Russia's Ontological (In)Security: Is it the Post-Cold War European Security Architecture?

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Abstract

On December 17, 2021, the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation published two draft treaties which demand various security guarantees from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United States. This meant that Russia wanted to reform the post-Cold War European security architecture. Upon the rejection of these proposals, Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Despite extensive scholarly research on Russia's stance regarding European security, the debate revolves around realist and neo-realist perspectives which are not sufficient in comprehending the fundamental reasons behind why Russia wants to do so. For that reason, this thesis introduces a new theoretical approach called the ontological security theory. By adopting a post-structuralist methodology and discourse analysis, it argues that Moscow feels ontologically insecure due to the divergence between Moscow's identity and its role in the post-Cold War European security architecture. Therefore, Russia sets its foreign policy for the "recognition" of its Self by the West, which is necessary for ontological security. The findings of this thesis also reveal the significance of identity in international relations and politics, as it brings alternative explanations to arguments put forward by grand IR theories regarding a phenomenon.

Keywords: Russia, Ukraine, European security, ontological (in)security, identity.

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Introduction

European security has entered another turning point, perhaps the most critical in 30 years. On December 17, 2021, the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation published two draft treaties outlining a set of demands from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United States. The treaties demanded various “security guarantees” regarding the non-expansion of NATO further to the East, the relocation of military forces stationed in Eastern Europe to its pre-1997 borders, and a Russian consent on all military movements and drills. These point out the Kremlin's desire to negotiate possible changes on European security with the West (Trenin, 2022).

The Russian attitude towards the post-Cold War European Security architecture has received vast scholarly attention over the past 30 years. However, there are two reasons for reexamination of the topic. First, the subject has reached a critical level that Europe has not seen since the Cold War with the publication of the two draft treaties, and later on, with the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Second, the existing literature is redundant and predominantly explains the problem from realist and neorealist perspectives, which do not put forward sufficient explanations. Therefore, a new approach is necessary to comprehend the fundamental reasons behind why Russia wants to do so. In this context, the concept of ontological (in)security offers an alternative theoretical framework.

Ontological (in)security is associated with the “identity” a state has (Zarakol, 2010, p.3). States set their foreign policy in accordance with this identity (Steele, 2008) and interact with other states (Mitzen, 2006). Then the question is: How does the ontological (in)security theory explain the Russian Federation's desire to reform the European security structure?

Taking a post-structuralist approach, this thesis argues that Moscow feels ontologically insecure, due to the divergence between Moscow's identity and its role in the post-Cold War European security architecture. Therefore, Russia sets is foreign policy for the "recognition" of its Self for the pursuit of ontological security.

In the following sections, the thesis first conceptualizes European security, and discusses the existing academic literature. Then, the concept of ontological (in)security is explained and how it would fit into the research is argued, and the research design and methodology are presented. Subsequently, using post-structuralist discourse analysis, Russia's ontological insecurity is analyzed from 1999 to 2022, with data gathered from primary and secondary sources. Finally, the conclusions and recommendations for future research are discussed.

Literature Review

Security is a complex concept, therefore difficult to define. In the most general sense, security is the absence of threats (Booth, 1991, p. 319). Yet, its definition might change depending on for whom the security is and against what type of threats security is (Rotschild, 1995). As this thesis focuses on European security and the states within that structure, one can say that it is security for states. Nonetheless, it is significant to indicate that European security does not solely contain the security of European states but also the United States, Canada, and former Soviet and Yugoslav Republics. In other words, all the signatories of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, which emphasizes the concept of sovereignty and territorial integrity in which states promise to refrain from the threat or use of force. Therefore, European security entails politico-military dimensions (Anthony, 2014, p.235). Specifically, the security of the territory of a sovereign state from outside political or military threats.

However, agents in the post-Cold War European security framework do not consist entirely of states. There are also prominent international organizations (IOs) within, such as NATO, the European Union (EU) and the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE). NATO is the main hard security provider while the EU is the main political and economic organization in the system. Whereas the OSCE is an IO in which states assemble, engage in diplomacy, and make up treaties on conventional arms control, military build-ups, and maneuvers (Hill, 2018 p.23). Therefore, European security architecture can be thought as an entity in which the abovementioned organizations and states interact and seek security.

