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Discourse-historical analysis of Russian officials' statements justifying the 2008 August War and 2022 Russo-Ukrainian War in the context of information warfare

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I Introduction

Another Black Swan appeared on the horizon in February 2022 with the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The Black Swan is a famous Taleb (2010) metaphor describing a hard-to-predict event with high-profile consequences. Although the low-key armed conflict has been smouldering since 2014 between official Kyiv and two separatist regions, Donetsk and Luhansk, not many anticipated that the violence could spark a full-scale armed conflict between Ukraine and Russia.

The ongoing war sheds light on how much information is available in the ether, yet how little can this information be trusted. Biased media work around the clock to disseminate suspicious content as much as possible. Images manipulation, video manipulations, cherry-picking, and missing context news polluted the media sphere on a vast scale. Media who push hard to check the information before publishing have huge issues validating the facts. "Could not be independently confirmed/validated" was a common repetitive phrase suggesting that obtaining valid information is extremely hard despite having fibre internet connections, drones, and satellites. At the earliest stage of Information warfare as a scientific discipline, a sceptical author asked a rather cynical question: "Naval War Is to Navies as Information War Is to What?" (Libicki 1995). This paper's stance is that the answer to this question is "Broad Public". IW targets everyone, regardless of the proximity to the border of the war zone. Even regardless of whether it is during wartime or peace. Ergo, Information warfare is the only type of warfare needed to be completely understood by the broad public.

This work is a modest contribution to the growing field of research on Information warfare. The maximalist IW goals – influencing the foreign decision-makers with misleading and manipulated content is just the tip of the iceberg (Clack and R. Johnson 2021a). The less ambitious goal of sowing distrust and discord and undermining the credibility of the institutions is the true fearsome outcome of IW efforts (Giles 2016, 2021). Ergo, it is surprisingly challenging to produce a definition of information warfare that would not be too rigid on one hand or too tautologic and eclectic on the other hand. The working definition in this thesis is that information warfare is a set of covert and overt operations, conducted in both peacetime and wartime, aimed at influencing domestic and foreign audiences. As it is becoming apparent from this outline, the nebulous and endless scope of the IW needs scaling down to be operationalised.

Therefore, this thesis focuses on critically analysing official discourses of the Russian justifications of the two armed conflicts – the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, also known as the August War, and the ongoing 2022 Russo-Ukrainian war. Although spatially and temporally distant, both wars share a common deep cause – Russian fear over NATO's open-door policy and the relatively unchanged Russian regime personnel (Mearsheimer 2014). The latter allows analysing the statements and messages through the critical discourse analysis of the official statements.

The top decision-makers create discourses that will later be picked up by the media and framed according to their editorial policy. Therefore, this thesis opts to analyse the official discourses and *official truths* as they initially emerge in official sources. Additionally, since information can be targeted both domestically and internationally thesis critically evaluates the emerging *official truth* at its initial broadcasting. The goal is to identify the allusions, arguments and tone of call-to-arms speeches at their initial broadcast before being processed in the media. Furthermore, the vital benefit of analysing the top decision-makers official statements is trying to grasp the meanings, utterances and frames that will subsequently be weaponised in information warfare (Giles 2016).

The discourse-historical approach to critical discourse analysis is particularly suitable for analysing power, ideology and hegemony transmission in the Gramscian sense (Wodak and Meyer 2016; Wodak and Reisigl 2001; Wodak 2002; Pesic and Stosic 2019; Bates 1975). The advantage of the discourse-historical approach is that it emphasises the role of the context and evaluates the tone, metaphors, and allusions (Wodak and Meyer 2016). The theoretical framework's discussion of information warfare, its historical development and the Russian approach to conducting IW serve as a context for the empirical analysis. Understanding allusions vis-à-vis context can sometimes give out better insights than relying on worn-out diplomatic phrases.

The seminal work from Keenan, Dowd and Maree established four "generic elements" of the leader's call to arms discourses. The empirical findings of this thesis will assess the sustainability of identified generic discourses in light of the call-to-arms justifications of the 2008 August war and 2022 Russo-Ukrainian full-scale armed conflict. Consequently, the data will be collected from official sources, predominantly the official website of the President of the Russian Federation and the state-run TASS news agency. As the thesis relies only on publicly available data, it will refrain from guessing when the final behind-the-scenes

preparations for launching kinetic action were finished. Instead, it will analyse the top officials' statements on justification made in the last week before the armed conflicts.

The Just war theory informs the theoretical framework to comprehend the avenues of justifying kinetic action. Therefore, the just war theory's fundaments are discussed to better evaluate the possible paths of justification. The differentiation between freedom fighters and terrorists, or aggressor and victim, greatly depends on the framing of the conflict (Walzer 2002). Therefore, generating and successfully promoting just cause discourses is critical in legitimising the armed conflict. Hence, in line with the longest-lasting set of just war criteria, known as ius ad Bellum (Walzer 2002, 2015), some non-orthodox views on suspending the supremacy of sovereignty, such as liberal interventionism, will be valuable in understanding the empirical findings (Teson 2001; Wheeler 2000; Bellamy 2009).

Structure walkthrough

Following the introductory notes, the thesis proceeds with the terminological framework. First, a very brief historical introduction mentions essential constituents of Information warfare – persuasion, propaganda, and challenges of reaching broad domestic and foreign publics. Second, the rapidly growing yet insufficiently coordinated development of the discipline's terminology and concepts deserve a closer inspection. Additionally, the thesis proposes that further research is needed to understand better the nexus between a country's reputation and the credibility of the news coming from its media outlets.

Moreover, the theoretical framework chapter attempts to disentangle the most critical aspects of this definition and analyse the evolution of the discipline. Additionally, a chapter on waging a just war provides the contextualisation of the usage of the IW in justifying the kinetic action. Finally, a discussion of the position of IW vis-a-vis the just war is an essential transition toward the empirical findings of this thesis.

The empirical findings chapter critically analyses official Russian justifications of the two armed conflicts – the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, also known as the August War, and the ongoing 2022 Russo-Ukrainian war. The thesis benefited from the quantitative analysis of the messages during the August War by Heinrich and Tanaev (2009). The discourse-historical analysis of the scarce messages at the first two days of the August War sheds light on the tone and metaphors used to justify the kinetic action. The August War is deemed to be an essential milestone in the Russian IW. Both in doctrine and practice, serious efforts were made to promote the significance of the informational dimension of warfare (Noviy Region 2008;

Thomas 2008). As a result, the decision-makers understood the impact of the armed conflict's swift, effective and precise justification (Noviy Region 2008).

Insights indicate that the peak hours of Russian information warfare, seen around the annexation of Crimea (Giles 2016, 2021), are diminishing. The empirical findings chapter focuses the most on the novel 2022 armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The discoursive practices applied to justify the kinetic action uncover the current Russian decision-makers' attitudes towards the informational dimension of warfare. Finally, evoking the reputation and country-of-origin theory, the thesis evaluates the Russian top official discourses impact on the IW capabilities in the future.

However, this thesis reminds us that IW can have less ambitious yet corrosive goals, such as amplifying the distrust in institutions and fostering the fertile soil for conspiracy theories. Nevertheless, as the public is the main target of the IW, the thesis's stance is that building capacities in domains of critical thinking and media literacy are the most benevolent and long-term remedy against the effects of the IW

II Theoretical Framework

Information warfare sounds both self-explanatory and mystic. Is the information weapon itself, such as obtaining top-secret intelligence, that exposes the adversary's weakness, or it is instead shrapnel that should spread as wide and far as possible? Additionally, is information warfare covert or overt? Is it reserved for military affairs, or do civilians engage in IW? Is it limited only to wartime, or it is permanent and a prerequisite for waging a successful war? Is it only defensive or offensive? Finally, the driving principles and foundations can be traced back to ancient times, yet the scientific discipline is young.

The following chapter discusses the abovementioned dilemmas and dichotomies starting from the historical perspective and further examines the terminological vagueness. Furthermore, the benefits and setbacks of information warfare are evaluated.

1. Historical roots of the IW: Sun Tzu vs Computer

The demoralisation of the adversary and attempting to discourage them even before the actual armed conflict is nothing new. The oldest known definition of success in Information warfare comes from Sun Tzu. His famous and oft-quoted sentence: "For to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill", tells us that even ancient authors realised the power of persuasion and propaganda (Clack and R. Johnson 2021b). However, during ancient times propaganda was not widespread; on the contrary. The absence of infrastructure and the lack of cultural communication made spreading propaganda almost impossible. As a result, the word propaganda comes from Latin, and it was value-neutral until the 16th century. Back then, faced with the reformation, the Catholic church formed the body of cardinals called *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* to spread the word of Catholicism and train new missionaries (Taylor 2013). This is the first notion of spreading propaganda as we understand it today; however, it was limited in scope.

Nevertheless, another significant contribution of ancient times is the art of persuasion. Persuasion and rhetoric are *sine qua non* of propaganda. Rhetoric blossomed in Ancient Greece, and numerous intellectual giants contributed to its development. Sophists were a group of philosophers who dedicated their work to finding rhetorical traps and tricks to gain approval and appraisal. Opposed to him were Socrates and his pupils, whose works on debunking logical mistakes were crucial to developing logic as a field in philosophy. Unfortunately, it cost Socrates his life; however, his pupils, Plato and Aristotle, carried on his

train of thought. Rhetoric and the art of persuasion, same as the dynamite and many more technological advancements, despite their initial good cause, could be, and usually were, abused.

In premodern times although many people learned how to use and abuse rhetoric and persuasion, the propaganda was carried out on a somewhat personal or organisational level in the case of the church. However, it is only after the invention of mass media that reaches the vast level of recipients from the top-down approach. The technological advancements rapidly increased the number of recepients at the dawn of the mass media era. In the wake of modernity, it became clear that the prerequisites for propaganda are the modern state, mass media, and a sufficient number of recipients.

At that point, a sufficient number of recipients was present only among the domestic public. Inspiring insights from *The Belle Epoque* could be drawn from the political caricatures. The final phase of the nation-building in 19th century relied heavily on stereotypes. The artistic presentation of fanaticism, chauvinism, faked historical events, and the overall Zeitgeist of Modernity could be found in the recent novel *The Prague Cemetery* by Umberto Eco. The book covers the 19-century Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a fabricated booklet intentionally written in a conspirative tone, aiming to stir antisemitism (Eco 2011). The fraudulent Protocols of Elders of Zion would later inspire Hitler and Dreyfus Affair as the conspirative tone of the *Protocols* went beyond the truth and created conspiracy theories (Eco 2011). The stereotypes and prejudices are carefully cherry-picked, and the language is a medium for spreading deception and "inventing the enemy" in propaganda texts (Garcia 2013).

Similarly, even during World War I, propaganda remained relatively straightforward. The pointed finger of Lord Kitchener or Uncle Sam and the message that he "wants you" is an overt and clear message. The backbone of propaganda is still present – attempting to make someone behave or think in a certain envisaged way. The WW II propaganda deserves the book for itself. However, with time, serious efforts were made to demoralise and discourage enemy troops from fighting. An illustrative example is the so-called Tokyo Rose, a group of English-speaking female radio anchors tasked with demoralising Allied soldiers in the Pacific (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2022). The notorious concept of the Big Lie is usually attributed to Goebbels's resonate that the lie should be big and constantly repeated until it becomes the truth (Jewish Virtual Library 2022). Nevertheless, little could be achieved to substantially influence the foreign public outside directly or indirectly controlled territories.

Until not long ago, the information sphere was controlled exclusively on the country level, it was hard to imagine CNN being broadcasted in the Communist Bloc. Media on the shortwave radio were pioneers in influencing the foreign public. The shortwave radio transmissions were, due to their technical characteristics, almost impossible to jam (Sacks 2022). Thus, some creative defence solutions had to be invented to obstruct shortwave broadcasts. The best known is that the US Information Agency (USIA) installed a robust radio relay near Munich to emit the noise on the same frequency used by Radio Moscow, effectively jamming Moscow's signal in the West (Committee on Foreign Relations 1972). Radio Free Europe would use the very relay in the years afterwards. Although being substantially used for propaganda, shortwave frequencies are fading into history (Carvajal 2006). However, the current war in Ukraine brought back to life the shortwave as a medium for transmitting messages over great distances when BBC restored its shortwave broadcasting to war-torn areas (Sacks 2022). However, the Internet allowed access to the foreign public without territorial restraints such as the traditional media and without the high costs that shortwave and satellite TV broadcast bring.

