the discourse that the second portion of my case study is devoted to "this Russian narrative has also been associated with the stability of the Russian state through suggestions that Islamist threats might spill over to the Russian North Caucasus region." (2013: 809) Allison concluded his article in 2013 before the rise of the Islamic State; therefore, I contribute by including post-2015 discourses in my case study and further to analyze them through the discursive dimension of demarcation. As I suggested, the second discourse grows more intensely after the Islamic State seized large swaths of land in 2014, and Russia's military presence in Syria starting in 2015 results in the discourse of danger as articulated through the postulation of a threat to the homeland. Campbell explains that "danger constitutes more than the boundary that demarcates a space." In fact, the presence of threat requires "enforcing a closure on the community that is threatened." Putin and Lavrov often describe the need to deal with the terrorists in Syria

so that “terrorists” do not return to Russia. What Russia is not overtly stating, but through discourses of danger, is producing an identity boundary between Russians' identity and that of foreign fighters, who often hail from Russia or the former post-soviet space. Russian officials demarcate a ‘Russian’ world in contrast to another world. Furthermore, Russia demarcates boundaries by acceptable locations for the neutralization of terrorists to occur. For Russian officials, Syria is an acceptable location, but Russia is not. In Russia, danger can be articulated, but only combated in extreme and necessary instances. In Syria, which is not Russia, the danger is postulated constructed in a space where Russia can combat it. Campbell explains this as a conception of “divergent moral spaces” and “the social space of inside/outside is both made possible by and helps constitute a moral space of superior/inferior, which can be animated in terms of any number of figurations of higher/lower.” (1998: 73) In summary, as conceptualized by Campbell, I see Russia postulating threat by drawing two different moral spaces one is through identity whereas the other is geographical (1) foreign fighters from Russia are not Russian in terms of identity (2) Syria is an acceptable location to kill terrorists, whereas Russia is not.

4.6.1 The Danger Within: The Rise of the Islamic State

The Islamic State, which is comprised of foreign fighters from the former Soviet Union as well as the Caucasus region, is postulated as ‘threat’ to Russia as they were exiting Russia to join foreign fighter movements in Syria. This is where I believe I have identified a “discursive” gap in the existing literature. The existing literature characterizes the Islamic State foreign fighters from the Northern Caucasus of Russia and their potential return to Russia as an objective threat in realist terms. I diverge and say we cannot know if foreign fighters posed a real threat, but we can see that Russia postulated them as such as evidenced in the following speeches from Putin and Lavrov. Putin emphasized that many of the ISIS members were from the former Soviet Union and that they pose a threat to Russia if they were to return. “The attempts by international terrorists to bring whole swathes of territory in the Middle East under their control and destabilize the situation in the region raise legitimate concerns in many countries around the world. This is a matter of concern for Russia too, given that sadly, people from the former Soviet Union, around 4,000 people at least, have taken up arms and are fighting on Syrian territory against the government forces. Of course, we cannot let these people gain combat experience and go

through ideological indoctrination and then return to Russia.” (Putin 21.10.2015) Two months later, in an interview between Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Interfax News Agency approximately two months after the Russian military intervention began, Lavrov described the increasing instability of Syria as “further aggravated by the unprecedented growth of the terrorist threat.” Lavrov alleged that the Islamic State and other terrorist and extremist organizations committed “barbarous crimes, including terrorist attacks against the citizens of Russian, the EU, the Middle East, Africa, and the United States.” Lavrov detailed the widely held view of the Islamic State’s desired end state – a caliphate which could span the Atlantic to Pakistan. Lavrov insisted that ISIS poses a threat to regional and international security.

After Lavrov postulated the threat of the Islamic State, he reinforced Russia’s legitimate presence in partnership with the Assad regime by explaining that Russian Aerospace Forces at the “request of the Syrian government have helped stop the terrorist offensive in its tracks.”