Various articles which will be argued below, trace the reasons behind the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the de-facto independence of two breakout republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, former Russian President Medvedev's proposal for a new European Security Structure in 2008 and the enlargements of the EU and NATO. Yet, these incidents should not be considered separately from the general debate on Russian discontent regarding European security, but as its symptoms (see Robinson, 2016).

In this context, it is possible to categorize the existing debate into two main categories. The first group explains the problem by using realist and neorealist assumptions. For instance, some argue that the security regime that has been created after the enlargement of NATO directly threatens Russia (Mearsheimer, 2014; Baev, 2018). Also, some scholars designate normative differences between the West and Russia, which might be behind the ongoing distrust as the post-Cold War European security order mostly consists of states and institutions that stand up for liberal and democratic values (Sokolsky; 2016; Averre, 2016). For instance, West's expansion poses normative challenges because Russia has geopolitical interests which are not compatible with West's

integrative liberal norms (Cottey, 2021). On the other hand, the acknowledgement of the concept of "classical geopolitics" also refers Russia's desire to maintain its sphere of influence in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, where the EU and NATO makes moves to increase its economic and political power (Götz, 2016; Mearsheimer, 2016; Speck, 2015).

Furthermore, some scholars draw similar conclusions by instrumentalizing different theoretical perspectives. Zwolski (2019) utilizes the regional integration theory and explains how Russia was excluded from European security building, while former countries under Soviet dominance were welcomed, intimidating Russian interests in the region. Duke and Gebhard (2016), on the other hand, applies the integration dilemma theory and claim that NATO's enlargement created a security dilemma for Moscow, whereas the EU's enlargement created concerns for democratic uprisings such as the Color Revolutions. These two developments provoked Russian aggression, first in Georgia in 2008 and second in Ukraine in 2014. Differently, Diyarbakırlıoğlu (2019, p.19) claims that it is the Russian elite's desire to see Russia equally recognized by the West regarding its political interests pursued through force.

Although not as overlooked as the consequences of the imbalance of the European security architecture, various scholars have also linked the eventual demise of the liberal international order to Russian foreign policy. For example, the problems arising within the West, Russia wants to take advantage of the contingent discord and use it in building a new political structure in favor of its geopolitical interests (Hill, 2022; Mearsheimer, 2019; Clunan, 2018).

Overall, there is much written on the relations between the West, Russia, and European security considering the important developments in the region. Nevertheless, the debate revolves around geopolitics and the threat posed to the Kremlin's interests and

security one way or the other. Yet, these claims are not sufficient in comprehending the fundamental reasons behind Russia's foreign policy. Therefore, it is necessary to reexamine the problem from another theoretical perspective. In this regard, the ontological (in)security theory can diversify the debate and reinforce the existing arguments.

The next section introduces post-structuralism, a significant school of thought in social sciences, which will complement the theoretical framework and form the methodological basis of this thesis.

Post-Structuralism

Post-structuralism is the name of a philosophical movement emerged in the 1960s (Williams, 2014). Nevertheless, it has influenced all social sciences and humanities. Opposed to positivism and structuralism that advocate objectivity and the existence of a single "truth", post-structuralism posits that there are no strict ontological assumptions in the world; therefore, stresses critique, reconsideration, and interpretation in understanding a concept, a theory, or the world in general (Morin 2007). In other words, post-structuralism criticizes the dominance of positivist knowledge and claim that life cannot be solely defined by materialism. Therefore, truth is a matter of perspective (Williams, pp. 14-16). While claiming so, post-structuralism believes that language is essential in how we make sense of the world as one cannot make our thoughts understandable to others without it (Shapiro, 1981). Thus, the concept of discourse is critical in post-structuralist theory.

With these principles, poststructuralism became a part of international relations (IR) during the 1980s. It has criticized the grand IR theories such as realism, liberalism, and Marxism and claimed that there is no objective yardstick that we can use to define

threats, dangers, or enemies (Hansen, 2014, p.170). Instead, one needs to investigate how constructions of the world, and the people and places that inhabit it, make particular policies seem natural and legitimate.