Contemporary challenges: the future of propaganda

As radio used to have the power to scare people to death that the apocalypse started (Pooley and Socolow 2013), now it is TV and the Internet leading the game. Growing ever subtler, the bitter notions of propaganda seen around World War II mostly perished or retraced to obscurity. However, marketing experts, spin doctors, editors, lobbyists, influences, and such work around the clock cherry-picking the bits of information we receive daily. "Virtually all information with which we are presented is pre-packaged" (Hughey and Jackall 1996). Propaganda intrinsically includes persuasion, and persuasion is more detectable (Taylor 2013). However, propaganda expects too much – accepting and instilling values in others, winning hearts and minds as common wisdom says (Taylor 2013).

Both authoritarian and democratic regimes tend to gatekeep their media sphere scope (Chang and J.-W. Lee 1992). However, suppressing the dissonant tones is what makes a difference between the regimes. The cancel culture of today resembles Chomsky's observation that "the smart way to keep people passive and obedient is to strictly limit the spectrum of acceptable opinion, but allow very lively debate within that spectrum" (Pedro-Carañana, Broudy, and Klaehn 2018). On the other hand, journalists who did not use "the special operation" attribution of the ongoing war were sentenced to years in prison (*CBS News* 2022b). It is a lengthy and risky endeavour where the success is a priori limited. No matter how well-

executed propaganda is, winning one's heart and mind requires their heart and mind to be open to such interference. That is why IW's job of creating discord, dissent, and distrust is easier (Giles 2016). The atmosphere of distrust is fertile soil for conspiracy theories, whose mystical nature is inherently tempting.

2. The evolution of the IW definitions

As some authors claim, political science has existed since the first hierarchical societies, where princes had their advisors, yet as a science, it is a reasonably new discipline (Simeunović 2009). That could also apply to information warfare. Hence, the previous very brief historical introduction indicates how many technological advancements and social turmoil helped shape the informational sphere we have today. Thus, defining information warfare is complex, requiring a precise explanation that would capture the gist of information warfare yet remain flexible enough to capture the ever-evolving nature of this warfare. The following passages will trace significant milestones shaping our understanding of the IW. Moving chronologically from 1995 to present, the discussed definitions show the changing scope of the IW.

The pioneering work by Libicki (1995) enumerates the seven dimensions of information warfare. Libicki (1995) disentangles possible avenues of information war to answer the question of what information warfare is and how real and applicable IW strategies are. However, there is no strong differentiation between tactical and strategic approaches in his work, nor more importantly, between civilian and military strategies. These seven forms, as described, have an explorative value; however, they conflate the meaning of information warfare. The following passage discusses these forms to establish a clear terminological foundation for this paper.

The first dimension, Command-and-Control warfare, attempts to decapitate the enemy command structure. To do so, on a strategic level, destroying the head of the command or, on a tactical level, destroying the command's neck can be employed (Libicki 1995). The second, Intelligence-Based Warfare, means employing advanced electronic systems that could gather information on the enemy's movement. It allows for more accurate engagements on their troops and better protection of their own troops (Libicki 1995). Similarly, Electronic Warfare aims to jam, spoof, and disable an adversary's electronic equipment in the military realm. Again, the benefits are twofold; first, it disables the enemy from transmitting vital messages to their troops in the field (Libicki 1995). Electronic Warfare's goals are a kind of synergy

between the two previous. These areas will persist up to today, however, they will remain purely in the military realm.

Two additional forms that resemble Electronic Warfare, according to Libicki, are Hacker Warfare and Cyberwarfare. Interestingly, though, in the Russian case, differentiation between the cybersphere and information sphere is non-existing. At the time of the writing, those were entirely novel, yet the author rightly recognised the growing importance of the Internet (Libicki 1995). Although it is deemed insignificant and on the brink of reality, in the years after the book was written, some notable hacker attacks, such as the Russian Hacker Attack on Estonia, briefly paralysed the country's public administration (Lesk 2007).

Possibly the vaguest form of information warfare is Economic Information Warfare. Its goal is to inflict an information blockade on another country or impose so-called information imperialism (Libicki 1995). This is rather wishful thinking and should not be considered substantially. Forms of economic statecraft can include limited (smart) or comprehensive sanctions and limiting a country's access to international economic fora (Drezner 2011). However, economic statecraft is a separate scientific field and can be too loosely attributed to information warfare.

Finally, the last form is Psychological Warfare, which should either target the troops and try to discourage them from fighting or, more narrowly, target the commanders and divert them from the fight (Libicki 1995). A good depiction of psychological warfare is the SMS intimidation of Ukrainian soldiers serving in and around the Luhansk and Donetsk regions (2014-2022) who were receiving messages that they had been betrayed and that their fighting would be in vain (Mölder and Sazonov 2018). Moreover, as a part of psychological warfare, the author also understands a culture war, a battle in the cultural arena, where exporting one's culture could deter a country from fighting (Libicki 1995). Although an interesting idea, this concept is too vague to be operationalised.

This terminological differentiation using these seven dimensions is still wide and shallow. As a result, it remains unclear if the information can be used as a weapon per se and if it can be used before the actual armed warfare or if it can even substitute the actual armed warfare. Overall, the aeroplanes, water pumps, trucks, and chainsaws use engines, yet putting them in the same basket brings little explanatory value. Moreover, this study fails to acknowledge one of the essential benefits of information warfare – the ability to reach far behind the front line (Clack and R. Johnson 2021b).

By refining these seven dimensions, the seminal work from RAND corporation is closer to the understanding that information warfare is designed around strategic communication (Molander, Riddile, and Wilson 1996). Although it still does not precisely define the concept, it takes purely military spheres out of the definition. Acknowledging the necessity to move away from tactical Command-and-Control Warfare and Electronic Warfare, they propose that Strategic Information Warfare is carried out using cyberspace infrastructure and cultural influences (Molander, Riddile, and Wilson 1996).

Eventually, understanding the present-day threats, doctrinal documents considered the power of the information and the astonishing speed of its dissemination. Thus, moving in that direction, the scholarship understood that the constitutive elements of information warfare are the dissemination of disinformation, propaganda and intentionally false information targeted at decision-makers (Clack and R. Johnson 2021b). It is expressed in the conception that the information can be used to create a "comparative advantage" and that information infrastructure can be utilised to "influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decision making of adversaries and potential adversaries while protecting our own (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2012, 2014)".

Information warfare aims to distort the boundaries between peace and war and engage in hostile yet subtle influence over the adversary's public (Clack and R. Johnson 2021b). Building upon or creating a post-truth society, information warfare aims not only at the decision-makers but at the broad public. The most corrosive effect of information warfare is blurring the borders between the truth and a lie and introducing alternative facts as a part of the discourse (Kintsurashvili 2020). There is no possibility of compromising between a truth and a lie and having the truth still. Further, manipulating information, such as attributing false meaning to the existing truth, is a novel threat that needs to be addressed.

Main Benefits of engaging in the IW

Information Warfare is inexpensive. For terrorism, usually, it is enough to have a fanatic with one or two rifles. Similarly, to participate in Information warfare, it is enough to have a smartphone, tablet, or similar device. Rifles are illegal, and electronic devices can be bought virtually anywhere. Although there is no precise information on how much it costs to equip the St. Petersburg troll farm (Patrikarakos 2021), it is safe to assume that a lot of IT equipment could be bought at moderate costs.

The inexpensive initial costs allow for asymmetric warfare or so-called hybrid wars (Почепцов 2016). The best-equipped militaries invest millions of dollars in deterring any potential military threat. However, information warfare bypasses the military capacities and directly attacks the citizens. That allowed even non-state actors such as ISIL (ISIS) to disseminate their publications online, such as Dabiq, and attract the world's attention with the shocking execution footage (Welch 2021).

One of the strengths of IW is concealment. Whereas public diplomacy is a powerful tool for promoting the country's image, it is natural to assume that Voice of America speaks in favour of America. The actual effect of IW is when the information is picked up, not knowing that information was part of the IW (Giles 2016; Mölder and Sazonov 2018). Still, the United States Information Agency, known today as US Agency for Global Media, is worth mentioning. It was a powerhouse of American public diplomacy, managing the global broadcasting services. However, cultural centres, reading rooms, and services such as Voice of America could be, in its nature, considered propaganda (Cull 2009). Information coming out of these facilities has an inherent pedigree.

Internet is the more sophisticated and more far-reaching solution to the shortcomings of shortwave transmission and registered public diplomacy facilities, and it goes well beyond borders. With fake registration of the internet domains, people are tricked into believing that they are reading domestic (Mölder and Sazonov 2018). For example, many Russian trolls and bots operated and ran websites that had .ua (Ukraine) domain, yet, they ran websites from inland Russia (Patrikarakos 2021). Additionally, web portals copy-paste news from various media outlets, sometimes not checking the sources of the news pieces.

Plus, Information Warfare is the only warfare that can be used to full extent during peacetime (Thornton 2015). Whereas military exercises near the border will alert neighbouring countries, and the troop's accidental border crossings result in public apologies and discomfort. In the worst case, troops crossing the border will cause horror and horrid pictures we are witnessing at the time of the writing. On the other hand, when information crosses the border and acts subversively towards the neighbouring or some other country, it would not attract much attention if subtle enough.

Additionally, the same way information bypasses military assets, it bypasses the borders. Some threats, like propaganda, can be traced back to the sender (Committee on Foreign Relations 1972). Plus, tracking the dissemination of false information, sowing fear and

spreading distrust in institutions proved a more challenging task (US Senate 2020). Despite countries' ability to officially limit some websites, VPNs and specialised browsers still allow a significant number of users to reach out to that content.

The probably most significant benefit of engaging in Information Warfare is internalising IW messages by the targeted population. Once a targeted audience starts believing in the messages they receive from ill-faith sources, they will internalise this message and spread it further (DiResta et al. 2019). Moreover, the threat becomes manifold – first, it is not a troll anymore, but an authentic person disseminates IW's message. Second, the citizen of the country under attack spread the message inside the territory of the targeted state. Finally, once persons internalise the message as their own, they tend to defend those messages when faced with an opposing stance. Finally, humans are prone to confirmation bias; once we believe in something, our mind tries to create an explanatory pattern to justify our beliefs.

Main Setbacks of engaging in IW
As discussed in the previous passages, IW is relatively cheap, wide-ranging and corrosive once it takes a grip on the recipients' public.

The country's reputation is an inspiring yet understudied concept. Consumers *a priori* install stereotypes and expectations of the product's quality according to the country of origin (Verlegh and Steenkamp 1999). For example, it is expected for Swiss watches to have superb built quality or German machines to be robust and reliable. Surprisingly, there is no available research on what stereotypes and expectations bear the country-of-origin of the media outlet. For instance, do BBC, RT, Al Jazeera or CNN bear the same credibility? It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore if there is a causal relationship between a country's reputation and the credibility of the media outlets registered there. Still, this thesis assumes that the reputation of the country where the media outlet is registered influences readers' perception of news credibility.

A country's reputation is an essential source of legitimacy of the messages. As Hakala, Lemmetyinen, and Kantola rightfully conclude, three sources of country-image perception are previous knowledge, previous experience, and stereotyping (2013). It is sometimes tricky to distinguish between IW and image promotion during peacetime. Rebranding a country is a mammoth undertaking with uncertain chances of success (Martin and Eroglu 1993; Yang et al. 2008). Nevertheless, there are legitimate strategies for improving a country's image, such as cultural and academic exchanges and contributing to peacekeeping operations (Hakala,

Lemmetyinen, and Kantola 2013). International broadcasting services of one country is not limited to disseminating propaganda and false and manipulated statements but also work on improving the country's reputation. Many people consumed RT as a legitimate information source years before the current aggression. However, RT was marked as a part of the propaganda machine and banned across the West once the aggression started (Euronews 2022; Bloomberg 2022).

Still, there is no complete concord in differentiation between image and reputation. It is usually argued that the temporal dimension prevails in reputation, whereas the country's image can be more easily changed according to the current needs of the officeholders (Martin and Eroglu 1993). Therefore, reputation is built progressively (Fombrun and van Riel 2004), and it is considered an aggregate term consisting of many images about the country/organisation (Yang et al. 2008).