Lavrov further invokes differentiation and threat as he makes allusions towards the West referring to them as actors “manipulating them [extremist factions] for selfish geopolitical purposes, and stabbing in the back those who are truly fighting against the terrorist threat, in the same manner, Turkey struck a blow to Russia.” These other actors are most likely the West because he explicitly names Turkey. (Lavrov, 28.12.2015) Lavrov and Putin both invoke memory politics of the Great Patriotic War or WWII and often equate global threats postulate the Islamic State threat as a profound global danger through interdiscursivity of Nazism. “to put aside all things secondary and focus on the main danger, as nations did when they fought Nazism.” (Lavrov, 28.12.2015) Through Lavrov’s remarks, we can once again see a deepening of antagonism between the West and Russia. Lavrov articulates that ‘terrorists’ have been manipulated and employed by the West. As addressed in the empirical analysis of the ‘threat to chaos’ discourse, Lavrov articulates a recontextualization of the Soviet fight against Nazism during the Great Patriotic War.

The final days of September mark the overt start of the Russian military intervention in Syria. My data includes Putin and Lavrov's speeches to the UN and the press during this time. On September 30th, 2015, a day after Putin, Lavrov addressed the UN Security Council to explain the overwhelming threat that the Islamic State presented. He postulated the danger of the Islamic State as an "extremist quasi-state with an efficient repressive apparatus, stable sources of funding, a well-equipped army and elements of weapons of mass destruction." He then went on to explain their territorial aspirations "ISIS is digging in in Libya, Afghanistan, and other countries and declaring plans to capture Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem and spread their sinister activities to Europe, Central and Southeast Asia and Russia" and their intolerance towards ethnic and religious co-existence "The terrorists stage mass and public executions, threatening the very existence of ethnic and confessional groups, including Christians, Kurds, and Alawites." (Lavrov, 30.09.2015) In this same speech and then again two months later, the concept of dictators and authoritarian regimes being "less threatening" than international terrorism is presented. "As a result, the euphoria that many felt in connection with the Arab Spring was replaced with horror in the face of the rapidly spreading chaos." Lavrov's remarks connect both discourses by postulating that the chaos of regime change resulted in "an unprecedented threat of terrorism," and two months later in an interview with Zvezda TV he reinforced this discourse "today, there is a growing realization in the administration that terrorism in Syria and the Middle East is far more terrible than Bashar Assad, Saddam Hussein or Muammar Qaddafi." (Lavrov, 30.12.2015) In this discourse, Lavrov postulates the threat of terrorism as more dangerous than authoritarian regimes known for their brutality. This is where we can see a layering of the discourses, through the nodal point of 'terrorism' the threat of terrorism is constructed in heterogeneity to Russia's discourse that the authoritarian regimes of Assad, Hussein and Qaddafi were less dangerous, therefore strengthening the hegemonic discourse of the 'threat of chaos.'

4.6.2 Russian Counter-Terrorism

Now that I have established presence of the Islamic State and the ripples in the discursive world, I want to take deeper look backwards into the Russian history of counterterrorism and how this relates to Russian identity production in the Syrian context. I begin this

section with Lavrov's own words. In mid-September of 2015 prior to the formal announcement of the Russian military intervention Lavrov addressed the media with regards to the situation in Syria and emphasized the Russian counter-terrorism experience. "Russia probably began this fight sooner than any other country, as you know, we did in the North Caucasus long before September 11, 2001." Lavrov reminded the media that Putin made the first call to George W. Bush after the 9/11 attacks to offer condolences and assistance. Lavrov also alluded to another hegemonic discourse by saying "we must only fight terrorism based on international law," referencing that all activities in Syria should be achieved by, with, and through the Assad regime. (Lavrov, 17.09.2015) Through Lavrov's rhetoric we can see that the two hegemonic discourses I identified often times are articulated concurrently. I also identify a resurgence of the hegemonic discourse of 'threat of terrorism' which dominated the Russian discursive space in the early 2000s.