Post-structuralism has also been the subject of criticism. For instance, critics have argued that post-structuralism is too philosophical and because of the sophisticated language it uses, it is near incomprehensible (p.181). Moreover, it has also been argued that post-structuralism fails to capture what is happening in the material world and what happens outside of discourses.

The next section introduces the ontological (in)security theory. As indicated in literature review section, realist explanations of why Russia acts as such may not be the only "truth". Therefore, a post-structuralist approach to the problem through the lens of ontological (in)security would contribute to the academic debate.

Theoretical Framework- The Ontological Security Theory

Ontological (in)security is fundamentally associated with psychology and sociology, focusing on the individual and the mind (Rumelili, 2015, p.10). It is not related to one's physical security but of one's identity, the subjective sense of who one is (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, pp. 17-18).

Psychiatrist R.D. Laing (1960) first theorized the term ontological security. Later, building upon Laing's work, sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991, pp. 38-39) argued that routines help individuals to "constitute a formed framework" for existence by cultivating a sense of being. This, in return, assists individuals in answering existential questions regarding their Selves, Others, and the objects around them (p.37). Among these questions is a person's understanding of its Self which refers to what the individual is doing in life and why s/he is doing so, referred to as biographical continuity. In this

context, individuals feel ontologically secure around their established routines. Ontologically insecure individuals, on the other hand, lack biographical continuity (p.53).

Jennifer Mitzen (2006) applied the concept of ontological (in)security to IR studies and argued that states also seek ontological security apart from physical security. As individuals establish routines with people and objects around them, states also have routines which is dependent upon their interaction with other states in international politics (p.364). They also seek "recognition" from Others for their identity to be sustainable. If this routine is disrupted, states might be attached to conflict (pp. 342-343) or have a conflictual foreign policy (Narozhna; 2022, p.83) to pursue ontological security.

Upon the adaptation of ontological (in)security to states, the concept has been studied within IR from various perspectives. For instance, in contrast to Mitzen, Steele (2008) argues that states structure their actions in accordance with their self-narratives that provide ontological security, rather than being dependent on others for identity. On the other hand, some scholarly works focusing on conflict resolution between or within states, explain why some states have opted-out from peace-processes and preferred conflict (Loizides, 2015), or how a failed peace process can be overcome by reconstructing identities through new narratives (Rumelili & Çelik, 2017).

One significant debate within the ontological (in)security studies is whether states are ontological security seekers or not. Some scholars claim that states cannot seek ontological security because they are not living entities, and therefore do not have a Self (Krolikowski, 2008; Mälksoo, 2015). Some also argue that ontological security seeking is interconnected at the state, societal and individual levels (Narozhna, 2020). However, depending on Kinnvall, Manners and Mitzen (2017)'s claims indicating that ontological security studies do not have a core, and that the concept can be employed in differing

forms and techniques, states are considered as ontological security seeking agents in this thesis.

Accordingly, this thesis defines ontological security as a state's self-understanding of its identity and its routine relationships with other states in international politics through the constructed identity. This also leads to the recognition of a state's Self by the Others (Narozhna, 2022). Ontological insecurity, on the other hand, is the curtailment of routines, which might arise from traumatic events, such as economic crises or political regime changes (Kinnvall, 2017).

In this context, Russia feels ontologically insecure in the current European security architecture because the Kremlin does not possess the necessary influence over the European security decision-making structures in accordance with its identity. Moscow had an imperial past that asserted dominance over Eastern Europe for decades and had a say regarding European affairs. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia lost its "routinized relationship" both with Europe and the United States, as well as its clientelist relationship with the Warsaw Pact countries, while keeping its self-narrative about being a great power. Therefore, for ontological security, Russia seeks "recognition" of its Self by sending two draft treaties on European Security architecture.

Research Design

In positivist research, case studies are significant to discover whether a causal link exists between the independent and the dependent variables (Van Evera, 2016, p.54). Yet, post-structuralist methodology adopts a constitutive rather than a causal epistemology (Hansen, 2006, p.23). Thus, in this thesis, there is a co-constitutive relationship between ontological (in)security and foreign policy, and they cannot be categorized as dependent and independent variables. Nevertheless, the existence of a such epistemology does not

necessarily indicate that the application of a case-study would be problematic in a post-structuralist research. In fact, case-studies are also a valuable methodological tool in post-structuralist research as it facilitates a deeper understanding of the social, political, and historical circumstances shaping a phenomenon (Mohammed et.al., 2015, p.99).

