Международные отношения

LEGITIMISATION OF RUSSIA'S SPECIAL FOREIGN POLICY OPERATIONS: STRATEGIC NARRATIVES OF RUSSIAN OFFICIALS

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Abstract
The article presents the results of an analysis of the strategic narratives of the President of Russia and representatives of the Russian Foreign Ministry in substantiating Russian military operations abroad. The analysis is carried out on the example of the military operation in Georgia (2008), special operation in Crimea (2014), Crimea joining Russia, and the military operation in Syria (since 2015). The justification for military operations was mainly carried out by the president and representatives of the Russian Foreign Ministry. The justification for military operations was intended to legitimize the military actions and decisions of the Russian Federation. Officials used strategic, national and issue narratives. The core of the justification was the interpretation of historical memory and the description of the actions of Western countries as contrary to international law. The author shows that the justification for Russia's military operation in Georgia differed from that of the Crimea joining Russia, and the military operation in Syria. In the first case, Russian officials blamed Western countries for illegitimate actions to a lesser extent than in the case of justifying the Crimea joining Russia, and the military operation in Syria. Moreover, after 2017 Russian actors began to use narratives about the humanitarian mission of Russia.

Keywords: legitimation; Crimea; Syria; Georgia; Russian military operation; Putin; Lavrov; Medvedev; MFA; strategic narratives.

The history of modern international relations remembers several cases when Russia used its military capabilities abroad. The most known cases were the Russian military operation in Georgia in 2008, Crimea joining Russia in 2014, Syrian operation, which was initiated in 2015, and the most recent one was the operation in Ukraine. In order to legitimise such activities, Russian officials used specific narratives, explaining its military acts domestically and abroad.

Different discourses had been present in the Russian political agenda at the time periods when military operations were in progress. For instance, in 2008, when the Russian operation in Georgia started, it was a widely used discourse of Russia, intending to engage with the international community, and cooperate with the West. But, in 2014, things changed and Russia found itself confronting the West, in the rhetoric of Russian officials. It became evident that the Crimean annexation[1] became a demonstration of the position which did not correspond to the previously-stated intentions, debated earlier, regardless of whether the Russian actions were based on calculation or miscalculation. The Russian operations in Syria and Ukraine in 2022 showed the same trends.

Such sort of a new Russian foreign policy required legitimisation domestically and abroad. It is highly likely that active foreign policy positioning after 2014 echoed in a selection of some certain justification strategies, in order to legitimise military interventions. This article reveals Russian officials' rhetoric in periods of military acts and discusses features of the strategic narratives used to legitimise military interventions.

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[1] In the case of Crimea, Russia was not using the term 'annexation' (aneksiya) thinking of its negative connotation, substituting it with 'Crimea joining Russia' (prisoedinenie Kryma), though 'annexation' has no negative connotation in English.

This article contains interpretation of the narratives and their effects used by Russian officials. This article is not supporting or non-supporting any political statements.

Policy justification and policy legitimation

State policies are justified in order to obtain legitimacy. *Policy justification* becomes crucial for a *legitimisation* in cases of military interventions. We consider *legitimisation* as a process of obtaining legitimacy - people's acceptance of policy, political regime, political order, leader, political actions and decisions (Dahl, 1956; Del Sordi and Dalmasso, 2018; Gelpi, 2010; von Haldenwang, 2017), wherein *legitimisation* can be obtained by different instruments, one of which is *policy justification*, which is a communicative instrument of legitimisation (George, 1980; von Haldenwang, 2017), 2017) that involves rhetoric means, interpretation, argumentation of the legitimisation's object as the best among alternatives (Abulof and Kornprobst, 2017). Comparison of the justification of the Russian military operation in Georgia (**then RMOG**), the Crimea joining Russia (**then AC**), and the Russian military operation in Syria (**then RMOS**) allows us to identify the justification strategies used to legitimise the military operations.

Why the Russian military came in Georgia, Crimea, and Syria

There is a plurality of reasons for the Russian - Georgian conflict. K. Welt explained the Russian intervention by the response towards Georgian aggression against Ossetia, the author revealed that both sides were guilty – Georgia that believed it could defend its interests, and Russia, who started the military operation (Welt, 2010). The study of A. Kohen and R. Hamilton showed that Russia's operation in Georgia was explained by the geopolitical goal: not allowing Georgia to enter NATO (Cohen and Hamilton, 2011). Analysis of the discourse was presented by R. Sakwa, who indicated that Russia used conspiratorial narratives, for instance 'NATO expansion', which was perceived as a threat for Russia (Sakwa, 2012). Historical analysis of the circumstances of the Russian intervention revealed that Russian intervention in 2008 had changed the status-quo, as Russia took responsibility for South Ossetia and Abkhazia (Markedonov, 2015). Analysis of the media discourse concerning the Russian – Georgian conflict showed that the Russian media were representing Georgia as the aggressor, but the conflict was personified by M. Saakashvili as a responsible person (Tønnessen and Kolstø, 2012). A negative image of Georgians and Georgia was also formed. The Russian operation was interpreted as a response towards Georgian aggression (Akhvlediani, 2009).