To further elaborate Lavrov's point about Russia's depth of experience fighting terrorism and provide greater context and also elucidate the nodal point of terrorism at home and terrorism abroad, I elaborate a short overview of Russian counter-terrorism policy as provided in Baev's research article "From Chechnya to Syria: The Evolution of Russia's Counter-Terrorist Policy" to provide a greater historical background on Russia's struggle against terrorism as a major weakness in recent years marked by setbacks "relative stability in the North Caucasus is eroding, St. Petersburg was shocked by its first terrorist attack on 3 April 2017." (2018:5). Baev claims that when Putin entered his new term his top priority was counterterrorism to prepare for the 2014 Sochi Olympics, and save an attack in Volgograd in December 2013, this was achieved. Furthermore, the statistics appeared to be trending in the Kremlin's favor, with a decrease in attacks and casualties, analysts were beginning to forecast "sustainable stability in the North Caucasus." The Islamic State challenged this "normalization," and Russian authorities allowed mass exodus of hundreds of volunteers from Dagestan and Chechnya to join the Islamic State in an attempt to "further decrease the pool of recruits for domestic insurgency." Kozhanov's research on Russia's motivations and methods in the Middle East illuminates that from 2013 to 2015, the number of Russian speaking foreign fighters supporting the

Syrian Opposition and Islamist forces rose from 250 to 2000. By 2016, these figures increased across Iraq and Syria to estimates between 3000 and 5000. (2018: 12-13)

During Putin's speech at the 70th session of the UN General Assembly, he reminded the international community about the dangers if "flirting with terrorists" and that "arming them" is "short-sighted and extremely dangerous." Through a discourse of danger he used visual imagery to remind the international community that the foreign fighters journeyed out of many countries to include European ones and Russia and that risk of their return to places of origins presents a threat necessary to confront on Syrian front "now that those thugs have tasted blood, we cannot allow them to return home and continue with their criminal activities. Nobody wants that, right?" (Putin 28.09.2015) This is not the first time that Putin invoked strong language to articulate the threat of terrorists with a dehumanizing animal-like language. This tone of this articulation is another example of performativity as it is consistently delivered, contributing to the production of identity containing threat and demarcation between Russian identity and that of extremists from Russia's Northern Caucasus.

As Campbell explains, "the constitution of identity is achieved through the inscription of boundaries that serve to demarcate an "inside" from an "outsider," a "self" from an "other," a "domestic" from a "foreign." (1998: 9) Furthermore, the imagery of "tasting blood" reveals another element of discursive analysis – is the representation of the body in discourses of danger. This returns us to the poststructuralist literature of biopolitics, as discussed in the literature review section of my thesis. Campbell explains, "can function as codes of gender and sexuality, such as anarchy, insanity, passion, or wildness." (1998: 80) The use of the characterization of "those thugs have tasted blood" evokes the imagery of a wild rabid animal who will return to the homeland to infect you. In the official discourse that I analyzed, I was hard-pressed to find any evidence of Putin or Lavrov encouraging a de-radicalization process, I never read about an invitation to those "thugs" to return home, to heal and to embrace their true Russian identity, the implication is that there is a difference in the foreign fighters who hail from Russian. In this instance, as I peel the discursive layers, it seems I had yielded more questions than answers – the questions that deserve further investigation is, did they (Foreign Fighters from Russia)

lose their “Russian-ness” when they transited across borders into a foreign combat zone, or as citizens of Russia how Russian were they really, to begin with? Perhaps, viewing the foreign fighters through this prism provides insights into the subject’s position towards the Northern Caucasus, which Torbakov described some Russian national ideologues as having “psychological alienation,” towards. (2015: 45)

4.6.3 Defense of the Homeland

In Dmitry Medvedev's interview with Time magazine February 15th, 2016, the reporter posed the question – when Assad’s offensive, back by Russian air support, will stop? In an exciting departure (but not unexpected based on the Libya experience), Medvedev did not articulate a discourse deepening antagonism with the West. Instead, he supported a multilateral negotiating, including the help of Russia, “the United States of the EU” facilitate Assad sitting down at the negotiating table with “with the people with whom you can reach agreements.” (Medvedev, 15.02.2016) Then Medvedev continued in response to the same question to defend the military campaign as one commissioned to “protect our national interests” he clarified this by stating, “we must prevent extremists and terrorists from getting to Russia from Syria. This is obvious. It is especially relevant given that there are several thousand militants from Russia and Central Asia fighting in Syria. This is a real threat. It is for that reason that we made this decision.” (Medvedev, 15.02.2016)