The Western bias is not necessarily a setback but rather a point for further discussion. The most influential media outlets are Western, and they prioritise stories that are closer to the Western audience (Chang and J.-W. Lee 1992). However, some regions receive little to no media coverage and usually receive it when something catastrophic happens. As a result, China has identified that gap and slowly but steadily started growing its media network in developing countries in Africa (Wekesa 2017). Although discussing the extent of Chinese information warfare is beyond the scope of this work, the importance of building capacities for Information Warfare could be an exciting topic for the upcoming research.

Once the reputation is gone, the only bare propaganda remains. Similarly, a threat works only if it is credible and if eventually it is not realised, but only remains a threat – information warfare works only when the sending country has some reputation. If the threat is executed, it becomes coercion; if the reputation is lost the credibility of the information is severely hampered. Stripped from credibility, the IW cannot execute its most demanding goal – influencing another country's decision-makers (Clack and R. Johnson 2021b). Still, the less demanding yet corrosive goal of weaponizing the information and creating discord abroad is still a viable option (Giles 2016, 2021)

3. Difference Between Russian and Western Approach to IW

In the aftermath of the Cold War, the influence of media coverage on foreign policy decisions sharply increased (Robinson 2005). Infamous is the example of the corpses of the killed American peacekeepers dragged through the streets of Mogadishu, Somalia, while being

broadcasted on television (BBC 2017). It triggered a severe backlash in the United States, resulting in an American withdrawal from Somalia and the disastrous failure of the UNISOM peacekeeping operation (Burk 1999).

On the other hand, exerting direct control over media in the West is significantly more challenging than in Russia. Although there is no direct control of the Western media, Chomsky and Herman identify ownership concentration, dependency on advertisers, the flamboyancy of negative news and anti-communism as the leading frames in selecting the aired content (2002). Apart from these factors, the governments exert indirect control by providing official information sources (Herman and Chomsky 2002). Notwithstanding, it is worth mentioning that media houses such as CNN, BBC, Associated Press, et cetera are corporations. Hence, they are subjects of domestic and international laws. Plus, before airing anything, the information is filtered through an organised structure with multiple editors serving as gatekeepers of the information (Chang and J.-W. Lee 1992). On the other hand, the exponential growth of the Internet allowed each person to be a global media outlet, with way fewer responsibilities and professional ethics constraints.

Thus, the feedback between decision-makers and media was possible in the West because officeholders and the media were simultaneously engaged in the same agenda, although from different perspectives (Robinson 1999). As a result, this permanent dialogue is the most significant contemporary vulnerability of open societies. The target of information warfare is the truth. First, by spreading ill-fated, manipulated content, agents of IW undermine valid facts. Second, by perpetually repeating the first step, a news consumer starts to question the validity of any piece of information from any institutional or official source, undermining the foundations of deliberative democracy (DiResta et al. 2019). Thus, defending against the IW calls for a delicate debate in protecting the freedom of speech while ensuring some filters of validity and credibility of the information (C. Fox and Saunders 2019).

In the Popperian sense, the paradox of to what extent should tolerance toward intolerants materialise (Rosenfeld and Bollinger 1987). Information warfare targets the decision-makers on a twin track. First, the decision-makers do not live in a vacuum. They consume information on the Internet just like the broad public. Second, since they strive for popular support in elections, they must adapt their political messages to accommodate public opinions that had already been subjected to information warfare threats (Robinsson 1999).

The previous chapter relied mainly on Western academic sources. Although the significance of the IW was timely recognised in the West, the evolution of the IW from purely military to civilian domain was rather grass-root. Additionally, as IW undermines democratic institutions, the possible boomerang effects and ethical dilemmas undermine the attractiveness of the offensive IW (Molander and Siang 1998). Plus, in Western doctrine, IW was never wholly recognised as a self-standing war-waging tool. In the following chapters, the Russian way of conducting IW will be contrasted with the Western, and after that, some conceptual remarks on the rise and fall of the Russian IW will be made.

The Russian government had few constraints to influence the media sphere decisively. The lack of media freedoms and state ownership of the main media outlets provided a highway for disseminating official discourses to the broad national public. (Giles 2016, 2021) Hence, controlling the media outlets gradually inspired the regime to evaluate the possibility of weaponising the information (Giles 2016, 2021; Soloviev 2011). Nonetheless, the ambient of globalisation emphasised the necessity to appeal to the international public. As a result, justifying critical actions internationally has become essential, and cable television and the Internet made it accessible as never before

The doctrinal development of Russian IW - Active Measures of yesterday and today
Historically, Russian IW did not come out of thin air. A few passages will be dedicated to so-called Active measures to understand Russian IW better. So-called Active measures were a common denominator for a toolbox of political warfare conducted during the Soviet era (Rid 2020). Bearing in mind that today's power vertical drew much personnel from Soviet security agencies, some institutional memory prevailed.

Even before the famous 2007 Munich Security Conference, in his article for the Ministry of Defence's journal, Putin elaborates on the future of the Russian armed forces. Putin's regime, faced with the decay of Soviet military equipment and the economic hardships of transition, realised the necessity for developing more creative, hybrid warfare (Soloviev 2011). Additionally, the bitter reminder of heavy losses in Chechnya called for revisiting asymmetric warfare. Putin reveals the necessity of "answers based on intellectual superiority" as a solution to the equation of finding something asymmetric and cheap (Putin 2006). This turned the spotlight onto information warfare.

After the experience of conflict in South Ossetia, weaponising of information flourished. The old and existing strategic documents, such as early Putin's Electronic Russia 2002-2010,

were revisited with much vigour. The proposed seven dimensions of IW, described in the previous chapter (Libicki 1995), in Russian modus operandi were compressed into two main avenues (Thomas 2008). First, information-technology warfare deals with the attacking adversary's information infrastructure, ability, and ability to obtain and transmit information. It is purely military in its nature. Second, information-psychological warfare is permanently and perpetually aimed at adversaries' personnel. This differentiation is, at the same time, eclectic and straightforward. Including all military-level actions into one basket evades setting blurry borders between highly specialised subfields. On the other hand, including all anti-personnel actions into one basket emphasises the overarching nature of the Russian IW (Giles 2021; Thomas 2008).

Giles, one of the leading scholars on the Russian IW, Giles, emphasises the definition from the Russian military glossary, where the accent is given on the differentiation between the Western concept of limited and tactical IW (Giles 2021). In contrast, the Russian approach includes peacetime and is not reserved for any stage of the war. Building on the Western example of unlimited war against terrorism, Russians opted for a non-linear IW strategy (Biersack and O'Lear 2014). Non-linear warfare in practice means that there is no strict differentiation between wartime and peace and there is no discrimination between ally or adversary (Pomerantsev 2014). The amount of resources involved is not necessarily pre-set.

This seems as the evolution of the so-called *active measures.* They were one of the favourite aces up Soviet sleeve. The most famous psychological operation conducted undere the umbrella of the *active measures* is painting swastikas on Christmas around Germany in the 1950s, while the World War II wounds were fresh (CNN 2017). The true secret of the active measures is amplifying the already existing fears and grievances (Abrams 2016; Rid 2020). The nuclear winter narrative is not fabricated, not made up. However, importing something authentic and valid such as the enormous environmental impact that a possible nuclear exchange between USSR and USA would bring, further promoting the nuclear winter scenario as an ever-closing doomsday scenario is the *active* part of the active measures (Rid 2020).

It is possible to argue that Active Measures and IW are almost indistinguishable in the Russian case. However, the stance of this thesis is that IW is one size bigger in scope. Hence, everything that is considered Active Measures is part of the IW. However, active measures mostly remain in the top-down realm (Abrams 2016), whereas Russian IW focused,

additionally, on impersonating ordinary people and creating natural-looking, organic impact (Patrikarakos 2021). The US Senate Select Committee recently published a five-volume report titled "Russian active measures campaigns and interference in 2016 U.S. election".

Still, although active measures no longer officially exist, their mystical and powerful nature kept them alive. Additionally, as mentioned in the first volume of the abovementioned report, there was a dilemma whether the identified interference to electoral infrastructure should be discussed publicly - since it fulfils the aim of the active measures by sowing distrust in institutions and the election process (US Senate 2020). No concrete harm has to be made, such as stealing data, unauthorised editing or deleting data. However, the sheer atmosphere in which some other country had access to the sensitive election data attracts suspiciousness and distrust in the targeted country (US Senate 2020).

4. Three milestones in evolution – South Ossetia, annexation of Crimea and Ukraine

This chapter provides conceptual remarks on how information warfare evolved around the Russo-Georgian war, peaked at the Annexation of Crimea, and then devolved into Russian Aggression on Ukraine.

In the aftermath of the August war between Russia and Georgia, some detailed analysis of developing Russian IW strategies emerged. Both positive and negative evaluations of Russian endeavour in South Ossetia could be heard (Giles 2016). Expectedly positive are the remarks from the deputy chief of the Russian Armed Forces, General Staff Nogovitsyn. Appeasing journalists efforts to cover the warfare, he stressed their role in broadcasting the truth and heroism. However, the sentence "[…] helped the West view our operations with understanding" is particularly interesting (Thomas 2008). This hints that the first echelons of the military realised the importance of international justification and the informational domain of warfare quite early.

After the most successful operations in South Ossetia, Russian security personnel were vocal about the benefits of information warfare. In his 2006 address, what Putin announced as the answers based on intellectual supremacy was further elaborated on the utmost importance of information warfare (Putin 2006). "The goals of war are now achieved not through force, but through technological and information supremacy". (Thomas 2008) This set path for the further development of IW techniques. Notwithstanding, there were some discorded voices on Russian IW performance in the August War.

"Russia lost information warfare against Georgia" (Noviy Region 2008). Eye-catching statements appeared in an unnamed article calling for further reforms of the Russian apparatus. The constructive criticism outlined prerequisites for a successful IW in the future. Most of the suggestions go in line with developing and securing the infrastructure and building NGO and Crisis response capacities (Thomas 2008). However, the most exciting suggestion is "system for training personnel for conducting information warfare" (Noviy Region 2008). As a result, schooling high and middle-level officials to conduct IW in a non-linear manner would increase the personnel capacities for IW. The doctrine gradually shifted from preferring officially aired statements to spreading targeted information interpersonally through the Internet (Biersack and O'Lear 2014).

Although it is clear who shot first on the 7 August, the Georgian perspective underlines the context – the low-key armed conflict has been smouldering for months before. Prominent Georgian scholar, Darchiashvili proposes that international relations doctrines can justify Saakashvili's decision. By pointing out that realism understands the self-preservation of the country as an ultimate task, he understands attack as pre-emptive (Darchiashvili 2012). Additionally, Saakashvili's communication experts well exploited the constructivist argument, noting that the Georgians were fighting for democratic values and choosing their own pro-Western path, rather than orbiting in the post-Soviet sphere (Darchiashvili 2012; Heinrich and Tanaev 2009; Wertsch and Karumidze 2009).

This value-driven communication strategy was at first well received in the West (Hans-Georg Heinrich and Kirill Tanaev 2009). It is deemed that the Russian side lost the information warfare at first. However, after the active spin campaigns from both sides, Russia managed to level off the arguments (Wertsch and Karumidze 2009). As noted by the 2009 Economist article, "truth is somewhere in between" (The Economist 2009). The August War gave wings to the understanding that the communication strategies of justification play a substantial role in managing the perception and the outcomes of kinetic warfare (Heinrich and Tanaev 2009). In order to more sophisticatedly target the adversaries' audiences, Russian IW developed so-called troll farms.

The idea of engaging with the people on the Internet gave birth to the troll farms (DiResta et al. 2019). As IW was developing in Russia, it became more profound and sophisticated. The troll factory or troll farm, first in St. Petersburg, worked like bees in a hive (Patrikarakos 2021; Giles 2016). According to the insider, it was a disinformation factory where numerous

journalists and spin doctors were tasked with creating and disseminating fake news or manipulated content (Patrikarakos 2021). Unlike propaganda, which promotes specific agenda with little space for feedback, this farm worked on producing natural-looking, organic dialogues (DiResta et al. 2019). The mechanism is simple yet ingenious. One department creates fake or misleading stories and posts them on blogs and Facebook posts. At the same time, in another department, workers use numerous fake Facebook accounts to comment and engage in discussions with real users (Patrikarakos 2021).