The Crimea joining Russia drew the attention of scholars. Law scholars (more often Russian), underlined the justice and accordance of Crimea joining Russia in the norms of 'right to self-determination'(Tomsinov, 2014), which was not an argument to be agreed among western scholars. For instance, some part of the Crimean discussion in literature was dedicated to the comparison of the cases of Kosovo and Crimea and the possibility to use the right of self-determination. A. Bebier concluded that Kosovars suffered repressions, which did not happen in Crimea, so the cases were incomparable in terms of applying the right to self-determination (Bebier, 2015). The analysis of the diplomats' narratives revealed that the Crimean crisis was not resolved because of the colliding narratives, and due to some different interpretations of international norms (Faizullaev and Cornut, 2017). S. Hutchings and J. Szostek had shown that the Russian media highlighted the self-identity of Russia, via reporting about the Crimean issue, which was based on a cultural and historical basis (Hutchings and Szostek, 2015). The literature regarding the Crimean issue provided us with an understanding of different positions towards the legal aspects of such annexation; the media discourse analysis revealed the major media narratives and communicative means used by the media. We will use this data to compare media discourse with official discourse.

The reasons for Russian intervention in Syria were explained by major arguments. A.Stent revealed that Russia wanted to prevent the situation where a new Syrian president would be set up by the West, as happened in Egypt; the author considered the Syrian conflict as a proxy war between the US and Russia (Stent, 2016). R. Dannreuther studied the Russian response to the Arab Spring and concluded that Russia suffered a political crisis because of the protests in 2011 and 2012, so the support and participation in the Syrian conflict could contribute to increasing the assurance to authorities inside Russia (Dannreuther, 2015). Analysis of the discourse by D. Averre and L. Davis showed Russia was following 'great power' interests, justifying them by the liberal conception 'responsibility to protect', but Russia supported Assad and required a strong interpretation of the conception, underlying that the sovereignty principle strengthened the state, as it was provided by the stability of a legitimate government (Averre and Davies, 2015). Media discourse analysis of the Russian intervention in Syria revealed that Russian media used the narratives of necessity to

prevent a possible intervention of extremists to Russia; and illegal intervention of Western countries to Syria (Strovsky, 2015).

The analysis demonstrates that the official legitimising discourse has not received enough attention from the scholars' side. But some existing research argues that the official discourse and media discourse were related.

Strategic narratives theory as a tool to analyse rhetoric

A variety of tools can be used to justify the policy, for example, toposes (Zagar, 2010), whether or not framed; speech acts, such as performatives. Focusing on each of them requires a different methodology. This study focuses on the study of policy justification, which implies the use of structured storytelling to convince the audience of the correctness of such a policy. In this regard, an important role in the discourse of politicians is played by narratives (Bottici, 2010; De Fina, n.d.; Miskimmon et al., 2017), which is a more complex rhetorical tool - narration, a story that gives meaning to the past, present and future. Narratives are used to achieve goals through the formation of a certain attitude of society towards themselves, their policies, actions and decisions. Narratives can be used to achieve different goals: agenda setting, legitimisation, distraction, securing consensus, increasing popularity, mobilising (Roselle et al., 2014). By identifying and analysing narratives, it is possible to determine how the narratives of politicians have changed and transformed, which could allow us to understand how the justification strategies used to legitimise foreign policy have changed.

The theory of strategic narratives proceeds from the premise of the importance of political discourse (correlated with the concept of soft power (Nye, 2009), which can influence decision-making in international relations and helps to reveal how actors achieve the set communicative goal, based on how they form their position in international relations. Using the toolkit of the theory of strategic narratives, we operationalise the levels of strategic narratives and create an integrated model for analysing the justification of policy by state actors, conduct a comparative analysis of the application of models of using narratives, and identify communication strategies.

There are three levels of strategic narratives according to Roselle, O'Loughlin and Miskimmon (Roselle et al., 2014) - the system narrative - serves to describe the state of affairs, how the world "works", who are the actors in the international environment, and what their actions are. The national/identity narrative - contains a story about values, identity of an actor, nation, state. The issue narrative - informs about what the problem is, what is the policy and why it is needed, how it is implemented. According to the theory of strategic narratives, actors need to take into account other peoples' narratives, thereby making their own narrative more competitive in order to implement a successful strategy. At the same time, the formulation of narratives, both for the internal audience and external audience, can occur for the purpose of legitimising foreign policy (Miskimmon et al., 2017). Competing narratives are semantic schemes formed by state actors and the media of other countries. The development of new media has led to the fact that the public has access to a wide range of information sources that the "new communicative environment" (Roselle et al., 2014: 77) offers. In this regard, people within the state become more critical of narratives, which gives a rise to their contestation. In order to make a narrative more attractive than the opponent's, actors must take into account not only the cultural characteristics of the public, but also the existing discourses that people tend to perceive positively or negatively. Implying the instruments of the theory, we can understand what was the official justification of changing the foreign policy.

Scope and limitations of the research

Russian foreign policy is conducted by multiple actors whose roles are defined by the Constitution and law. Foreign policy media discourse is studied more often (Brown, 2014; Strovsky, 2015), however the level of pluralism of media discourse can be dependent on the type of political regime and media system (Hallin and Mancini, 2004; McCombs, 1997; Vartanova, 2011). In authoritarian and hybrid media systems such as Russian, the authorities can impact media discourse using administrative resources. Thus, in cases of authoritarian and hybrid regimes, it is more important to look at the official discourse. This research is limited to the analysis of the official discourse of the president (due to article 80.3 of the Russian Constitution, which defines the directions of the foreign policy, and due to article 87.1, the President is the supreme commander), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (a body carrying out foreign political activities, provides its coordination due to the presidential decree of the 8th of November, 2011). The Ministry of Defence played a signif-

icant role in justifying Russia's actions in Syria. However, in cases of the justification of the Crimea joining Russia and military operation in Syria, its role was more modest, which limits the possibilities for comparative analysis.