Through a similar thread of logic that I provided in the introduction and the case study, on the conflation of ‘terrorists,’ the reporter questions Medvedev on this statement “I don’t quite understand how airstrikes can stop terrorists from going to Russia because there had been no ISIS terrorist attacks in Russia. The airstrikes started in September, and a month later, an attack came – an airplane blew up over Sinai?” Then, Medvedev, in a similar manner to my previous explanation of why ‘terrorism’ is a nodal point, tries to detail an assortment of known extremist actors to justify his claim “I’ll try to explain this now. Can you actually tell an ISIS or DAESH member from Jaish al-Islam or Jabhat al-Nusra members? Can you tell them apart from the way they look? By their ideology? They can’t even tell each other apart... They are all thugs and terrorists.”

Through this articulation of the privileged signifier, ‘terrorist’ forms the nodal point which the hegemonic discourse ‘threat of terrorism’ to justify Russian military presence in Syria as necessary for protecting Russian interests – in Russia is constructed. Then through recontextualization of the evolution of Al-Qaeda, Medvedev explains, “So when I’m told that there is ISIS here but no ISIS there... We remember very well how the Taliban transformed into Al-Qaeda and how Al-Qaeda transformed into something else and how all of this together transformed into the Islamic State. This is the way these people live.” This postulation of threat is possible through the articulation of nodal points such as ‘terrorism,’ which have, in essence has imbued its meaning but allows Russia to form a fuzzy yet hegemonic discourse around them. Furthermore, this is not the only time Russian officials refer to ‘terrorists’ as ‘thugs’ – this seems to be commonly used in official discourse. This appears to another nodal point, which helps mark the demarcation between Russian identity and the ‘terrorist thugs.’ (Medvedev, 15.02.2016)

In 2017, Saint Petersburg became the target of multiple attacks in connection with the Islamic State. On April 3rd, 2017, explosives were used against civilians on a passenger train in Saint Petersburg. This attack resulted in the death of 14 people and the 51 injured. The following day Sergey Lavrov answers questions from the media. When a journalist suggested the attack in Saint Petersburg was an act of revenge Lavrov retorted with differentiation and with a subtle postulation of threat from the US over the Russian military intervention Syria that this suggestion is “cynical and ugly” and condemned US pentagon officials who made statements that if “we [Russia] came to Syria to help the Bashar Assad government we should expect coffins with the bodies of our servicemen to come pouring into Russia.” Lavrov characterized this as “unworthy of politicians,” and reinforces that “terrorism is threatening all countries without exception, there will not be such double standards and that politicians will act responsibly in this regard.” (Lavrov, 04.04.2017) Ironically, in this incident, Lavrov does articulate a connection between the counter-terrorism threat on the domestic front and the Russian presence in Syria. As Lavrov, articulates the nodal point of ‘terrorism’ as a threat, he layers this discourse with an uncouth statement from a Pentagon official, deepening the antagonism between Russia and the West, in this case, quite clearly – the U.S. Furthermore, while there appears to be

a demand to postulate international ‘terrorism.’ However, Lavrov does not reinforce the ‘threat of terrorism’ emanating from Syria in this case. In other official discourses, the threat as external from Russia is emphasized by Medvedev, Lavrov, and Putin, however in this speech the terrorist attack has no relationship to Russia’s military intervention in Syria – according to Lavrov.