The targeted internet users are unaware that they are engaging with the trolls. In fact, with time, concealment strategies grow more sophisticated. As a result, trolls became more natural-looking, and their social media profiles did not immediately attract suspiciousness (DiResta et al. 2019). Moreover, not rarely, trolls engaged in a broader spectrum of topics, which added to their credibility, making them harder to detect.

Additionally, Russian IW realised the importance of using the native languages of the targeted public. Trolls were writing comments in Ukrainian or English. The full potential of the trolls is manifested once Western media outlet picks up trustworthy-looking fake news. The setbacks of this are twofold – first, the fake news is further disseminated. Second, it allows the trolls to quote the Western source as the source of the story, adding credibility to what is originally – a piece of fake news.

Challenging the Western global media monopoly, Russia Today was together with Al Jazeera and CCTV to provide an alternative, internationally accessible news. These media show the best differentiation between propaganda and IW. In the case of propaganda, Voice of America or Radio Moskva produced openly biased content to promote the respective countries' values and image. In the case of IW, media such as RT or Al Jazeera provide vast volumes of timely and trustworthy content. The catch is that manipulative content is concealed with valid articles (Orttung and Nelson 2019). Whereas propaganda only aims to make someone believe in something, IW's scope also includes sowing distrust and dissent.

The culmination of the Russian IW – annexation of Crimea

In the years after the August war, Russia conducted a systematic operation to demoralise Ukrainian security personnel. According to Gusarov, an expert on information security, "the active phase of the information war" began following the celebration of 1025 years of Christianity in Kievan Rus (Mölder and Sazonov 2018). Russian media worked around the clock to produce content on Russian and Ukrainian, inspiring secessionist sentiments.

Volumes of articles are written on the Russian annexation of Crimea. Mostly they agree that the annexation of Crimea brought Ukraine to *fait accompli.* "The annexation of Crimea was a successfully conducted non-linear attack" (Mölder and Sazonov 2018)

On a tactical level, Russian special forces stripped their insignias, wearing unmarked green uniforms. They will be known as *The Little Green Men,* or how Russian spin doctors called them *The Polite Men* (*BBC News* 2014). Although Putin himself, would confess that these soldiers were affiliated with the Russian institutions, the international response was rather vague (Radio Free Europe 2019). Nevertheless, Russia managed to communicate their military presence in their favour (Biersack and O'Lear 2014). There were no casualties in the process and the annexation never became a tier-one world crisis. Russia suffered some mild sanctions; however, according to the 2020 Vox Ukraine analysis, western media revisited their frame from the "international conflict frame" to "local conflict frame" (Wilderom 2020).

One of the most ambitious Russian IW projects was launched to ensure supremacy in the media sphere. Sputnik was launched, an allusion to the series of Soviet-made satellites that circled the globe. A serious amount of money was invested into building a vast network of offices producing content in more than 20 languages. Initially, Sputnik affiliations started spreading like a torrential wave. Analysing more than 50 000 articles from Sputnik News, Watanabe's biggest findings are that Sputnik was vociferously criticising Western migration policies, underlining governmental institutions' mistakes and setbacks, and "promoted distrust of the western information technology and media companies" (Watanabe 2018). These main avenues are the emanation of the IW strategies implementation. Rather than blatantly promoting the Russian view, as propaganda outlets would do, Sputnik, RT, trolls, and similar, excelled at IW, focusing on sowing distrust and distorted facts.

The downfall of the Russian IW – ongoing war in Ukraine
However, in the years to follow, the corrosive influence of fake news had a double effect. First, allegations that Russian-controlled media interfered with numerous civil activist groups and ultimately with elections in the USA exposed the mechanism of Russian IW (DiResta et al. 2019; US Senate 2020). Russian Internet Research Agency, a government-sponsored body tasked with coordinating bot networks targeting USA social network users, gradually became more and more exposed (DiResta et al. 2019). Benefiting the surprise factor, Russian IW had some pioneering success in South Ossetian and Crimean cases (Mölder and Sazonov 2018). Moving towards the ongoing war, the blade of the once rapidly developing and flourishing

tool lost its sharpness. The *modus operandi* of the Russian IW was exposed, and the initial advantage faded out (Giles 2016).

Above in the chapter, the nexus between a country's reputation and the credibility of information was discussed. Since the reputation repair is extraordinarily timely and requires consistency to take effect (Hakala, Lemmetyinen, and Kantola 2013; Martin and Eroglu 1993), once a country loses its IW potential, the chances of regaining it in the near future are bleach. Mild sanctions imposed after the annexation of Crimea did not substantially harm the Russian economy or the *power vertical.* However, Russian reputation was shaken by the series of exposing troll accounts and malicious content (DiResta et al. 2019). Once the reach declined, the content became more sensationalistic, with troublesome trustworthiness (Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral 2018). However, on the global stage, it was a lost cause. The military option became more attractive than soft, winning hearts and minds without this trump card in the deck and increasing classic realist rhetoric of the supremacy of hard power.

Putin decided to launch a full-scale attack on Ukraine, disregarding the historical lessons that winning hearts and minds using tanks is not working. Even glancing at Soviet historical experiences would confirm that in 1956 in Budapest, 1968 in Prague, 1989 in Tbilisi and 1991 in Vilnius, mobilised armoured brigades did not bring loyalty and appraisal of the local population. Nevertheless, the formal and informal media infrastructure had the mammoth task of transmitting and polishing official justification to the broad domestic and foreign public. The following chapter will examine the official statements of the power vertical's heads, investigating how the highest officials engage in information warfare.

5. Avenues of the justification of the armed conflict

As illustrated in the previous chapters, the scope of the IW is virtually unlimited. Thus, it is necessary to better precise the scope of this thesis. Furthermore, to better understand the top officials' contribution to the IW in justifying kinetic actions, it is essential to dedicate a full chapter to examining the scholarship on justifying the armed conflict.

The numerous benefits of the IW and its relative affordability make IW attractive and often used foreign policy tool (Почепцов 2016). According to Sun Tzu's quoted wisdom, the most significant virtue is achieving supremacy without casualties (Clack and R. Johnson 2021b). However, one grey area deserves additional scrutiny. Justification of the war and kinetic movements of the troops nominally happens in peacetime; however, it leads to war.

Therefore, although IW has warfare in its name, it is more efficiently employed in peacetime but also as a prelude to the wartime.

In their influential article Keenan, Dowd and Maree applied a discourse-historical approach to several historical speeches *and* identified the "generic elements" of leaders' *call to arms* discourses (2004). From pope Urban II's speech calling for the crusades to declaring the war against terrorism after 9/11, four discourses prevail in justifying the armed conflict. First, "constructing the evil Other" is the fundament of justifying kinetic action (Graham, Keenan, and Dowd 2004). The first notion that who is not with us is against us can be traced back to the Bible (Simeunović 2009). The second "appeal to history" is essential for providing the context for mobilisation (Graham, Keenan, and Dowd 2004). The discourse of historical injustices, if systematically abused, has proven to be a mighty weapon for calling to arms. During their swift rise to power, both Hitler and Horthy agitated for revision of the Versailles and Trianon treaties and remediating what they perceived as historical injustices inflicted by the First World War treaties. Finally, "uniting for the greater good" and "appeals to legitimating power external to the orator external to the orator" are discourses aimed at legitimising the armed conflict (Graham, Keenan, and Dowd 2004). They portray that it is not a whim of the leader but a more important legitimate goal, justifying the victims needed for that endeavour.

This window of opportunity to justify the action needed in the wake of the full-scale conflict would dramatically impact the war's outcome. Justification takes two directions. The first is the domestic public, justifying the necessities of mobilising substantial human and economic resources. Succeeding in justification in the domestic arena would bolster the soldiers' morale and bring popular support to the government. The second is the international public. In an ever more connected world, the swift and éclat communication of just cause would distinguish the aggressor from the victim (Wertsch and Karumidze 2009).

Contested viewpoints of the armed conflict

Depending on the perception of the conflict, our lenses change. Nevertheless, just by changing the point of view, the differentiation between the liberation fighter and a terrorist becomes blurry (Walzer 2002). Even historical narratives could be remodelled. For example, is Gavrilo Princip a terrorist or a hero? In the era of Yugoslavia, it was widely acclaimed that he was a hero and fought armed resistance against the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Guardian 2014). However, when Yugoslavia dissolved,

historiographies for the new countries pursued new agenda. Thus, upon gaining independence, some countries reconsidered Princip as a terrorist who is to blame for triggering the First World War (Karabeg 2013).

Were Chechens or Abkhazians terrorists or freedom fighters? Hence, it becomes clear how important it is to react promptly and to name the Other – aggressor or terrorist. Presenting themselves as just cause warriors in the international arena would determine the global *framing* of the conflict. Thus, information warfare is the most suitable weapon for fulfilling the utter goal of selling justification to domestic and foreign publics and simultaneously sowing distrust in competing narratives. Hence, the subsequent paragraphs would inspect possible just causes and justifications of the warfare.

6. Evolution, institutionalisation and devolution of sovereignty and non-interference

The history of humankind is perplexed by countless wars. Since the earliest ages, tribes have fought for food, water, shelter, and spoils. Fighting for the existential needs, for the bottom part of Maslow's pyramid, is self-explanatory. Moving forward, with the advancement of civilisation, the causes of the war became more complex. However, the advancements were not universal. Despite being famous for their legislation, Romans advocated that between adversaries, the laws are quiet (*inter arma silent lege*) (Walzer 2002). Inherent to all empires is the will to expand their territories and influence. Crusades brought several waves of destruction and looting in the name of Christianity. Colonisation was a euphemism for conquering overseas territories, usually in the name of spreading civilisation or Christianity. Although those events are stretched throughout history, they have a thing in common – they have a justification. The princes, their advisors and clergy invested all their intellectual resources in finding reasons and causes why the war had to happen (Taylor 2013).

In a Hobbesian world of *Bellum omnium contra omnes* (The war of all against all), war is natural and a sovereign state's right. Although rulers realised the necessity to provide some explanation for why they were engaging in a war, there were no supranational instances capable of stopping them (Arquilla 1999). Setting the fundamentals of international law, Hugo Grotius relied on the doctrine of natural law. GROCIJUS. As a result, The League of Nations was established after the horrors of the First World War. The League of Nations was the first ambitious endeavour to mitigate conflicts in a permanent international organisation. To outlaw the war as Clausewitz's continuation of the politics by other means, in 1928, a Brian-Kellogg pact was signed. Officially known as the "General Treaty for Renunciation of

War as an Instrument of National Policy", it was a significant leap toward depriving countries of their right to wage war. The pact was unable to stop World War II; however, its spirit would be incorporated into UN Charter (ICRC 2015).

However, the UN Charter is the first universally acclaimed document to describe when it is just to engage in armed conflict. Article 51 entitles a country's legal right to self-defence (United Nations 1945). Another essential instrument introduced in the same article is the right to collective self-defence. However, the Charter refrained from defining war, aggression, and occupation precisely.

Ergo, it is just to defend from attack, but is there a situation where an attack is justified? The answer lies in UN Charter Chapter VII, entitling UN Security Council to authorise interventions to restore peace (Bove and Elia 2011). Creative interpretation of the Charter gave birth to UN Peacekeeping missions, and the end of the Cold War blockade of the UN made a spike in the number of Chapter VII Peacekeeping mandates (Howard and Dayal 2018; Bove and Elia 2011).

The responsibility to protect and the doctrine of liberal interventionism

Moving away from international fora, Just War Theory was a response to the necessity to provide moral criteria when war is permissible. Just War Theory lies somewhere between the Machiavellian state reason that would allow the war pursuant to national interest and the pacifist movement that forbids any warfare (Walzer 2002). It is realistic enough to acknowledge that wars will not stop and idealist enough to expect that mounting constraints on warfare would reduce civilian suffering. Ius ad bellum is a set of rules and criteria when it is just to wage war. Ius belli is the second set of rules that evaluate once the fighting started, a morally acceptable way of conducting warfare (Walzer 2015; Taddeo 2016).

Many philosophical arguments of ius Belli were codified in international conventions, such as numerous Hague and Geneva conventions, and they are further elaborated in international humanitarian law[1]. Although ius Belli embeds a great academic discussion, the focus would be on the criteria for waging a just war (*ius ad bellum*) since this thesis deals with the justification of warfare.