In each of the cases selected for analysis, policy justification was a dynamic process. The chronological framework of the analysis is determined by this circumstance: for the justification of the Russian military operation in Georgia: 2008-2009; for the justification of the Crimean joining Russia: 2014 - 2019; and for the justification of the Russian military operation in Syria: 2015-2019. The limitation of the research is that we compare only cases of justification of Russian operations in Georgia, Crimea, and Syria, (because the case of Ukraine does not provide us with enough empirical material yet). The current study reveals the features of the Russian official's strategies of justification to legitimise its military operations.

Data

Empirical data included speech transcripts of the Russian President and representatives of the Russian Foreign Ministry from 2008 to 2009 (justification of the Russian operation against Georgia in 2008); and from 2014 to 2019 (justification of the Crimea joining Russia in 2014, the military operation of the Russian Federation in Syria in 2015). It contained 56 transcripts of the President's speeches; 59 transcripts of the Minister of Foreign Affairs' speeches; 48 transcripts of the MFA representatives' speeches; as well as 33 reports of the UN Security Council meetings, containing transcripts of the counter-actors' speeches. The transcripts were selected by a thematic search on the web portals "President of Russia", "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia", "The Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the UN", and "the UN".

Method

The research method is a qualitative content analysis of speeches of the Russian President and representatives of the Russian Foreign Ministry, carried out on the basis of the QDA Miner computer software.

Measuring

To analyse the texts, 6 deductively distinguished categories of codes were set (strategic system narrative, strategic national narrative, strategic issue narrative, method of justification, the president's speeches for different audiences, and speeches by representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for different audiences). Sub codes were highlighted inductively.

Measuring included 3 stages of coding. At the first stage, the main strategic narratives were identified by type – systemic, national, issue. At the second stage, thematic coding was applied to the identified narratives. The main themes of the narratives repeated in different speeches of the president and representatives of the Russian Foreign Ministry were inductively highlighted. Themes of system narratives: "about the connection between the Cold War and the current situation", "about a unipolar world", "about the violation of international law by the West", "about the destabilising actions of the West", "about the use of double standards by the West", "about the compliance of Russia's actions with international law", "about ensuring human rights by Russia", and "about partners of Russia in international relations". Themes of national narratives: "We and Others", "about the religious / sacred meaning of the discussed territories", "about Our tolerance towards other religions and peoples", "about Our past, about Our values", "about heroes", "about Our national qualities", and "about Our self-sufficiency". Themes of issue narratives: "the need to ensure security", "the threat to the "Russian world"", "the threat of restricting access to the Black Sea", "the humanitarian role of Russia in Syria", "the use of the veto by Russia in the UN Security Council", "the demonstration of the arms and will of the Russian army", "the decisive contribution of Russia to the defeat of terrorism", "the return of a part of the military contingent to Russia", "the repeated provocations of Georgia", "the violation of obligations by Georgia", and "the provision of stability in the Caucasus region".

At the third stage, the narratives were coded according to the type of justification and speech of the president, representatives of the Foreign Ministry, for domestic or foreign audience (that is a limitation for the research as in the intertwining media channels messaging to domestic or foreign audience is hardly distinguished). At the final stage, the frequency of the use of narratives by year was revealed, which made it possible to demonstrate when new strategic narratives appeared, and which of them were used more often than others in a given time interval.

Codes, subcodes, features

Group of codes	Category of codes	Category of subcodes	Features
Strategic narratives	System narrative	Inductively defined theme of the narrative	Description of the "order of the world", the system of international relations, "who is who" in international relations, description of the actions of actors in international relations
	National Narrative	Inductively defined theme of the narrative	Description of national values, history, symbols
	Issue Narrative	Inductively defined theme of the narrative	Description of the problem, explanation of why such a policy was chosen to solve it
Justification methods	Justification method	Position declaration	Statement and argumentation of the actor's foreign policy position, the actor's attitude to a particular issue, which determines his further political actions and decisions
		Communicative attack	Statement of the illegality and unacceptability of the actions of the opponent, the accusation of the opponent
		Communicative defence	Denial of one's own guilt, narrative about the groundlessness of the accusations
		Agreeing with the position of the opponent	Consent with the illegality of one's own actions, justifying narrative
		Avoidance of discussion	Absence of the justification
Audience	Speech by the president for different audiences	Speech for domestic audiences	Speaking at events in Russia, interviews with Russian media
		Speech for international audience	Speaking at international events, interviews with international media
	Speech by representatives of the Russian Foreign Ministry for different audiences	Speech for domestic audiences	Speaking at events in Russia, interviews with Russian media
		Speech for international audience	Speaking at international events, interviews with international media
	Strategic use of the narrative		The use of the narrative frame repeatedly in different and similar communicative situations, but with different content, in relation to the justification case
Attitude towards the communicative opponent	Critical strategies of justification	N/A	Using justification methods: communicative attack, communicative counterattack
	Non-critical strategies of justification		Avoiding or rarely using justification methods: communicative attack, communicative counterattack.

System narratives analysis

System narratives were used by officials in explaining "the World" and international relations. There were several such narratives.