In this regard, Russia's position in the post-Cold War European Security architecture as the case-study for this thesis is suitable looking for a co-constitutive relationship. For instance, Russia's and relations with other states changed when the Soviet Union collapsed, but its great power identity remains. However, this identity is not supported in the post-Cold War European security architecture. Therefore, Russia feels ontologically insecure. As a consequence, the Kremlin wants to negotiate possible changes in the security architecture for ontological security by trying to make its Self "recognized" by Euro-Atlantic states. In fact, Hansen (2006) affirms that foreign policy is dependent on identity, but it is also through foreign policy that identities are produced. Correlated to this logic, the Russian Federation and the European Security architecture appear to be a valuable case for the research of the relation between ontological (in)security and foreign policy.

The operationalization of the ontological (in)security is challenging as there is no clear-cut approach on how to empirically identify the concept (Rumelili & Adısönmez, 2020, p.38). In light of post-structuralists' argument considering language as the only mean that things are given a meaning, this thesis applies a post-structuralist discourse analysis as its method of analysis. This method is concerned with the ways in which language constructs and mediates social and psychological realities (Willig, 2014, p.341) by focusing on readings based on discursive articulations of "specific words", and how these words are linked to construct identities and particular policies (Hansen, 2016, 41).

Moreover, the thesis adapts the deconstruction theory of Jacques Derrida, which claims that language is made up of dichotomies (e.g., developed / under-developed, or civilized / uncivilized) (Hansen, 2014, p.173), and that these dichotomies make meaning on how we understand the world. In ontological security studies as well, Self / Other dichotomies are significant in construction of an identity (Tsygankov, 2008). In this direction, the thesis examines the articulated "words" and "dichotomies" for the construction of the Russian identity within official discourses of prominent Russian politicians, how the constructed identity affected Russian foreign policy and the relation of these to ontological (in)security.

Accordingly, the speeches Russian President Vladimir Putin, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and former President Dimitry Medvedev are selected as the primary sources. On the other hand, as the context in which language is used is critical for post-structuralist discourse analysis (Hansen, 2016, p.107), secondary sources are used such as history books, think-tank reports and academic articles. Lastly, the two draft treaties that the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation published indicating Russian desire to reform the European security architecture the operationalization of foreign policy.

In this regard, the timeframe examined is from 1999 to 2022. In 1999, the Kosovo War occurred which is considered as a breaking point between the West and Russia in terms of European security (Antonenko, 1999). Also, the same year, Vladimir Putin was inaugurated as the acting president of the Russian Federation.

The following analysis section is divided into three chapters, namely, *The New Russia: Western and Still Great, Russia's Discourse Change,* and *the Russian Civilization*, based on official discursive changes and important events regarding the

European Security. After the analytical chapters, conclusions and recommendations for future research is discussed.

Analysis

1- The New Russia: Western and Still Great (1999-2006)

Under the administration of President Boris Yeltsin (1991-1999), Russia was in quest for a new identity and ontological security which would bring a sense of closure to the Soviet identity (Narozhna, 2018). The new identity was in construction by turning towards “the West", by becoming a member of democratic, capitalist, and civilized states (Neumann, 2017. p,184). This meant that, the Kremlin was narrating its Self by linking it to the Western principles which won the Cold War, while the Other represented the underdeveloped, non-democratic and non-capitalist states, implying Russia's Soviet past. However, while doing so, the great power identity of Russia was not neglected. Yevgeny Primakov, who was the Russian foreign minister at the time, indicated that “Russia was and is a great power and its foreign policy should correspond with that” (quoted in Gurganus and Rumer, 2019). This implied that Russia desired to maintain its great power identity while being integrated to the new world (Tsygankov, 2016, p.126).