On December 27th, 2017, an explosive was left in the locker of a grocery store, which ended up leaving eight victims in intensive care. A day after the attack in Saint Petersburg, President Putin met with members of the Armed Forces who participated in military operations in Syria to present them with state decorations and connected their service abroad to a discourse of danger towards the homeland. “As you know, a terrorist attack was perpetrated in St Petersburg yesterday, and the Federal Security Service has recently thwarted another terrorist attack. Furthermore, what would happen if hundreds and thousands of people whom I have just mentioned came back here well trained and armed?” (Putin, 28.12.2017) Furthermore, through yet another articulation of danger using the word “thug” Putin reinforced the will of the state to eradicate all elements of terrorism on Russian soil as he spoke to the servicemembers “I instructed the Director of the Federal Security Service yesterday to act within the bounds of the law while dealing with these thugs and arresting them.” Then Putin continues “if the lives and health of our operatives and officers are at risk, the FSB must act resolutely, take no prisoners and eliminate terrorists on the spot.” (Putin 28.12.2017) A 2002 article by Michael Wines from the New York Times observed how this harsh rhetoric was reminiscent of 1999 statements towards Chechnya when Putin used crude and threatening languages after the apartment bombings against Chechen guerillas "If we catch them in the toilet, we will rub them out in the outhouse." Putin consistently uses strong language to reinforce Russian authority as he postulates threat and demarcation between Russian identity and Islamic terrorists in the Northern Caucasus or those who left to join the Islamic State. The Wines article reinforces Snetkov’s (2012) observation that that the leading securitization and subsequent threat postulation in the early 2000s was centered on Chechen seperatists conflated as Islamic extremists, whereas in 2017, the same rhetorics is articulated in the context of military operations in Syria. The example, empirically demonstrates the

connection and similarities between Russian identity production domestically and the parallels it shares with identity production in Syria.

The above section focused on the strong language of Putin's articulations of danger and intersubjectivity between physical attacks on Russian soil and Russian military action in Syria, whereas this section pulls from official discourse articulated to servicemembers in Syria. As Russian officials sent soldiers to Syria, they consistently articulated that it was in defense of the homeland, and they manifestly link Russian identity to danger. "The boundaries of a state's identity are secured by the representation of danger integral to foreign policy. (Campbell, 1998: 3) The Islamic State in Syria and Iraq did not present a direct threat to Russian authorities or their people the Islamic State could have potentially fixed "terrorists" and foreign fighters from the Northern Caucasus in place. However, Russia postulates a constant and evolving threat that challenges the core of Russian existence and identity. Therefore, it is unsurprising to identify multiple instances where President Putin directly connects the military service of men and women in Syria to the defense of the Russian homeland. However, as Lavrov demonstrated, this discourse is not without limits, and one specific limit is revenge for Russia militarily entering the Syrian conflict.

For over five years, Putin postulated a risk to the Russian homeland that Russian servicemen and servicewomen directly confront on Syrian soil. "As you perform combat missions to fight terrorists in Syria, you are defending Russia and its citizens." (Putin, 17.11.2015) In 2017, while visiting Khmeimim Air Base in Syria, "here, in Syria, far from home...you are protecting our country. By helping the people of Syria to maintain their statehood, to fight off attacks by terrorists, you have inflicted a devastating blow to those who have directly, brazenly, and openly threatened our country." (Putin 11.12.2017)

Again in 2020, Putin articulates the nexus between domestic and foreign security dimensions "here, in Syria, you are defending your home country by preventing terrorists from reaching Russia and its neighboring countries." (Putin, 07.01.2020) Repeatedly, Russia has articulated discourse of 'threat of terrorism' emanating out Russia itself from

the Northern Caucasus, assuming that foreign fighters or ‘thugs’ as Russian officials refer to them, would travel to Syria and then return to Russia to stage terror attacks. Through the use of the nodal point, ‘terrorism’ Russia has formed a hegemonic discourse. This hegemonic discourse demarcates elements of Russian identity itself as the other is an ‘other’ from within the Russian social and political community itself that would seek to destroy it. Furthermore, this reveals something about the subject position itself to the Northern Caucasus as something untamed and ‘thuggish.’ This discourse appears to be logically weak as deployed for Syria through sometimes inconsistent articulations, yet, it appears to be prominent at the same time. Furthermore, it is often layered or articulated as a part of or to reinforce the ‘threat of chaos’ discourse, which is articulated through a deep antagonism of the West. The resiliency of the ‘threat of chaos’ and ‘threat of terrorism’ discourses rests in their unfinished state, and their inability to fully overcome their oppressor, whether the oppressor is the West or the ‘thugs.’