The narrative *about the connection between the Cold War* and the current situation, in the case of the RMOG, was presented as the presence of the absence of a Cold War that ended in the past. In justifying the AC, the president understood the Cold War not as a confrontation between ideological blocs, but as a rivalry in international relations, in which Russia's opponents play against the rules and, use "dirty" methods, trying to limit Russia and its interests. Putin accused the West of counteracting the Russian Federation and blackmailing, and spoke about NATO aggression near the borders of Russia. At the same time, the president used the image of a bear close to the Russians: "Maybe our bear needs to sit quietly ... Maybe they will leave him alone? They will not leave ... they will always strive ... to put him on a chain", Putin said in one of his addresses. In contrast to the case of the AC, in the justification of the RMOS and the RMOG, it was stated that the cold war had ended long ago, and the conflict in international relations was presented as an issue requiring settlement by joint efforts.

The narrative *of a unipolar world* differed significantly in the justifications for RMOG and RMOS. In the case of the RMOG, NATO was the key actor in the narrative. NATO has been accused of destabilising unilateral moves. In justifying the RMOS, the president and representatives of the Foreign Ministry accused Western countries (mainly the United States) of imposing their values and striving to dominate. So, the narrative in both cases assumed the use of a communicative attack, however, the difference in the addressees of the communicative attack - NATO and Western countries, can be explained by the caution of Russian representatives, in the case of the WORG, to openly oppose the West in order to preserve relations, and in the case of the WORS, on the contrary, by demonstrating their own independent position in international relations.

To accuse opponents, the president and representatives of the Foreign Ministry used the narrative *about the destabilising actions of the West*. In justification of the RMOG, NATO was accused of conducting military exercises destabilising the Caucasus region. In justifying the AC, this narrative arose in February 2014 and did not change in content, only supplemented by arguments about the guilt of Western states. In justifying the RMOS, the argument was built in a similar way, "Western colleagues" were accused of pursuing their own interests by any means, a secret game, the actions of Western countries led by the United States.

The narrative *about the use of double standards by the West* in the discourse of the President and representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was revealed only in the justification of the AC and RMOS. This narrative appeals to double standards in the interpretation of the right to self-determination and territorial integrity, thus accusing the international community of unfair treatment of the will of the Crimean population. The justification was based on the interpretation of the facts in such a way that the actions of Western countries contradicted their declared positions, which characterised their actions as illegitimate. In the justification of the RMOG, Russia's actions were explained as necessary to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe, that is, for humanitarian purposes. In the justification of the AC, the compliance of the actions of the Russian Federation with international law was explained by the results of the referendum. In justifying the RMOS, the legal basis was interpreted as the invitation of the government of B. Assad.

To form a positive image of Russia in international relations, the president and representatives of the Foreign Ministry tried to use the narrative *about Russia's provision of human rights*. Justifying RMOG and RMOS, the actors talked about securing the right to life. In the case of the AC, the narrative has been transformed and referred to the threat of discrimination against Russians and the deprivation of their rights to the Russian language. Later, the actors began to declare that the rights of Russians, Hungarians, Bulgarians and Ukrainians inhabiting Crimea, were protected.

Another system narrative was the narrative *about Russia's partners in international relations* which differed in the justification of RMOG, AC and RMOS. In the first case, the EU was described as a partner of Russia, and the situation around the RMOG as an incentive for the development of relations between Russia and the EU. A negative role in relations with Russia was assigned to the NATO military alliance. Thus, Russian actors accused NATO as an organisation hindering cooperation in the military sphere. In justification of the AC and RMOS, the partners' role was given to Iran, Turkey, Syria and mostly non-western countries.

National narratives analysis

National narratives were used by the president and representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in justifying the AC and RMOS, to a lesser extent, in justifying the RMOG.

The Us and Others narrative, used to justify the AC, described the connection of peoples. Initially, in February and March 2014, the narrative emphasised the closeness of the peoples of Russia and Ukraine: Ukraine and Russia are fraternal republics, one people; Russia and Ukraine are close relatives. After the referendum in Crimea, which Ukraine and Western countries did not approve of, the plot began to be based on the proximity of the peoples of Russia and Crimea - "native shores ... the connection of generations and times ... heroic ancestors ... the historical origins of spirituality and statehood ... a single people ... a close-knit nation". Using this narrative, the president probably sought to evoke compassion, a special attitude towards "the same as Us", towards "brothers" who found themselves in a difficult situation.

The narrative *about the religious/sacred significance of the territories* under discussion was the key one, both in justifying the AC and in justifying the RMOG. The strengthening of the territorial significance of the Crimea for Russia was described - the place where Prince Vladimir was baptised, where the source of Russian civilisation began. At the same time, in 2017, the President of Russia made some changes to this narrative and began to use the myth of the Russian Mecca in Chersonese. Crimea was given nation-forming significance, which was probably aimed at a positive response from the people - the bearers of the Russian cultural code. Thus, the myth of the Russian Mecca in Chersoneses became a strategic national narrative, which the president used to take the correctness of Russian actions in Crimea "on faith". In justifying the RMOS, the description of the significance of the territory was also built on the basis of religion and the interests of Christians and Muslims in the region. At the same time, to describe, in essence, different cultures - Muslim and Russian, Orthodox, a unifying core was found.