Thucydides' seminal work, The Peloponnesian War, rooted the discussion on the just war. He describes the substantial negotiations prior to the war as diplomatic means to resolve the crisis (Thucydides 1919). Once the negotiations ultimately failed, the war became inevitable. This would evolve into the last resort criterium. For a war to be just, all diplomatic means

should be exhausted, and all peace-brokering attempts should prove to be in vain (Walzer 2015). Despite relatively clear-cut and categorical definitions of the last resort, the operationalisation lies in the hands of decision-makers. Yet, the perception of the last resort drives the decision-makers. Regardless of a situation not being objectively justifiable using last resort logic it does not prohibit decision-makers from calling for action. Therefore, the empirical findings section seeks insights from the top-level official justification of the kinetic action.

Building on conflicts that cannot be easily addressed diplomatically, negotiations can be used in an ill-fated manner. For example, as understood in Serbia, the Rambouillet conference was an "alibi diplomacy" where the Contact Group did not show true intention to negotiate but instead had a failed negotiation process that could be an excuse for the kinetic action (Kovačević 2010).

There are more criteria, proportionality, meaning that there should be enough arguments to do more good than harm (Walzer 2015). However, especially in the 1990s and early 2000s, there was a vivid debate about whether doing harm, or preventing more extensive harm is just and who should be authorised to execute that endeavour (Teson 2001). The following passages would look up the just cause, as IW is tasked with justifying the actions taken.

The just cause gamble - possible abuses of the just cause justifications
The backbone of the ius ad bellum is the just cause. The previous criteria have some more or less precise benchmarks – it is possible to estimate the level of casualties or possibility of success. Additionally, in most cases, there is a clear-cut who the competent authority is and when the negotiations ultimately fail. Unfortunately, just cause is the most slippery terrain, where the bias is most present (Walzer 2002)

The ultimate expansion of just cause came with liberal interventionism. In the aftermath of the Cold War, the once sacred principle of sovereignty has been challenged (Bellamy 2009). The Responsibility to Protect doctrine promoted at the 2005 UN World Summit gave supremacy to the protection of human rights. In its most radical form, it justifies suspending sovereignty and intervening against any country deemed to severely hampers the fundamental human rights of its citizens (Teson 2001; Bellamy 2009).

The just cause idea behind liberal interventionism is that human rights stem from universal, natural rights, whereas sovereignty is a positivist concept (Teson 2001). Thus, the only body that could authorise an intervention, UN Security Council, plays a secondary role. This

doctrine emerged at the time when it became clear that America had won the Cold war, and the bipolar world became unipolar. However, Locke warned that awarding even the most honest princes with prerogatives is not wise since they will eventually retire, and prerogatives are hard to revoke once given (Locke 1988).

Once Russia recovered from the breakup of the USSR enough to feel confident to re-enter the world arena, the prerogatives of interventionism became tempting to her (Evans 2020). The Russo-Georgian war was the first test-probe if Russia was capable of justifying intervention internationally. The following chapter thoroughly examines the Russian discourse officials used to justify the action taken. Just cause is the ultimate argument used for justification of armed conflict. However, it is not only enough to think of an argument. The utmost goal is to sell the justification viewpoint to domestic and foreign publics.

Still, it is important to address can the just war theory be applied to the IW. Hybrid in its nature, Information warfare deserved closer investigation and some fine-tuning of the Just War Theory (Taddeo 2016). As discussed in the previous chapters, IW has nebulous perpetrators and the time of start and end of the hostilities. Unlike kinetic wars, information warfare causes fewer, if any, civilian casualties, and it is drastically harder to pinpoint what is going on. As Arquilla notes, the "disruptive rather than destructive nature of IW" eases the ethical dilemma revolving around conventional warfare, allowing information warfare more straightforward access to the just warfare domain (1999).

Still, Taddeo (2016) proposes four criteria when information warfare should be considered ethical. Building on the entropy as the primary opponent of the Infosphere and that every entity should have the right to enter the Infosphere bona fide, Taddeo proposes that IW "ought to be waged only against those entities that endanger or disrupt the well-being of the Infosphere" (p. 9, 2016). Following that train of thought, the EU banned RT, Sputnik and their affiliates from broadcasting in the EU. The EU Commission stated, "In order to justify and support its aggression of Ukraine, the Russian Federation has engaged in continuous and concerted propaganda actions targeted at EU and neighbouring civil society members, gravely distorting and manipulating facts" (Bloomberg 2022).

The older paper from Arquilla uses a more eclectic definition of Information warfare, similar to the ones explained at the beginning of this chapter (1999). Thus Arquilla (1999) differentiates between ius ad bello, and ius belli conducts in information warfare, whereas Taddeo (2016) proposes one criterium of engagement – IW can be waged only to "preserve

the well-being of Infosphere. Plus, she notes that promoting the well-being of the Infosphere could be a potential carte blanche for warmongering states, so she underlines that only preservation is just interest, not its promotion (Taddeo 2016).

III Methodology

This thesis employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to investigate the official statements on the justification of warfare. The CDA revolves around *ideology, power, history and critique,* making it suitable for analysing officeholders' top-down messages (Wodak 2007). Furthermore, CDA sees language as social practice and dramatically emphasises the role of the context (Wodak and Reisigl 2001; Fairclough 2018; Wodak 2002). The following passages will examine the main benefits of employing the CDA methodology.

Understanding the concept of discourse and Critical Discourse Analysis

There are several essential arguments why critical discourse analysis is particularly suitable for this topic. As a predominately interdisciplinary approach, CDA allows the analysis of social phenomena, especially the transmission of power and hegemony, in sociology and political science (Wodak 2002, 2007; Wodak and Meyer 2009a; Bates 1975). Furthermore, rather than having a rigid methodological framework which is universally used in any research, CDA advocates for the problem-oriented approach (Wodak and Meyer 2009a; Fairclough 2018). It is a more suitable approach for integrating various fields of science to explore the nexus between text analysis and social practices (Wodak 2007). Still, in an attempt to evade "fitting the data to illustrate the theory": a constant reconsideration between the theory and the data is needed, bearing in mind the context (Wodak 2002).

The true comparative advantage of critical discourse analysis is stretching beyond the text and evaluating the context. The context plays a vital role in the CDA: the process of adding new elements to the existing context is *recontextualization;* conversely, if we exclude something from the existing context, it is decontextualization (Wodak 2002). Therefore, the theoretical framework provides a substantial discussion on the context of the leaders' justification. Information warfare is the ambient where initially broadcasted utterances will develop further, and the infrastructure for conducting IW will seriously impact the justification's success, both domestically and internationally. On the other hand, the just war theory will help us understand better categories and intrinsic logic of justifying the armed conflict.

On the other side of the coin, CDA pays special attention to the omitted (Wodak 2002). The interdisciplinarity of analysis and the emphasis of the critical analysis requires the additional effort to disentangle the words, phrases and messages that are intentionally omitted (Wodak

2002; Pesic and Stosic 2019). The most recent and well-known example is the insisting on the *special operation in Ukraine* rather than naming it the war.Having genres as the unit of analysis allows the adaptable scope of the research. Genre is 'a socially ratified way of using language in connection with a particular type of social activity' (Fairclough 1995). In this thesis, the only genre analysed would be the official statements of the top decision-maker.

To better understand the concept and notions of CDA, the following passages will disentangle what discourse is and what being critical means. Afterwards, discourse-historical analysis (DHA), a field of critical discourse analysis employed in this thesis, will be examined.

Although the CDA methodology features rather strict guidelines and blueprints for operationalisation, at the bedrock, the vision of the discourse depends on the analyst's viewpoint (Wodak and Meyer 2009a; Jäger and Maier 2009). Additionally, once selected, the discourse cannot be isolated, nor can it be sealed to disable reinterpretations (Wodak and Meyer 2009a; Waring 2018). On a vernacular level, the term discourse is often misused and overstretched to the point where it is hard to grasp any meaning out of it. When speaking with my friend about this thesis and asked her about her understanding of the discourse, she replied that discourse is *mystification, a tool to make you sound smart.* Those notions of everyday usage of the language for transmitting messages are what Gee considers discourse with little *d* (Gee 2014).

Contrasted to discourse with little *d*, Gee proposes discourse with capital *D.* Namely, Discourse is "ways of combining and integrating language, actions, interactions, ways of thinking, believing, valuing, and using various symbols, tools, and objects to enact a particular sort of socially recognizable identity" (Gee 2014). Adhering to a 'critical' stance should be understood as gaining "distance from the data" and valuating the context and societal dynamics (Wodak and Meyer 2009b). However, an analyst must understand both the political stances of discourse participants, and the necessity for self-reflection during the research process (Reisigl 2018).

Still, CDA is not a monolith approach. Throughout the development of the discipline, several groups of thinking could be differentiated. The best known are the sociocognitive approach (van Dijk 1993), dialectical-relational approach (Fairclough 1995) and discourse-historical approach (Wodak 2002). The first two feature a broader linguistic operationalisation, whereas

the discourse-historical approach uses more detailed linguistic operationalisation (Wodak and Meyer 2016). Since this thesis deals with the concrete statements, this thesis would opt for the discourse-historical approach.

Discourse-Historical Approach to the critical discourse analysis (DHA)

The focal point of discourse-historical analysis is that the discourse is necessarily created and interpreted in a historical context (Wodak and Meyer 2016, 2009a). Therefore, it is determined in the spatial and temporal dimensions. Furthermore, Wodak and her colleagues worked on refining and standardising the DHA research throughout the years. Hence, strategies of analysis, research blueprints and notions of validity of the research are substantially and thoroughly explained by Wodak. Thus, the following passages would fill in the general notions on DHA with concrete topic-specific content.

DHA relies on the four-step strategy of analysis. Firstly, establishing the *content* or *topics* of a particular discourse (Wodak and Meyer 2009a). For example, in the empirical part, the messages on the justification of the Russo-Georgian War, the ongoing war in will be examined. The second step is the analysis of the *discursive strategies (Wodak and Meyer 2009a).* Simply said, discursive strategies are the modes of constructing arguments to justify actions. The third step is identifying the linguistic means of transmitting messages (Wodak and Meyer 2009a). This thesis is informed by means of official statements of the decision-makers. Eventually, the last step is the evaluation of the nexus between the context and the discriminatory stereotypes (Wodak and Meyer 2009a). This ultimate step should allow the differentiation between messages targeted to domestic and foreign publics.

Notions on validity

Ensuring the validity of the research is paramount. Therefore, the DHA's approach proposes the so-called triangulatory approach. According to Wodak, DHA's triangulatory approach is mainly theoretical and based on the concept of context, which considers four levels spanning from text and co-text level to extralinguistic and societal level. As the regime remains relatively coherent – in 2008, Medvedev became president, and Putin switched to the prime minister's office due to the constitutional limitation of a maximum of two consecutive terms. Nevertheless, when Putin became prime minister, immediately the prime minister became the most influential figure in the country. Unquestionably Putin is the most powerful figure in Russia. Still, many incumbent top officials such as Medvedev, Lavrov or Patrushev played a

prominent role during the August War, as well. Therefore, proposed levels are not static; rather, DH Approach suggestss "permanent switching between these levels and evaluating the findings from these different perspectives should minimize the risk of being biased" (Wodak and Meyer 2009a). Still, the question of bias is a valid objection to this toolbox. Later, the limitations and setbacks of the proposed methodology will be examined.

Moreover, to ensure validity DHA does not stop at evaluating *intertextual* and *interdiscursive relationships* between utterances but instead evaluates the historical developments of the institution or organisation it surveys (Wodak and Meyer 2016). The domain of societal and political influence the changing nature of the discourses. To clarify, intertextuality presumes the continuum between past, present and future that shape the text" (Wodak and Meyer 2016). The connections are established either through explicit reference to a topic or main actor; through references to the same events; or by illusions or evocations (Wodak and Meyer 2016). Interdiscursivity features the same logic, using discourse rather than text.

Limitations

"The analyst can – and has to – take a stand" (Jäger and Maier 2009). Assuming a value-neutral researcher is nonsense. Additionally, it is arguable that even robots could not be totally neutral and unbiased since humans program them. Is political science value-neutral, or does it prefer democracy, human rights, and the rule of law (Simeunović 2009)? Still, the researcher must bear in mind that "these values, norms, laws and rights have been discursively constructed too" (Jäger and Maier 2009). Although DHA features rather strict guidelines on operationalisation, it accepts alternative interpretations (Wodak 2007).