I conclude the empirical portion of the case study by highlighting how the two hegemonic discourses of 2000s, resurfaced in the Syrian conflict. By linking security, identity and foreign policy, and by analyzing two hegemonic discourses it becomes observable that Russian official discourse in the context of Syria is a performative identity production anchored in the same postulations of fear that are present in domestic discourses. with Campbell’s conceptualization of the state’s need to postulate fear “Should the state project of security be successful in the terms in which it is articulated, and the state would cease to exist. Security as the absence of movement would result in death via stasis.” As evidenced in Russia’s counter-terrorism efforts, “ironically, then, the inability of the state project of security to succeed is the guarantor of the state's continued success as an impelling identity.” (1998: 12)

5. CONCLUSION

By linking identity, security and foreign policy, my thesis aimed to provide an alternate understanding of the conditions of possibilities for Russian foreign policy within the context of the Syrian conflict. The key findings of this thesis include the identification of two hegemonic discourses: ‘threat of chaos’ and ‘threat of terrorism.’ These hegemonic discourses are present in Russian official discourse throughout the nearly decade long Syrian conflict. These discourses reveal performative identity production in the Russian foreign policy realm. The identity production is observed through articulations of antagonism towards the West and identity demarcations between Russia and the Northern Caucasus.

Building on the work of previous scholarly analysis (Snetkov 2012), I contextualized these discourses in the broader Russian discursive space of state securitization analyzed in the 2000s. I revealed how the same domestic and foreign dimensions contribute to the continued articulations of these discourses and reveal Russian state securitization practices. The analysis of the Russian official discourses yielded an understanding of Russia’s subject position oppressed by Western hegemonic order, anxieties towards the West, resentment, and ultimately antagonism as presented in the official Russian discourses.

Russia’s unstable identity is not exceptional. All identities are inherently unstable, and as seen through Campbell (1998), foreign policy can “be understood as a political practice central to the constitution, production, and maintenance of ... identity.” (Campbell, 1998: 8) The maintenance of identity can be explained through performativity. The performativity, otherwise known as stylized repetitious acts, is seen through Russia’s consistent postulations of fear from within the two hegemonic discourses I identified and analyzed. Furthermore, as the hegemonic discourses relate to postulations of threat, they are also anchored by antagonism, in the first case towards the West, and the second case towards terrorism emanating from Syria in my case study, but with origins from the Northern Caucasus. However, at the core of both of these discourses, there is a Russian attempt to increase state authority as well as to gain recognition as a strong state on the international stage.

Through the prism of poststructuralism, I embraced the Laclauian theoretical concepts of discursive struggles. Poststructuralism provided a language for which I could identify and interrogate the respective discursive realm of Russian identity production, and untangle the discursive systems in which they exist. Through this effort, my theoretical findings confirm that Russian state identity is caught in what Laclau characterizes as a discursive system of oppression. One example of this discursive system of oppression is illustrated through the inversion of oppression towards NGOs, as exemplified in the literature review by Morozov (2008) and evidenced in the empirical analysis by Lavrov when he characterizes the White Helmets as provocateurs from the West. It is a concept in which the ‘oppressed’ attempts to ‘oppress’ the other (the West) by whom they are oppressed.