The multinationalism of Crimea, as well as, later, Syria, determined the use of the narrative *about Our tolerance for other religions and peoples*. Tolerance as a value is present on the Western agenda. Probably, the President and representatives of the Foreign Ministry sought to present Russia's policy as corresponding to mass ideas, including those in Western culture.

The narrative of *Our Past* has been used to justify the RMOG, AC, and RMOS. In the first case, the common past was described through an appeal to the Second World War, which is a universal unifying factor of the former republics of the USSR. In fact, stories about the Second World War are a narrative template, which J. Wertsch (Wertsch, 2017) wrote about. This pattern is often used by Russian politicians. In the case of the AC justification, both the Second World War and the fact that Crimea was part of the USSR seemed to be a common past. The Russian authorities, as it were, opposed themselves to the Soviet authorities from the position of the correctness of their own decisions and actions, on the contrary, the decisions of the Soviet leaders were described as illegitimate (they gave up Crimea to Ukraine). In the justification for the RMOS, the common past was based on the economic partnership between Russia and Syria.

The narrative *about heroes* was applied in the case of the RMOG, AC and RMOS in a similar way - at military holidays and ceremonies, mainly by the President. In the case of RMOS, the narrative formed a special image of Russia, which gave significance to the actions of the military, "who were fighting against the global threat – terrorism".

The narrative *about Our national qualities* was used by the President to justify the RMOS, it was stated about the uniqueness of the Russian nation, where citizens are able to give their lives for the fatherland.

The national narrative *about Our self-sufficiency* was different in the case of the RMOG. Thus, the President declared that Russia was becoming independent. In the case of the AC and the RMOG, the President spoke of Russia as an independent active participant in international life and Russia's self-sufficiency. The national narratives, in the justification of the RMOG, were used only by the president, while the hero narrative was used most often among the national narratives. Probably, the President sought to raise the military spirit, declaring the merits of the Russian military, as well as to form the image of a strong army.

The dynamics of the use of narratives shows that national narratives were most actively used in justifying the AC and RMOS. This can probably be explained by the desire of the President and representatives of the Foreign Ministry to use additional arguments to legitimise foreign policy. Since national narratives were likely to respond to mass notions of identity, actors sought to bring the issues of the AC and RMOS to the level of the personal agenda of citizens, through the description of the common identity of Us and Others.

Issue narratives analysis

Since the RMOG, AC and RMOS were separate events, the issue narratives differed in their justification. However, the narrative *about the need to ensure security* was revealed in all three cases, in fact being a narrative template.

In the case of the RMOG, the argument was built through an appeal to the concept of responsibility to protect, as stated, for example, by R. Chatham (Chatham, 2011). Russia, as it was presented in speeches, took upon itself the responsibility of protecting the people of South Ossetia, which, according to this internationally recognised principle, should have positively legitimised Russia's military operation against Georgia. A negative image of Georgia was formed, while the conflict was personified by M. Saakashvili, who became the "image of the enemy" in the officials' speeches. Justifying the AC through the narrative *about the need to ensure security*, an existential threat was identified - the new authorities of Ukraine, were described as accomplices of radicals who did not comply with laws, human rights, they posed a threat to the security of Russians in Crimea, so the image of "Others" was used. Thus, the argument was based on securitisation, and the actions of the Russian Federation in Crimea were justified as necessary to ensure the security of the population of Crimea. In the case of RMOS, *the narrative* identified an existential threat - terrorists, and the image of "Others" was formed. It was said that terrorists followed a barbaric ideology, they burned mosques, churches, monuments, hospitals and schools. It increased the emotional load of the narrative. Specific actions by Russia, in response to this issue, were described as necessary, since Russia would allegedly face terrorism already on its territory, in the absence of decisive actions. In the case of the RMOS, *the narrative about the need to ensure security* was transformed into two, both jointly and separately used narratives by V.V. Putin - the narrative *about the decisive contribution of Russia to the defeat of terrorism* and the narrative about *the return of part of the military contingent to Russia*. In this manner, the significance of Russia as an influential international actor was taking shape. Russia was credited with a military victory.

Other issue narratives were not identified as being applicable in justifying all three cases.

Thus, the President and representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared *a violation of obligations by Georgia*. The argument was based on an appeal to the Russian-Georgian agreement, according to which, Russia withdrew its military bases from Georgia, and Georgia had to pass a law prohibiting the deployment of military bases of other states on its territory. This narrative was probably used to justify a military solution to the conflict through the formation of a negative image of M. Saakashvili as a president who could not be negotiated with, could not be trusted.

The strategic illegitimate actions of Georgia were described by the President and representatives of the Foreign Ministry with a narrative a*bout Georgia's repeated provocations*.

Another narrative in the justification of the RMOG - *about ensuring the stability of the Caucasus region*, presented the actions of the Russian Federation as more ambitious - not just stabilising the conflict, but also preventing the destabilisation of the entire Caucasus region.

Unique narratives were also used to justify the AC. For example, the narrative *about the threat to the "Russian world"* argued Russia's actions from the standpoint of the need to protect culture and historical memory. At the same time, the concept of the "Russian world" was used broadly - not necessarily in relation to ethnic Russians, but also to those who consider themselves Russians.

The President, in contrast to the representatives of the Foreign Ministry, used the narrative *about the threat of restricting access to the Black Sea*. According to the President, if Russia had not annexed Crimea, the NATO fleet and troops would have occupied its territory, which was a threat to the international balance of power.