It is both a blessing and a curse that there are many methodological approaches in social science. However, for examining the contribution of the official statements of the decision-makers to the big matryoshka of Information warfare, structure-oriented discourse-historical analysis of the concrete statements seemed the most suitable. The strict guideline of the proposed methodology has a focal point in ensuring that the proposed methodology is applied adequately. Despite being quite precise and envisaged to be *retroductable,* and repeatable, one should not forget that the very concept of discourse is disputable (Wodak and Meyer 2009a).

Data collection

Since the research focuses on the Russian top officials' statements made amid the 2008 August War and in the wake of the full-scale 2022 Russo-Ukrainian War, the data collection relies on official sources. Two primary sources of the data are the official Website of the President of the Russian Federation and TASS Russian state-owned biggest media agency. To exclude the any possible interference between the author and the citations, the data for the empirical analysis is collected from the English translations offered by the aforementioned websites.

The thesis was informed by the already identified four generic discourses of the leaders' call-to-arms speeches. However, as advised by the creators of the DHA "back-and-forth" approach to the analysis is necessary to ensure that the analysis encapsulates the most important utterances (Wodak and Meyer 2016). Therefore, the DHA allows the data to steer the analysis. Moreover, having pre-determined labels or frames bears a risk of confirmation bias, which could lead to cherry-picking of the statements. However, DHA suggests that during the research process, the author must constantly reevaluate the findings and the arguments (Wodak 2007, Wodak and Meyer 2016).

As a result, choosing the right timeframe is a mammoth task. Although it is tempting to seek farther in the past, the risk of conflating the meanings of the utterances and discourses increases with the distance to the analysied event. Ergo, this thesis opts to analyse the statements imminently before actions are taken. The thesis will address the August War through the justifications of the action taken on the 8 and 9 August. In comparison, the backbone of the justification of the February War is two Putin's addresses and the aired Security Council meeting between 25 and 27 February. Rather than spreading the analysis timeframe far from the actual start of the armed conflicts, some essential speeches and articles, such as 2021 Putin's article "On Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians", will be used as tools for explaining the justification of the analysis of armed conflicts.

IV EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

As announced earlier in the text, this chapter employs critical discourse analysis on the most important statements amid The August War and The Russo-Ukrainian War. The discourse-historical approach, a subfield of the CDA, is employed to understand better the Russian top official's justification of the warfare.

1.Laconic justification the August War

Late at night on 7 August 2008, pro-Western Georgian president Saakashvili "took the gamble" and launched an attack on the capital of the separatist region of South Ossetia (Darchiashvili 2012; Waal and Asmus 2010). The later, international fact-finding mission concluded that the shelling of Tskhinvali triggered the full-scale conflict between Georgia and Russia, whose peacekeepers were already present in the South Ossetia region (Fact-finding Mission 2009). The prompt but rather brutal war will rage for the following five days, later entering the frozen conflict stage. The reception of the war significantly differs. The framing of the war is the first step in creating the collective memory of the event. The fact-finding mission concluded that the force applied to Tskhinvali was disproportional (Darchiashvili, Fact-finding Mission 2009).

The quantitative context analysis of the justification of the August War shows that more than half of the justifications in the wake of the conflict and in weeks to follow were arguments for restoring peace and security (Heinrich and Tanaev 2009). The second most prominent frame is the role of NATO. For Russia, NATO was attributed negatively as destabilising factor, whereas the Georgian president did the opposite (Heinrich and Tanaev 2009). The conferences amid the ongoing war in Ukraine confirmed that this frame became part of the collective memory of the Russian officials. Patrushev, Putin's top security officer, discussing the affairs in Ukraine, noted that the Ukrainian scenario "was manufactured by the United States, just like during the conflict with Georgia in 2008" (Patrushev 2022). To better understand the quantitative content analysis by Heinrich and Tanaev, this thesis employs the discourse-historical approach to the most important Russian top officials' statements in the wake of the conflict.

The shelling of Tskhinvali started just before midnight on 7 August, local time. However, only around eleven o'clock local time, President Medvedev aired the first speech. The cornerstones of the statement are that Russian presence is lawful, that Georgians committed aggression and breach of the international law, causing the death of the peacekeepers and

civilians, many of whom are Russian citizens ((Medvedev 2008) compare: (Heinrich and Tanaev 2009)). However, two elements of the speech need special attention. First, "Russia has historically been a guarantor for the security of the peoples of the Caucasus, and this remains true today" (Medvedev 2008). Although this statement cannot compete with the recent Putin's in size, the argument of history is an irreplaceable constituent. This appeal to history for enabling future action acts as Locke's last resort measure, better known as the Appeal to Heaven (Locke, 1988). Apart from the discourse of history, the second intriguing element of the speech is the last sentence.

"The perpetrators will receive the punishment they deserve" (Medvedev 2008) disembarks from the fairly diplomatic tone of this relatively short statement. The utterances at the statement are well adjusted for the international public, evoking international law, mandated peacekeepers, Georgia causing loss of life and relatively coherent in tone (ibid). However, this last sentence seems as it was added, as it is an outliner to the well-calculated messages previously delivered in the statement. The punishment they deserve is an open threat aimed at the Georgian government, however, addressed to the domestic audience (ibid). This threat is a compressed way to symultaniously comfort domestic public that Russia has the situation under control and that it is capable of taking revenge in a just manner ([as] they deserve) in no-time.

As the day unfolded, Gryzlov, State Duma Speaker, was the first to reaffirm that Russia will take active participation in the conflict. He announced that Russia "will not give up comprehensive and operative measures necessary for protecting Russian citizens in the region and preserving the safety of our southern borders amid aggravating situation in South Ossetia" (Lenta.ru 2008). Interestingly, the first statement does not include the attack on the Russian peacekeeping forces, which will in the following statements, become the prime justification. The angry tone and imprecise message of the statement give empirical proof that the crisis communication and readiness to engage in the information dimension of the emerging warfare was underdeveloped.

A few hours later, a concise yet illustrative message from the Ministry of Defence attributed that "Russia will protect peacekeepers and citizens of the Russian Federation in the conflict area" (Lenta.ru 2009). It is followed by an interesting allusion "the Georgian administration engaged in an awful adventure" (Interfax.ru, Lenta.ru 2009). Awful adventure is a condensed way to convey both the shock that the Georgian military attacked Tskhinvali and to downplay

the prospect of success of that operation. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, wording plays a vital role in framing any event. Similarly, the ongoing war in Ukraine is dubbed a *special operation*, evoking the limited scope of professional (special) personnel carrying out an operation. In the era of liberal interventionism, the terms war or invasion were substituted with humanitarian intervention, and civilian casualties were dubbed collateral damage.

Finally, Putin voiced his first statements. After talks with US President Bush, Putin said it "will not be easy" to prevent the volunteers from fighting in South Ossetia (Putin 2008). In this context, this message seems a bit bland since it was already announced that the formal Russian military would engage in the conflict. Years later, in 2014, this test probe was implemented when *The Little Green Men* took over vital communications and institutions in Crimea in plain green uniforms without official insignias (BBC 2014). At first, Russia was denying connections with them, despite them wearing pieces of equipment same as the Russian special forces. Only after successful communication of the annexation of Crimea Putin admitted ties with *the Little Green Men* (Wilderom 2020) .

However, there is surprisingly little communication activity at the very beginning of the August War. In contrast to the 2022 events, the Security council meeting was not aired live and the official press release featured 54 words in English, describing the event (President of the Russian Federation Website 2008). This lacuna will later be identified as the missed opportunity to better justify the call-to-arms. Still, from the four generic disourses of the leader's call to action – "constructing evil other", "appeal to history", "appleals to legitimating power external to orator" and "uniting for the greater good" the last one is missing (Graham, Keenan, and Dowd 2004).

The everpresent appeal to history is underlined in the scarce utterances at the wake of the armed conflict. <u>Peacekeepers,</u> <u>international law and loss of life caused by Georgians and Russia as the historical guarantor of the security in the Caucasus</u> apply to the three aforementioned generic discourses. Yet, the uniting for the greater good, as a call for making a sacrifice and it can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it helped the leaders throughout the history to promote the *noble* goals and to justify sacrifices of the armed conflict. On the other hand, evoking the sacrifices emphasises the severity of the challenge. The short almost laconic utterances justifying the August War should demonstrate determination, professionalism, thus downplay the seriousness of the threat. The tone of the Medvedev's speech and other top officials' follow-ups is more as if they are informing the

broad public of the progress made, as if something buerocratic happens, rather than the full-scale armed conflict. The top officials did not pleadged for help, asking the broad public for sacrifices, but rather informed them on the actions taken to remediate the crisis. In that sense, mobilising support is not conducted thoroughout the plea for the *noble sacrifice,* but through the promise that the perpetrators will be punished.

2. The misleading official statements before the armed conflict, February 2022

In February 2022, Russian top officials were almost daily commenting on the indivisibility of security and that it is against the OSCE principles for any country to gain its security at the expense of another country (Lavrov 2022; Peskov 2022a). Namely, the Russian ministry of foreign affairs sent 37 letters to the leaders of EU and NATO countries. However, especially in Zakharova's speeches, she cannot conceal bewilderment that they received a collective response signed by NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg and Vice-President of the European Commission Josep Borrell (Zakharova 2022). Although Lavrov was reluctant to uncover the details of the letter, the recipients of the letter outlined some details of its content. The gist of the letter is "The 1999 Charter for European Security and the 2010 Astana Declaration, adopted at the highest level by the OSCE, clearly stipulate that no state, group of states or organisation can be given a superior right to maintaining peace and stability within the OSCE" (Zakharova 2022). Still, there is no clue in official discourse that this fairly general discussion would turn into a war in a few weeks.

More than a month before the start of the war, Western media started to anticipate that Ukraine would be subjected to invasion. Russia demanded the halt of NATO eastwards expansion and announced a comprehensive military exercises near the border (Associated Press 2021). Simultaneously, the Western diplomats were being recalled from the embassies, citizens were advised to leave Ukraine, and Western media and diplomats kept forecasting the possible invasion start date daily (*BBC News* 2022a). On the other hand, Russian top officials denied any possibility of invasion as late as the 19 February (Peskov 2022b). Cynical statements were proliferating, such as asking Western colleagues if they can share their information on the possible security threats in Moscow, since Russians do not possess such information. These two passages are the necessary introduction to the main focus of the analysis. The following chapters analyse the 21 and 24 Februray Putin's speeches and the aired Security Council Meeting.

The aired Security Council Meeting – Power vertical at play

In the afternoon, on 21 February, Kremlin broadcasted the Security council meeting. Surprisingly, the whole session was aired live, including the decision-making process. The Security Council consists of the top officials, and throughout the years of the Putin and Medvedev presidencies, it gained some credibility and authority. Simultaneously, the power vertical is probably exacerbated by the live broadcast of the session. Probably, in the closed sessions, some less powerful officials can override peer pressure and question, comment or suggest policies. However, the live aired session emphasised the power vertical, making such suggestions or contesting opinions a risky endeavour.

On top of that, it is safe to assume that the top officials were, at that point, already anticipating the upcoming invasion; thus, expressing the contesting opinion bears the risk of being portrayed as a traitor in future historiography. Bearing that in mind, the session resembled more the public hearing than the discussion. The head of the foreign intelligence service, Naryshkin, was interrupted four times in a trial-like manner until he positively replied to the proposal of recognising the independence of LNR and DNR.

The only woman's speech at the Security Council meeting was made by the Speaker of the Federation Council, Valentina Matviyenko. Matviyenko's speech was the richest in frames. She was spanning from the discourse of the bloody anti-state coup in Ukraine [Maidan 2014] and the notions of Banderite units causing harm in the disputed regions to Ukraine as the fraternal Slavic nation (President of the Russian Federation Website 2022). Her tone was constantly saturated with emotions. She, herself, at some point, admitted maybe I am too emotional (ibid). Additional analysis from the feminist perspective could disentangle if her speech was simply honest and she was overwhelmed by the situation or if it was a carefully selected array of emotions aimed to further grasp support, especially from the women part of the electorate. Eventually, the recognition of the two self-proclaimed republics received unanimous approval by the top officials.

Discourse of (Re)interpretation of the history

In the atmosphere where the Western media speculated about the possible date of the start of the invasion, Putin's address on 21 February was anticipated to clear ambiguities. The atmosphere of the speech resembled a history lecture. Only after more than 7200 words,

eventually, near the end of the speech, he will announce the decision to recognise the Donetsk and Lugansk Peoples Republics.