Nonetheless, the quest for ontological security was troublesome due to critical events regarding European security. Among one of the most significant events was NATO’s intervention against Serbia during the Kosovo War of 1999. While Moscow was seeking ontological security with an integrative Western discourse, the intervention of NATO against a nation which has historical ties through the Slavophile ideology of Tsarist Russia (Neumann, p.30), violated Russia’s “greatness”. For instance, Sergey Lavrov, who was the Russian ambassador to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

at the time, accused NATO of seeking to become the “global policeman” (BBC News, 1999) after the bombing of Belgrade. Moreover, Russia stressed the importance of a UN mandate for military interventions in order for it to be under international law (Antonenko, 2019). Lavrov’s accusations was an implication of Russia’s disturbance of the Western unilateralism on European affairs, specifically in a region where Russia has historical significance. This also implied that Russia’s influence over the Balkans was not “recognized”. On the other hand, Russia’s interest in the realization of international law through a UN consent for such military actions could be evaluated as a cover for Russia to attain its interests as it has a veto power regarding decisions to be taken in the UNSC. In this regard, by the end of the Yeltsin era, Russian quest for ontological security with “Western great power” identity was unsuccessful due to the West’s non-recognition of the novel Russian Self.

The same year, Vladimir Putin (1999-2008; 2012-) became the second President of the Russian Federation. During his first part of presidency, he followed the Yeltsin administration’s Western discourse. For instance, in his inauguration speeches in 2000 and 2004, Putin stressed that his administration aims to “transform” Russia into a “fully democratic, free, prosperous and strong modern state”. However, at the same time, he also referred to Russia’s historical “might" and “power”. Following the 9/11 attacks, Putin (2001) defined global terrorism as a problem of the “civilized humanity” and voiced Russia’s support with “the ones against terrorism”. Such discourse is significant in the ontological security seeking process for Russia as it not only incorporates “the new Russia" into the post-Cold War and “globalized” world, but also demonstrates how Russia’s greatness can be integrated within its new Self.

Accordingly, Moscow's approach towards the post-Cold War European Security architecture after the Kosovo War should be evaluated in light of the new identity. For instance, both Putin (2001b) and Lavrov (2004) referred to NATO as an obsolete organization and as a remnant of the Cold War. Therefore, NATO did not have any reason for meaningful existence in a "globalized and undivided world, where ideological differences do not matter anymore". These depictions meant that Russia perceived the alliance as a representative of the Western, democratic, and capitalist bloc of the Cold War and the existence of this organization constituted an obstacle for the realization of the new Russian Self in the new European security architecture.

Based on this, the Kremlin was "discursively" opposing further NATO expansion towards the Baltics and the possible membership of Ukraine and Georgia. At the same time, however, Russian officials reiterated that every state has the right to pursue its own security interests, and that Russia would not and could not impose its wishes on other sovereign states (Putin, 2001c; Lavrov, 2004b). The significance of emphasizing a state's right to pursue its own interests and state sovereignty is a reference to the Helsinki Final Act and other adopted European security agreements by the OSCE member states in which these principles are also mentioned. Recalling what had happened during the Kosovo Crisis in which Russia stressed the importance of a UNSC mandate on military interventions on the continent, it is apparent that Russia pointed to another platform where it could have potential influence on the decision making on security affairs. In fact, both Putin (2001d) and Lavrov (2004c; 2005) called for the reform and strengthening of the institutional capabilities of the OSCE where a pan-European security can be fully realized in an "equal" and "undivided" way. However, without reform, the OSCE was affected by

NATO and EU's bloc approach to European security, and therefore Russia was highly discontent with the organization (Hill, 2018. pp. 198-200).

Though the case be such, Russia, and the West cooperated where they had common interests. For example, after the 9/11 attacks, Russia endorsed American intervention in Afghanistan for its fight against terrorism which constitutes the Other for the "civilized world" (Tsygankov, 2012, pp. 118-120), and abstained from using an assertive language when the US unilaterally withdrew from the Antiballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty (Putin, 2001e). Moreover, the "necessity of an open, frank, and constructive interaction" through the NATO-Russia Council was emphasized (Lavrov, 2005b) and both sides expressed a desire to cooperate against terrorism (NATO-Russia Council, 2001). This was important for the quest of ontological security as it was an opportunity to "prove" the new Russian Self to the world by being one of the leading "civilized" countries taking action against terrorism.