A number of unique narratives were also justifying the RMOS. V.V. Putin articulated a narrative *about the demonstration of weapons and the will of the Russian army*, which appeared in 2015, then again in 2017. The President talked about the need to demonstrate to the world that Russia not only has good weapons, but has the will and ability to use them in practice. Thus, the position of the Russian Federation was declared regarding its readiness to use weapons to defend its interests, and the President acted as a military leader, ready to make decisions effectively, which probably should have been evidenced by the effectiveness of the operation in Syria.

Representatives of the Russian Foreign Ministry applied the narrative *about Russia's use of the right of veto in the UN Security Council*. The narrative was formulated in response to US accusations that Russia was opposing the normal functioning of the Security Council, protecting Bashar al-Assad and escalating the conflict in Syria.

The narrative *about Russia's humanitarian role in Syria* demonstrated Russia's noble actions. The facts were interpreted in such a way that Syria, which suffered from terrorists, needed assistance, which Russia provided through various channels, this assistance was also provided through donations; rebuilding the infrastructure was also described as an urgent task.

Thus, in issue narratives, Russia's key argument was based on an appeal to the "defence concept". Other narratives were used ad hoc as additional arguments in favour of Russia being right.

Results

The representation of narratives in officials' speeches by years shows trends in use of certain strategic narratives.
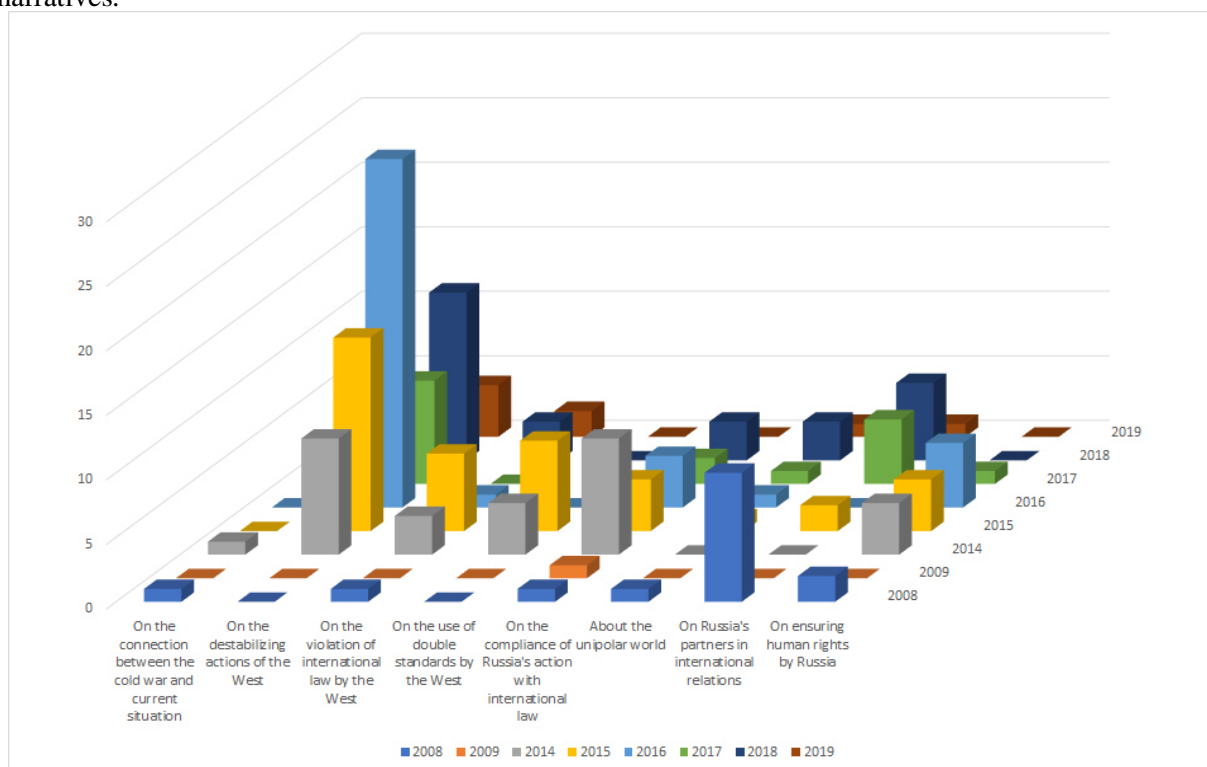

Figure 1. The frequency of occurrence of system narratives in the speeches of the President and representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the justification of 2008–2009 and 2014–2019