Furthermore, my analysis confirms the notion of the *Katechon*, as explained by Engström (2014), which historically positions Russian identity as a restraining force. Russia as the *Katechon* is revealed throughout the Syrian conflict as Russia postulates threats, but also positions itself as the defender against these dangers. This thesis also builds upon biopolitics as explained by Medvedev (2019) and I assess that biopolitics are used to consolidate state power through securitization practices. I identify how official Russian discourses utilize biopolitics and identity links between associated discourses such as ‘territorial integrity’ to reinforce state power. I confirm that Russia performatively reinforces these hegemonic discourses domestically as well as in the Syrian conflict. I aimed to contribute to poststructuralist analysis through the examination of Russian official discourse over the entire past decade of the Syrian conflict.

My empirical findings build upon experts on Russian identity or policy in the Middle East – specifically Syria. Whereas, Hill (2013) connects what I see as “the dots” between Syria and Chechnya I disagree with her assumption that Putin sees an objective threat, but rather analyze the postulation of threat and how this relates to identity production. Allison and Dannreuther’s, on the other hand, invoke a stronger sense of identity building in the context of the international legal order. They strongly capture Putin’s frustration (antagonism) with a Western intervention, which is critical to part I of my case study 2011-2015. However, I furthered the analysis by including a case study that continues past 2015 and I identified the re-emergence of the ‘threat of terrorism’ as hegemonic

discourse, which is the return to Russian official discourses of the early 2000s. Through this endeavor, I aim to return the conversation on Russian foreign policy to one that emphasizes the “significance of the internal-external security nexus and its inter-relationship with Russia’s state identity,” that Snetkov began in 2012. Furthermore, by invoking Campbell’s *Writing Security* research on identity production, I identify fault lines or demarcations as articulated between Russia and West and Russia and the North Caucasus. Drawing upon Campbell (1998) I provide empirical evidence in the Russian official discourse of deep antagonism through the postulation of threat toward the West and demarcations between Russian identity production and the political imaginary as it relates to the Northern Caucasus concerning ‘Islamic co-existence’ and within the discourse of threat of international terrorism. My position is that Russian identity production is not dependent on the Syrian conflict. However, it is the case where it is consistently performatively produced through the discourses of dangers postulated through the chaos in the Western hegemonic world order and the risk of radical Islamic militants to Russia.

Furthermore, and perhaps, more controversially, I dedicated sections of this thesis to alternative explanations of the Syrian conflict. While these explanations are material in nature, I analyzed these to ensure a scientifically rigorous process of identifying alternative explanations and eliminating explanations. As I recognize not all my readers may be experts in identity production, I aimed to present alternative explanations and demonstrate due diligence in eliminating these explanations from my empirical analysis. My conclusion towards material resources is that these considerations might motivate any state actors to a certain degree, but the greatest need of the state is to exist. This need leads to securitization and ensures the existence of the state. Securitization occurs in the discursive realm, specifically through discourses of danger, which I have explicitly explained in the empirical portion of my thesis.

Drawing from Campbell, in my research I analyzed the roles “difference, danger, and otherness play in constituting the identity,” of Russia “by questioning what is implicated in the notions such as identity, the body, the state, danger, foreign policy, containment, security, and sovereignty,” (1998: 191) I provided an alternative approach to understanding Russia’s foreign policy in Syria and when possible I built upon the work

of other authors by contributing to the analysis of Russian identity production post the Russian military intervention in Syria in 2015. Furthermore, I took the discursive analysis more in-depth in terms of demarcations within identity production. My research investigated the official Russian discourse and assessed two hegemonic discourses. While the identification of these discourses was not novel, the investigation of otherness through the analytical framework of David Campbell yielded empirical findings which situation Russian identity production respective to the Western others and the differentiated foreign fighters from Russia. Furthermore, keeping with the notion that securitization is a self-referential process and that the security of the state is never finished and paradoxically it cannot be achieved I believe my research as serious implications which challenge the material based conclusions that Russian intervention into Syria should be studied in relationship to material interests such as ports, bases, weapon sales, and oil. Again, drawing from Snetkov(2012), there is profound bias in the existing literature on Russian foreign policy, which centers on the external dimension and fails to analyze the nexus between the foreign and the domestic dimensions of foreign policy. I tried to offset this balance in the bias by providing an account of the Russian identity production which considers the interrelatedness domestic and foreign.