The European Union, on the other hand, was seen as an important partner by the Kremlin with regards to cooperation on economy, security, and conflict settlement (Mankoff, 2016). Being partners with the European Union for the "greater good of the continent" was complementary to the Western discourse identifying Russia as being a "historical and geographical part" of European civilization (Lavrov, 2005c). Therefore, the Putin administration did not articulate such a negative opinion on EU enlargement towards the East, as it did for NATO. Despite this positive discourse, Russia did not have any intention in becoming a full member while defining itself as "European" (Putin, 2001f). This was due to Putin's desire to build an "independent and powerful Russia" and his perception of possible membership as a thing that would impede this objective.

Overall, between the years 1999-2006, the new Russian Self was in construction through a Western discourse based on the main ideals of "civilization" such as "democracy", "freedom" and "modernity". In addition, there was also emphasis on Russian "greatness" and "power". In this regard, the new Russian Self entailed a mixture of the West and Russia's historical characteristics. This affected how the Kremlin perceived European security and adjusted its foreign policy accordingly. NATO was referred to as an "old" security organization of the Cold War era which should not play a role if European security was to be built upon the common values of the new millennium. However, the opposition against its enlargement was rather moderate due to Moscow's emphasis on a state's right to pursue its own security. This can be related to the OSCE and its political documents which was a reference to Moscow's ambitions to make the OSCE as the main security organization in the Euro-Atlantic where it could have influence in accordance with its great power Self. However, this was not realized as the OSCE's significance got weaker after NATO and EU enlargements (Hill, p.236). The EU, on the other hand, was an important strategic partner for Russia to affirm its new Western characteristics. Moreover, when Russia saw an opportunity to become a protagonist regarding European affairs, it chose to cooperate with the West.

The next chapter examines the period 2007-2012, in which Russia slowly started to change its discourse and adopted a more assertive foreign policy for the quest of ontological security.

Chapter 2- Russia's Discourse Change (2007-2012)

The period 2007-2012 contains important developments regarding European Security and it is possible to divide the period into two. The first period (2007-2008)

marks the last two years of the Presidency of Putin, in which a new Self started to take shape. The second period (2008-2012) commences with the election of a new president, Dmitry Medvedev, and the adaptation of a new foreign policy reflecting the new Self.

a- Putin's Last Years (2007-2008)

The first period begins with the Bush Administration's proposal to deploy Ballistic Missile Defense Systems (BMDS) to Poland and Czech Republic against a threat that might come from Iran. Following the United States' decision, it is possible to observe changes in the official Russian discourse. Yet, this change did not mean that Russia was "completely" transforming its Self. Instead, while keeping its original attitudes towards European Security architecture, Russia became more assertive in expressing systemic problems and defending its interests.

For instance, in the Munich Conference on Security Policy, Putin (2007) openly criticized European Security architecture by indicating that the "unipolar" world order undermines "international law" which is "unacceptable" and "impossible" in today's world. Therefore, Putin believes that the current security architecture does not have anything to do with "democracy" and that Russia cannot be "thought" of it. Moreover, Putin reiterated the importance of the UNSC as "the only platform where the use military force should be given a mandate". Last but not least, Putin's concluding remarks stressed Russia's "history" in which it always had an "independent foreign policy" and reaffirmed Russia's desire to maintain its independent foreign policy in the current political context while "cooperating" on important matters.

Putin's criticisms in Munich constitute the summary of the overall Russian discourse between the years 2007-2008. Also, it is symbolic because his criticisms came

right after a unilateral decision undermining “Russian interests”. Then, it is possible to consider the U.S. decision as affecting the ontological security seeking process of Russia because it does not recognize “the indivisibility of security for everyone” (Lavrov, 2007). Thus, Moscow slowly yet incrementally denounced the security architecture while expressing determination to “defend its interests through an independent foreign policy”. Furthermore, Russia started to “differentiate” its Self from “West” by justifying differences in “identity and culture” as factors affecting the speed and quality of democratization (Putin, 2007b), while giving references to Russia’s “ancient history, profound traditions and its powerful moral foundation” (Putin, 2007c). In addition, opposed to Russia’s “civilized / non-civilized” dichotomy in its discourse during the War on Terror, Lavrov (2007b) argued that “Russia is opposed to civilizational divides in the world”, further demonstrating Russia’s departure from its previous discourse.