"Since time immemorial, the people living in the south-west of what has historically been Russian land have called themselves Russians and Orthodox Christians. This was the case before the 17th century, when a portion of this territory rejoined the Russian state, and after" (Putin 2022b). From the very beginning of the speech, Putin's stance is straightforward. Opening the address with notions of Ukraine as a territory which has historically been Russian land and have called itself Russian from the very beginning gave out a sense of *fait accompli*. The opening statement is addressed exclusively to the domestic audience, and the strong presuppose is voiced – it is a Russian matter, of a Russian people, on the Russian land.

In the following sentence, Putin adds that in 17th-century lands that constitute Ukraine today rejoined the Russian state (ibid). Paternalistic in its tone, the lecture aimed to justify interfering in Ukrainian internal politics. The term rejoined downscales all historical circumstances where Russians did not rule the subjected lands as temporary, transitory phases. First, by stipulating the Russian historical right to Ukrainian territories since time immemorial. Second, the Ukrainian state, according to Putin, is a historical misfortune and error that some elites utilise to push for anti-Russian agenda (Putin 2021, 2022b).

It is not the first notion of denying Ukraine its statehood. A similar lesson on the history and statehood of Ukraine was delivered in Putin's article "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians" (Putin 2021). When it was published, it prompted huge backlash and debate (NewsCenter 2021). Spanning on almost 7000 words, the article's main messages are that both Ukrainians and Russians stem from ancient Rus and that the common tradition, culture and religion make the two nations indistinguishable (Putin 2021). Additionally, the article stipulates that the "modern Ukraine is entirely the product of the Soviet era" (ibid). These bullet points would be expanded and underlined during the 21 March speech. The culmination of the claim that Ukraine is a Soviet product is Putin's most recent remark that Ukraine can be rightfully called "Vladimir Lenin's Ukraine" (Putin 2022b). Whereas in his 2021 article, Putin accentuates the explanation, bringing forward korenizatsya policy and the Communist party's stances on the national question (Putin 2021), the 21 February speech emphasises cynicism and strong allusions.

Notable discoursive strategies: Cynicism and Allusions

Cynicism is an oft-employed tool in the Russian top officials' discourses. Some scholars call the excessive use of sarcasm and cynicism a communicative strategy. Namely, in sharp contrast to Western diplomats' language, excessive use of irony and cynicism emulates speaking from above the situation (*NPR* 2022c). For example, on 21 February, Zakharova commented that the Munich conference's mission is to "address political security issues, while in reality it has been indulging in disinformation attacks, spreading fakes and demonstrating its own imbecility" (Zakharova 2022). Notwithstanding, there were numerous occasions where something was qualified as idiocy and similar derogatory terms (Carbonaro 2022).

In that manner, Putin claims in his 21 February speech that "Ukraine has outperformed its Western masters by inventing sanctions against its own citizens, companies, television channels, other media outlets and even members of parliament" (Putin 2022b). Syntagma Western masters imply that the Ukrainian foreign policy is tailored abroad. Yet, evoking the term <u>masters</u> should allude that Ukraine is a captured, externally governed state that needs some form of liberation.

Allusions are vital because they bear unsaid meanings – it is up to the recipient to evaluate the scope of the allusion (Wodak and Meyer 2016; Wodak 2007). For example, "You want decommunisation? Very well, this suits us just fine. But why stop halfway? We are ready to show what real decommunizations would mean for Ukraine" (Putin 2022b). This open threat is fixed on the one end we are ready to show you; however, it does not contain the exact extent of this threat. Combined with the genuinely vague term decommunisation, it resembles an angry older brother or parent disciplining a kid.

Continuing with his views on the history of the USSR, Putin states, "The collapse of the historical Russia known as the USSR is on their conscience" (Putin 2022b). It is an interesting remark, bearing in mind that it refrains from syllogism USSR is historical Russia, USSR created Ukraine ergo Russia had already given Ukraine full sovereignty. Once something is created, it cannot be undone easily. This is a fine example of the ambiguity of the threat delivered through allusion. On the one hand, knowing that the threat evolved into coercion and that the war broke out, it is easy to point out that this kind of threat announces

possible ultimate consequences. On the other hand, had the war not started, it would remain a stylistic figure in the speech.

Thus, researchers should focus more on exploring the possible scopes and extents of allusions since they can subtly announce the upcoming events more accurately than the rigid and precise language of diplomacy. Yet, it comes with hurdles, since in academia, where standards of validity and reliability apply. Mentioned here is an example of an allusion that bore a covert message. However, lucky guessing the meanings of some allusions is a lottery and more suitable for journalistic accords. To illustrate that, another allusion from the speech is analysed. After stating that the USSR created Ukraine, Putin calls Ukraine's ruling elites "grateful progeny" and condemns their removal of the Lenin monuments (Putin 2022b). Grateful, of course, is a sarcastic attribution and bears an opposite meaning. According to the storyline, Lenin gave Ukrainians the country, yet they are now calling for decommunisation (Putin 2022b). Less clear is the term progeny. It does not fit the frame of the Western masters controlling Ukraine, nor the frame of temporary transition phases where Russians do not rule the Ukrainian land. Time has shown us what the last allusion meant. However, there is no easily spottable meaning of the progeny. The speech can be separated into two central chapters. The first is the history lecture, while the second chapter addresses international public, focusing on international law and security.

The discourse of (failed) NATO promises
The discourse of NATO enlargement plays a prominent role in this speech. Putin mentioned NATO 27 times in the statement. "In 1990, when German unification was discussed, the United States promised the Soviet leadership that NATO jurisdiction or military presence will not expand one inch to the east and that the unification of Germany will not lead to the spread of NATO's military organisation to the east. This is a quote" (Putin 2022a)
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This point of speech sparked an intense debate internationally – both print and electronic media invited witnesses and experts in an attempt to disentangle the truth. Following the dramatic increase of groups with obscure popularity on Telegram, Zakharova brought up a 1990 telegram between US Secretary of State Baker and the minister of foreign affairs of then-West Germany, Genscher, on her Telegram channel (B92.net 2022). However, it is a document from the 1990s, and in his interview in 2014, Gorbachev said that no such promises had been officially made towards Russia (Kórshunov and RBTH 2014). Many more

arguments surfaced during the debate, such the dramatically different geopolitical landscape of 1990, the last Cold War year and the post-Cold war period (Harvard Law Today 2022). However, the scope of this thesis does not allow us to further elaborate NATO – Russian relations.

Notably, throughout the years, the Russian regime built the image that NATO forces countries to join, omitting that the ruling elites in candidate countries opted to apply for membership[3] (Tomiuc 2002). Speaking of NATO eastward enlargement, Putin stated: "if it does not happen tomorrow, then it will happen the day after tomorrow. What does it change from the historical perspective? Nothing at all. (Putin 2022b)"

The last resort discourse

This statement of the inevitable eastwards expansion of NATO resonates both with the ongoing war and the August War. But, interestingly, in 2022, the sense of nihilism and resignation became very prominent. "The flying time of Tomahawk cruise missiles to Moscow will be less than 35 minutes; ballistic missiles from Kharkov will take seven to eight minutes; and hypersonic assault weapons, four to five minutes. It is like a knife to the throat (Putin 2022a)". The image of a knife to the throat vividly depicts an imminent and lethal threat. Usually, (crossing) the red line is the expression that should describe the critical juncture after which self-defence becomes inevitable. But, unfortunately, many analytics revoked Putin's story, where he said that he learnt the art of self-defence by chasing the rats on the streets of St. Petersburg. Namely, a rat, completely cornered and with a knife to the throat, will attempt to counterattack everything it has at its disposal (Газета.Ru 2018).

Additionally, recalling the ius ad bellum arguments, the knife to the throat is the last resort argument. From a moral viewpoint, it is hard to object to the right of self-defence of an attacked person faced with a knife to the throat. However, these abstractions downscale the reality to a powerful and vivid images that justify actions taken to remediate the imminent threat. However, engaging in such abstractions makes it easy to forget that this self-defence will harm real people, destroy real homes, and leave a persisting trauma. And this is not limited to this, Russo-Ukrainian war.

Confronting the romanticised allusions with objective estimations of human losses and losses in economy and infrastructure could take romanticism out of allusions. After the trauma of

the Vietnam War, where thousands of US soldiers died, US decision-makers became exquisitely cautious about how many casualties an engagement could bring (Holbrooke 1999). According to the testimony of Richard Holbrooke, the US assistant secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, he was asked by the State Department how many black sacks would be needed for establishing the SFOR mission in Bosnia and Hercegovina (Holbrooke 1999). The satisfactory estimation of the number of black sacks was one of the essential criteria for Washington's approval of troop deployment (Holbrooke 1999; Bildt 1998).

However, this cautiousness of the mid-1990s was relatively short-lived until dramatic images of the 11 September attacks sparked similar knife-to-the-throat feelings. Moreover, there are a plethora of other examples where the knife to the throat narrative justified mobilising human and material resources. Infamous is Goebbels's blueprint for waging war. "The people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same way in any country" (Ratcliffe 2017). The allusions and metaphors could be an insightful benchmark of the situation's importance. Especially following the logic that allusions are employed when something needs to remain unsaid, diplomats should keep a weather eye if the allusions and metaphors are intensifying. Putin portrays an interesting continuum between knife to the throat and alliance proposal in the same speech:

"Moreover, I will say something I have never said publicly, I will say it now for the first time. When then outgoing US President Bill Clinton visited Moscow in 2000, I asked him how America would feel about admitting Russia to NATO" (Putin 2022a). Ironically, that would be the most comprehensive eastward expansion of NATO. Throughout the 1990s, there were several attempts of NATO-Russia cooperation stemming from Russia joining the Partnership for Peace programme. However, the honeymoon phase would soon end once Russia realised that if admitted, it would be considered a junior partner in NATO, which was too little compared to the superpower role of the USSR. However, the mildly defensive tone of *fait accompli* – that Russia does what is historically inevitable after trying to ally with NATO, promptly changes in the following address three days later.

The final speech before kinetic action – discourse of NATO injusticies

Early in the morning on 24 February, Putin made yet another speech. Throughout the address, a motif of the Eastward expansion of NATO was prominent. Whereas the previous speech revolved around historical injusties and was somewhat defensive in tone, this speech started with criticism of the West. It carried on with the justification of the upcoming war.

The focus was on the injustices committed by NATO states. The discourse of the injustices of the humanitarian interventions was introductory to the speech. Although it addresses the injustices, it is more a reminder of the shortcomings of the Russian diplomacy in the late 1990s. "First, a bloody military operation was waged against Belgrade, without the UN Security Council's sanction but with combat aircraft and missiles used in the heart of Europe" (Putin 2022a). Unauthorised by the UN Security Council, NATO stepped out of the defensive nature of its Treaty, challenging the UN Charter and setting up a dangerous precedent (Wheeler 2000). Due to that fact, in contemporary Serbian public discourse, the intervention is framed as NATO's aggression against Yugoslavia (Krivokapić 2019). The question of legality versus legitimacy is deeply contested (Wheeler 2000; Teson 2001). Finally, the Kosovo War happened at the peak hours of liberal interventionism, which prioritised the respect of human rights, over sovereignty and non-intervention in domestic affairs (Teson 2001). This dangerous precedent opened Pandora's box for the already existing frozen conflicts. Not rarely Kosovo is used as an argument, usually lacking context and with misleading attributions.

The *humanitarian intervention* bypassed the potential Russian veto in UN Security Council (Wheeler 2000). Official Moscow was faced with a diplomatic defeat, unable to prevent NATO from engaging. Some authors note that the turnaround of Russian prime minister Primakov over the Atlantic Ocean, the day when NATO started kinetic action, marked a turnaround of the Russian foreign policy towards the West (Шангараев 2019). A few months later, in the aftermath of the war, several hundreds of Russian soldiers on a peacekeeping mission in Bosnia covertly arrived on Kosovo i Metohija[4] and captured Slatina Airport near Priština (BBC 2000). The tensions swiftly erupted between Washington and Moscow, as NATO and Russian soldiers almost clashed at the airport. However, NATO managed to make the Russian soldiers retreat by diplomatic means. Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, NATO candidate countries at that time, closed their airspace for the supplies, depriving Russian soldiers of the connection to mainland Russia (Kaiser and Hoffman 1999). Thus, in less than

three months, Moscow faced two defeats. First, as a UN Security Council veto player. Second, as with Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria entering NATO, Russian capacity for projecting power was seriously hindered.