My thesis focused on a specific case study in which I analyzed Russian identity production through a foreign policy experience in Syria; however, I have integrated the prospect of further research between different state and not state actors that are present in the same theatre of conflict. A more in-depth investigation into the identity production of actors such as Turkey and the Kurds would provide further insights into the tense dynamics in the Middle East. The Kurds do not occupy the classical sense of a “state” as defined by territory de jure, but they do imagine a political community which embodies a contested identity struggle towards statehood exists arguably with an objective existential threat in the classical realist sense, but also with a fair amount of postulation of threat, abundant in antagonism which often divides and unites their social and political community.

My final thoughts are that Laclau’s concept of the discursive struggle for hegemony provided a theoretical framework for me to analyze Russian official discourse, through which I identified two predominant hegemonic discourses throughout the Syrian conflict

and characterized throughout my thesis. Buzan et al.'s securitization theory enabled me to name the process in which the state transfers an issue to that of high politics. Ultimately, Campbell provided an approach that allowed me to link foreign policy, identity and security.

The securitization of the Syrian conflict for Russia is the process which this case study interrogates. Campbell explains his conceptualization of security in identity as “the constant articulation of danger through foreign policy is thus not a threat to a state’s identity or existence: it is its condition of possibility.” The state can only exist due to constantly re-articulating danger, in particular through foreign policy. Therefore, foreign policy is a discourse of danger.

It is through this understanding that Snetkov’s (2012) analysis illuminates the Russian discursive space and creates an opportunity for my analysis. While Snetkov does not speak in Laclauian terms she does identify two hegemonic discourses, as seen as predominate threats postulated throughout the 2000s. Snetkov discusses how 'terrorism' is the predominant threat postulated in the early 2000s which is used to securitize the domestic space, consolidate power and also create an avenue to the international stage as a major power. However, in the late 2000s, the effect of the Color Revolutions leads to the emergence of a new hegemonic discourse the 'threat of the West' or threat of encroachment/intervention becoming the predominant postulation as it relates to identity construction.

My findings reveal that the hegemonic discourses Snetkov observes in the 2000s directly relate to my case study – Russian official discourse in the Syrian conflict. The 'threat of terrorism' was always in the background of the discursive space; it was just weaker at the onset of the Syrian conflict because in 2011 the 'threat of chaos' was still prominent and postulated as emanating from Western provocation, according to Russian official discourse and evidenced through the Color Revolutions and the Arab Spring. However, in 2015, as Russia launched its military intervention into Syria, Russian officials began blurring the term, 'terrorist threat' (a practice they frequently rehearsed in the early 2000s), then after ten years in 2015, it seems the Russian hegemonic discourse of the

early 2000s resurfaced with new strength. Russian officials explicitly defended their role in Syria as directly related to securing national interests to defend against terrorism.

Furthermore, there appears to be an inverse in the pattern of hegemonic discourse. As the early 2000s in Russia are dominated by the postulation of terrorism as a threat, and the later years are dominated by a fear of external actors and Western intervention. Snetkov refers to the threat of terrorism in the early 2000s as the “lynchpin” of identity production, “it also became a way of re-establishing Russia as a strong power on the international stage.” In the early 2000s terrorism was “presented as the source of threat and thus an existential threat to Russia,” conflating the separatist movement with international terrorism “provided an avenue for Russia to return to the international stage as an equal and active participant in cooperation with other great powers against international terrorism.” (2013: 5325) To bring this conversation full circle, the ‘threat of terrorism’ in the context of the Syrian conflict is a different articulation in which terrorism is presented predominantly as an external, rather than an internal, threat.

Thus, building off the anxieties of the Arab Spring, the Color Revolutions, and the fear of continued Western intervention against sovereign leaders, in conjunction with the anxieties of foreign fighters, I can conclude that the Syrian conflict is a process of securitization by Russia. This process of securitization is observable through the identity production as seen through continuous articulations of danger.

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