The AC and RMOS justifications were more critical than the RMOG justification. Thus, the addressee of the critic in the case of the RMOG was NATO. The accusations were made to a greater extent against the military alliance, while the EU, as the addressee of the critic, was not mentioned, which indicated the avoidance of communicative confrontation with the EU directly. An opposite situation - the case of AC and RMOS, as the addressees were Western partners, Western countries, the USA, and NATO. Although the President and representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in the justification of the AC and RMOS, called the European countries and the United States Western partners. This was done, probably to comply with diplomatic protocol. To a greater extent, it showed a desire to improve relations, since the so-called Western partners were repeatedly accused by Russia of unacceptable behaviour. Thus, changes in justification methods after 2014 may indicate more critical justification strategies, which probably served the purpose of demonstrating the new positioning of the Russian Federation in the international arena.
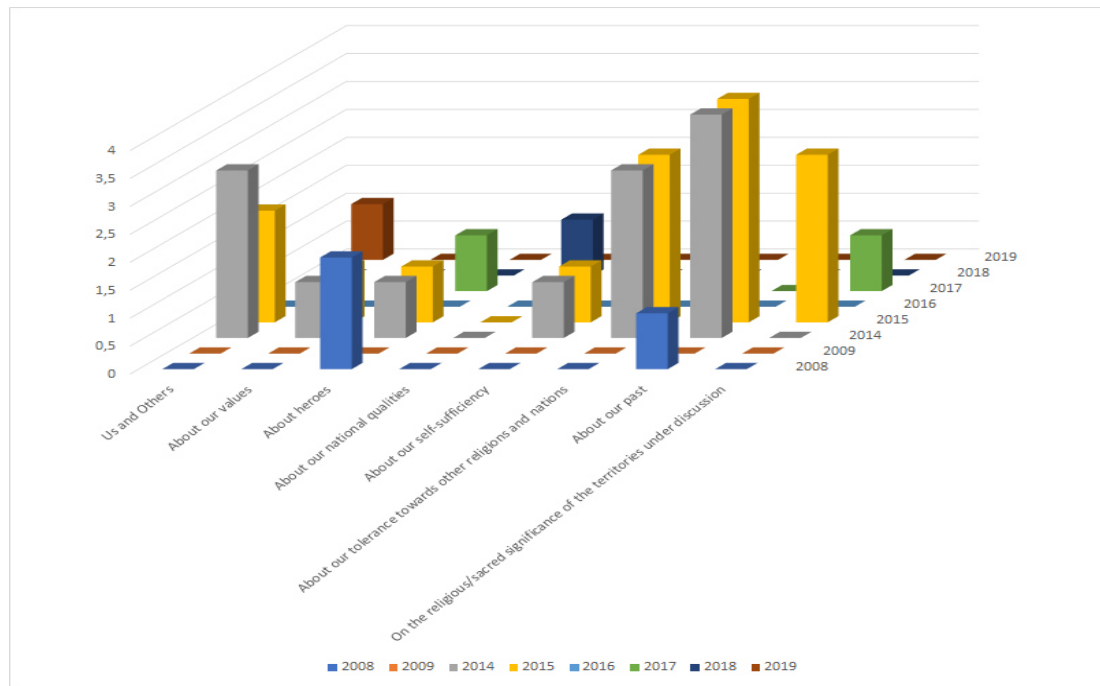
Figure 2. The frequency of appearance of national narratives in the speeches of the President and representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the justification for 2008–2009 and 2014–2019

The President and representatives of the Russian Foreign Ministry acted as "ideologists" using national narratives in their justification. Probably, the actors tried to encourage the domestic audience to perceive the problems of Ossetia, Abkhazia, Crimea and Syria as important for the Russian people. The population of Crimea and the Syrian people were presented as sharing the same values as the Russian people. Through the use of national narratives, Russia's foreign policy was justified by an appeal to the fact that "We carry out our own will because of the need to help 'brothers' and preserve a common culture". In the case of justifying the Russian operation in Syria, a greater number of national narratives were used than in the case of justifying the Crimea joining Russia. In justifying the actions of the Russian Federation in Syria, in most cases, national narratives were used once and most often only for the internal audience, mainly by the President, at military events. Probably, Russian actors sought to use national narratives as more effective for the domestic arena, to maintain military spirit and consolidate society.
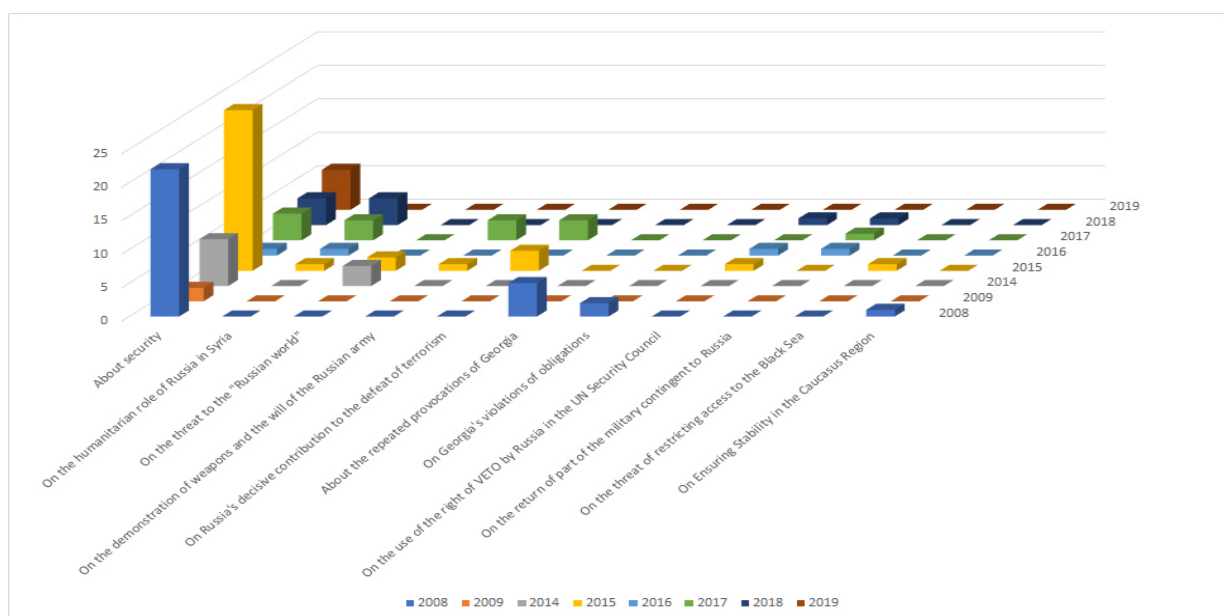

Figure 3. The frequency of appearance of issue narratives in the speeches of the President and representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the justification of 2008–2009 and 2014–2019

Through the issue narratives, Russian officials were declaring the position. The President and representatives of the Russian Foreign Ministry described the actions of the Russian Federation from the standpoint of their necessity. The desire to convey one's own position may indicate a desire to demonstrate one's independence in making foreign policy decisions.