Discourse of Ukraine being the vital interest of Russia

As NATO was expanding eastwards, Russia felt more under threat, or as Putin said, experienced a knife to the throat. Putin just summed up the ongoing developments. "In December 2021, we made yet another attempt to reach agreement with the United States and its allies on the principles of European security and NATO's non-expansion. Our efforts were in vain. The United States has not changed its position. It does not believe it necessary to agree with Russia on a matter that is critical for us" (Putin 2022a).

Professor Mearsheimer's controversial lecture delivered in 2014 finds the deep cause of the conflict from the Western endeavour to "peel Ukraine away from Soviet orbit" (Mearsheimer 2015). According to him, Ukraine is a vital interest of Russia, whereas, for the US, Ukraine is of secondary importance (Mearsheimer 2014). Ergo, protecting vital interests allows Russia to mobilise all resources at its disposal (Mearsheimer 2015). Evoking the core principles of classical realism in international relations, he reminded us that the balance of power remains a vital concept for explaining contemporary international relations (Mearsheimer 2014).

As Putin continues, "for the United States and its allies, it is a policy of containing Russia, with obvious geopolitical dividends. For our country, it is a matter of life and death, a matter of our historical future as a nation (Putin 2022a)." Once again, a powerful allusion of the historical future as a nation is simultaneously mystic and clear. The anthropomorphic representation of the nation as something that has a future and that is evolving throughout time should assume that if Ukraine turns to the West, that would mean the end of the Russian nation as well.

"This is not an exaggeration; this is a fact. It is not only a very real threat to our interests but to the very existence of our state and to its sovereignty. It is the red line which we have spoken about on numerous occasions. They have crossed it. (Putin 2022a)" The atmosphere that all is said and done prevailed. After more than 2100 words, Putin eventually touched upon Donbas and neo-Nazis, which would become a common topic once the war started. However, there is again insisting on path dependency in the previous speech – "They will

undoubtedly try to bring war to Crimea just as they have done in Donbass" (Putin 2022a). Eventually, the official justification is announced. "The people's republics of Donbass have asked Russia for help" (Putin 2022a). Although it is not the first situation where Russia first awarded fast-track citizenships and supported provisional governments in disputed territories, the pace of the events is entirely new. It took less than 72 hours to recognise two de-facto states, LNR and DNR, to sign a treaty of friendship and to answer LNR and DNR's invitation for collective self-defence positively. "In this context, in accordance with Article 51 (Chapter VII) of the UN Charter, with permission of Russia's Federation Council, and in execution of the treaties of friendship and mutual assistance with the Donetsk People's Republic and the Lugansk People's Republic, ratified by the Federal Assembly on 22 February, I made a decision to carry out a special military operation" (Putin 2022a).

The actual speech about the conditions in the field in two self-proclaimed territories was secondary. "Not a single day goes by without Donbass communities coming under shelling attacks" (Putin 2022a). If it is true, then it is a serious flaw of the Russian media outlets. It is becoming even ampler if zoomed out to include more territories in Ukraine: "one shudders at the memories of the terrible tragedy in Odessa, where peaceful protesters were brutally murdered, burned alive in the House of Trade Unions" (Putin 2022a). The low-key conflict in Donbas between 2014 and 2022 was far from being the trending story globally.

Ergo, as mentioned in the chapter on just wars, official Moscow role-played the invitation for collective self-defence under the provisions of the Chapter VII UN Charter. However, better understand the staggering pace of developments between two of Putin's speeches on 21 and 24 February, the following chapter examines the statements of Maria Zakharova, Sergei Lavrov and Dmitri Peskov. Their statements up to a month before the war are analysed. Methodologically, it is challenging to establish the tight timeframe since there is no publicly available data on when the final decision that the war will happen officially took place. Nevertheless, this thesis assumes that the top officials were briefed better than the general public. Thus, the following passage examines the change in their discourse in the weeks towards the war.

3. The failure of the Russian Information Warfare

The last resort argument is missing from the previous weeks before the kinetic action. It can be indicative of the lack of trust that media outlets could create enough tension that the war

seems like as a last resort. Russia did not manage to utilise its overt media potential, nor covert operations such as troll farms to push for international support or sympathies. As indicated in the theoretical framework, measuring the countries' reputations is relatively understudied, and some existing indicators are used predominantly for commercial purposes. However, it is safe to assume that Russia lost its reputation after the Annexation of Crimea and during the sanctions 2014-2022.

This loss of reputation was fuelled by the massive uncovering of troll accounts on Twitter and the debunking of the system of troll farms both from external intelligence agencies and by insiders who decided to speak up (Patrikarakos 2021). With a declining reputation and growing isolation of Russia between 2014 and 2022, the credibility and newsworthiness of the stories coming from the Donbas were substantially hindered (Wilderom 2020). Although establishing a robust causal relationship between newsworthiness needs more empirical research, this argument is an assumption that could be an avenue for future research.

This intentionally under-justified kinetic action by the top officials indicates that Russian information warfare, as described in the theoretical framework, has lost its attractiveness for targeting domestic and international audiences. What started with Russian eager to communicate that Tbilisi attacked Russian peacekeepers and that their intervention was morally justified turned upside down - Putin almost forgot to assess that the Minsk agreements are no longer valid. During the Security Council meeting Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office, Dmitry Kozak assessed that the Minsk agreements' "status has remained at zero level since 2015" (Kozak 2022). However, only a day after the 21 February speech, at the press conference, Putin concluded that Minsk agreements are no longer valid.

Closing remarks

In terms of the number of discourses and allusions, the three analysed broadcasts are in sharp contrast to the austere utterances justifying the August War. Keenan, Dowd and Maree's four generic discourses of the leaders' call-to-arms are present and easily identifiable. Unlike the August War, where the discourse of uniting for the greater good was absent mainly due to the significant asymmetry between the Russian and Georgian military capacities, in 2022, it played a significant role. The knife to the throat suggests the last resort, aiming to explain to the domestic audience the necessity for making sacrifices. The generic "discourse the appeal

to history" is omnipresent in the speeches and knit into every statement. Additionally, the "appeal to legitimating power external to orator" is mostly encapsulated in the discourse of the NATO injustices and pleas to international law. For this 2022 armed conflict, the most delicate was the discourse of "constructing evil other". Hence, it was a sensitive operation to justify action against evil Other when Ukraine is denied historical nationhood and deemed as a fraternal part of the Russian nation. Therefore, the speeches focus on promoting that the runaway leadership (grateful progeny) in Kyiv is simply executing the externally-created foreign policy of Ukraine. Launching the images of the neonazi battalions to a domestic public with high appraisal towards victory against nazism in the Second World War succeeded in blurring the real image of against whom Russia is fighting. The torrential flow of metaphors and presumptions covered up the paradox of who is the evil other. If all Ukrainian soldiers are nationalistic and nazi, then how can Ukrainians be part of the Russian national corpus? On the other hand, if the real target is NATO and Ukrainians are a fraternal nation or part of the Russian nation, as per Putin's speech, then a fratricidal war is waged.

Additionally, if the Russian reputation was shaken from 2014-2022, after the invasion, the countries' reputation will further deteriorate. The ongoing war would probably mark the end of comprehensive Russian information warfare. The threat from non-linear, comprehensive information warfare (Giles 2016, 2021) coming from the hive-inspired troll farms (Patrikarakos 2021) producing and spreading manipulated news and fake news aimed at foreign decision-makers (Clack and R. Johnson 2021b) will probably wane. This tricks in this playbook are already well known. Nevertheless, it does not mean the end of information warfare, neither from Russia, nor from elsewhere. Less ambitious IW goals will remain, such as spreading fake news and sowing distrust in institutions and mainstream news outlets. Especially, the covert atmosphere of the Telegram groups allows swift, covert, and convenient mediums for disseminating IW content. At the institutional level, it is highly unlikely that Russia will completely give up the idea of information warfare. However, it will take plenty of time and creativity first to fight emerging Russophobia and then to restore the credibility of the Russian media.

V CONCLUSIONS

Information warfare has proven to be a nebulous concept. The true power of the IW stems from its concealment and unclear boundaries, allowing IW to adapt to new situations and actors quickly. However, this thesis is a modest contribution to demystifying the concept of the IW. In that sense, it portrays essential milestones of this concept's historical and academic development. Understanding the IW required terminological differentiation from very similar concepts of propaganda and so-called Active measures in the Russian case.

Evolving from the military realm, scholarship of the IW had to disentangle what does and what does not belong to the IW. The most critical doctrinal success was filtering out military means from understanding the IW. At first, IW was understood as a toolbox for using the information to gain an advantage in the field. However, that also included items such as jamming telecommunication equipment or gaining intelligence on the enemy's movements. Although it is called *warfare,* it is carried out almost exclusively by non-military personnel, and IW's prime targets are civilians. In its most demanding task, it should decisively influence adversaries' decision-makers, making it virtually identical to propaganda. However, another dimension that propaganda lacks is that IW can, and usually targets the broad public spreading malicious content that should discourage the electorate from trusting in institutions and in official sources.

Becoming a standalone weapon, IW had to swiftly adapt to technological advancements in the wake of the new millennium. Once strictly monitored and country-specific telecommunication infrastructure turned upside down. The Internet allowed access to the adversary's public as never before. Therefore, the impact of classical, officially sanctioned propaganda such as cultural corners, pavilions, libraries or foreign-language foreign radio programmes cannot compare with the reach of the internet. Therefore, discussing the media's role as an important bridge connecting IW as a concept to the Russian approach to the IW.

After discussing the already existing literature on the most prominent features of the Russian IW, the author attempts to track the development of the Russian IW. T The three major milestones are identified. First, the lessons learned from the underdeveloped crisis communication and the preparedness for media impact in the international arena. Those lessons manifested during the Annexation of Crimea. The Russian IW infrastructure successfully managed to downplay the crisis's extent and neutralise voices from Ukraine.

However, in the years to follow, the West has polished defence mechanisms against the IW. Series of debunking of false and misleading articles and even portals, together with the exposing hundreds of bot accounts, mounted pressure on the Russian side. Also, some insiders spoke up about the operations they conducted. All those factors contributed to the decline of the Russian IW.

Since this thesis relies exclusively on publicly available materials, understanding the covert nature of the Russian IW required the proxy variable. Therefore, the official justification of two armed conflicts by Russian top officials, first the 2008 August War and the ongoing war in Ukraine, were indicative of their trust in Russian IW infrastructure. The official discourses of justification will be further disseminated in the media outlets according to their editorial policies. Thus, this thesis opted to analyse the very spring of statements rather than tracing them across the perplexing network of the media outlets. The critical discourse analysis allowed hands-on analysis of speeches, mainly focusing on allusions and metaphors – utterances that allow further reinterpretation. Further reinterpretations allow the IW infrastructure to build on the allusions initially expressed in the official documents.

In 2008 top officials could not rely substantially on the concept of the IW since the infrastructure was in the early stages and the efficiency of the IW strategies was unproven. In 2022, top officials did not rely on the IW infrastructure because they did not find it capable and resourceful of *preparing terrain* – building fundaments of the justification in advance. Even Zakharova and Peskov, two speak persons daily addressing the media on behalf of the Kremlin, were denying in a rather cynical manner the possibility of the invasion on Ukraine. Additionally, as it is perceived in Serbia that the Rambulliet conference was *alibi diplomacy*, negotiators dealing with the Minsk accords did not create a diplomatic crisis to provide one of the just causes described in the theoretical framework.

Therefore, the evidence laid out in the empirical findings indicates that the Russian IW lost its attractiveness. This thesis evokes the concept of the country-of-origin and country reputation to describe so. Examining the nexus between the country's reputation and the credibility of the news outlets registered in the particular country could be an interesting avenue for future research. Should there is a significant causal inference, it can be operationalised as an impact factor. In the meantime, this thesis' stance is that now, when Russia has completely lost its reputation in the West, the credibility and *impact factor* of the

information stemming from Russia is excessively low. Thus, this ongoing war can mark the end of the Russian IW as described by the existing scholarship.

However, this is certainly not the end of the IW. Moving from public Twitter profiles to closed, better-protected Telegram groups is probably the emergence of the reformulation of the IW. Thus, a final recommendation is that investing in high-quality education that will emphasise critical thinking and media literacy from the earliest age is the only long-term remedy against not just Russian but any other country-specific information warfare.

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