Discussion

In 2015, the communication strategy moved from the defence phase to the attack phase. Representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs began to use concise narratives, declaring their unwillingness to discuss the topic of Crimea, which has de facto become part of the Russian Federation. The actions of Western countries in Syria served as a pretext for bringing charges against them, thereby strengthening the anti-Western discourse used by the Russian authorities in the case of justifying the AC. It is likely that such a discourse has worked positively in the domestic arena, stimulating the acquisition of domestic legitimacy in Russia's foreign policy.

In justifying the RMOG, Russia avoided an acute communicative confrontation with the West and did not present direct accusations to it, which can be explained by a political orientation towards cooperation with the West and the United States, the accusations were more directed towards NATO, and not specific Western countries. On the contrary, the justification for the AC and RMOS formed a negative image of Western countries led by the United States. This may indicate a change in the approach to the justification of Russian foreign policy after 2014.

Justifying the RMOS, the President and representatives of the Russian Foreign Ministry applied narratives in the same way as in the case of justifying the AC. This fact allows us to say that the justification of foreign policy after 2014 was carried out strategically.

The international communication regarding the AC and RMOS represented two opposing positions. From the first position, Russia was responsible for the Crimea illegitimately being taken away from Ukraine and the escalation of the Syrian conflict (Western discourse). From the second position, Western countries supported the coup in Ukraine and opposed the legitimate army of Assad in Syria, with the aim of overthrowing him (Russian discourse). Both the first and second discourse had their supporters.

Military victories were of particular importance in justification used by the President of the Russian Federation. V.V. Putin acted as a "triumphant" who declared that the RF ensured the safety of its citizens; or a "global triumphant" who claimed that Russia defeated the terrorists in Syria, thereby ensuring security for the world. Probably, such communicative behaviour pursued the goal of associating the military victories of the Russian Federation with the personality of the President, which should have had a positive effect on both his personal legitimacy and the legitimacy of his decisions, and, ultimately, the legitimacy of order.

The justification strategies used by Russian actors were based mainly on securitisation; description of historical memory; interpretation of facts and international law from the standpoint of the correctness of Russia. Such justification strategies probably made it possible to transfer the "problem" to the level of the personal agenda of citizens, causing approval and agreement with the actions of the authorities in the domestic arena. At the same time, such justification strategies are similar to the strategies for justifying the war in Iraq, which were used by the US authorities - ensuring security, humanitarian action, ensuring law and order (Miller, 2008). Thus, a model of justification similar to the American one was applied for a similar case - the use of fighter and bomber aircraft on the territory of another state.

We can say that the demonstration of military power and special justification are links in the same chain and are carried out strategically. Probably, the aggressive communicative environment and possible consequences did not become a reason for choosing other, softer communication strategies, which may also indirectly indicate a change in approaches to the positioning of the Russian Federation in the international arena.

Thus, the study showed that the justification was used strategically by the actors in both the justification of the AC and the justification of the RMOS; at the same time, the justification of the AC and RMOS was different from the justification of the RMOG. The justification actually reflected the changes that took place in the positioning of Russia in the international arena.

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ЛЕГИТИМАЦИЯ СПЕЦИАЛЬНЫХ ОПЕРАЦИЙ ВО ВНЕШНЕЙ ПОЛИТИКИ РОССИИ: СТРАТЕГИЧЕСКИЕ НАРРАТИВЫ РОССИЙСКИХ ОФИЦИАЛЬНЫХ ЛИЦ

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Аннотация
Представлены результаты анализа стратегических нарративов президента России и представителей МИД России в обосновании российских военных операций за рубежом. Анализ осуществлен на примере военной операции в Грузии (2008 г.), спецоперации в Крыму (2014 г.) и присоединения Крыма, военной операции в Сирии (с 2015 г.). Обоснование военных операций преимущественно осуществлялось президентом и представителями МИД России. Оно было призвано легитимизировать военные действия и решения РФ для внутренней и внешней аудитории. Официальные лица использовали стратегические, национальные нарративы и нарративы о проблеме. Ядром обоснования служили интерпретация исторической памяти и описание действий западных стран как противоречащих международному праву. Показано, что обоснование военной операции России в Грузии отличалось от обоснования присоединения Крыма и военной операции в Сирии. В первом случае российские официальные лица в меньшей степени обвиняли западные страны в нелегитимных действиях, чем в случае обоснования присоединения Крыма и военной операции в Сирии. Также после 2017 г. российские акторы стали использовать нарративы о гуманитарной роли России.

Ключевые слова: легитимация; Крым; Сирия; Грузия; российская военная операция; Путин; Лавров; Медведев; МИД; стратегические нарративы.