In due course, two additional incidents marked the “non-recognition” of Russia’s interests by the West. First, was the reluctance of the West to ratify the CFE Treaty, while giving reason to the presence of the Russian peacekeepers in Georgia and Moldova (Hill, p.252). Subsequently, the Kremlin published a moratorium stating that it is withdrawing from the CFE Treaty unless the West ratifies it, which is “critical for the post-Cold War security architecture” (Minasyan, 2008). The other was the unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo in February 2008, and the West’s recognition of its independence without a UN mandate. Both Putin (2008) and Lavrov (2008) criticized the “the unilateral” decision of the West to recognize Kosovo’s independence and considered the developments as “violation of international law”. In this regard, similar to the Kosovo War of 1999, the West’s decision to exert influence over the Balkans where Russia has historic ties and interests was another disruption of Russia’s pursuit of ontological

security. Thus, Russia wanted a collective approach regarding the solution of the issue, where it can be “an equal”.

In summary, the last two years of Putin’s presidency displayed changes in the Russian discourse, which is more critical towards European security architecture. At the same time, Russia’s independence, history, and cultural distinction was expressed more frequently, compared to Putin’s previous years, indicating the beginning of the construction of a “new” Self for the quest of ontological security.

b- The Medvedev Era (2008-2012)

The Medvedev era marks the continuation of the construction of the new Russian Self, started during Putin’s last years in office and the application of this new Self in Russian foreign policy for the pursuit of ontological security.

In his inauguration speech, Medvedev (2008) referred to Putin’s policies as a solid foundation for making Russia “one of the best countries in the world” and that Putin’s policies are his “strategy”. Yet, unlike Putin’s previous inauguration speeches, he did not give any reference to “democracy” as Russia’s “ultimate goal”. Instead, he underlined “modernity” and “development” which would solidify Moscow’s “influence in the world.” The negligence of “democracy” is significant as it displays the continuation of Russia’s differentiation of its Self from the West, while maintaining the great power Self. Of course, one cannot ignore the international political context in which Medvedev gave his speech. For instance, in the meantime, one of the worst economic crises in “the West” since the Great Depression was taking place and the image of the West was shaken in “the developing East” (Tsygankov, 2016, p.210). Therefore, it is also meaningful to evaluate Russia’s distancing of its Self from the West under these conditions.

In addition, during Medvedev's first visit to Europe, he stated that "Russia has laid the foundations of a state that is compatible with the best of all that makes up the common heritage of European Civilization" (Medvedev, 2008b). Yet, he continued by separating the European Civilization into three branches, namely "North America, the EU and Russia", illustrating the differentiation of Russia both from the EU and North America. During his last years of presidency, Medvedev slowly changed his discourse about Europe and defined the general state of EU-Russia relations as "business-like" (Medvedev, 2010), while referring to "common values and civilization" less often compared to Putin era and his first years of presidency. Nevertheless, he frequently stressed the importance of cooperation regarding European security, by using the phrase "from Vancouver to Vladivostok" in order to stress the unity of security in the Euro-Atlantic space.

The idea of "security from Vancouver to Vladivostok" came into existence with a proposal called "the Draft of the European Security Treaty" (The Kremlin, 2009). This proposal was a reflection of the Russian Self as it suggested amendments on structural problems of European security architecture which had been articulated multiple times by Russia since the early 2000s. For instance, Foreign Minister Lavrov (2010) referred to the treaty as "helping to overcome politico-military instincts of the past", as well as an opportunity to "solve the fundamental task of strengthening the positions of European civilization in the globalizing, polycentric and increasingly competitive world on a de-ideologized basis". Therefore, the proposal was a foreign policy initiative for the pursuit of ontological security since it would mean the "recognition" of the Russian interests and therefore its Self by the West. Even though the Western leaders initially had positive perceptions of the treaty, it was not realized due to American claims indicating that the

proposed objectives can be pursued “within existing the European Security framework” (Weitz, 2012).

Another critical turning point both affecting the formation of a new Russian Self and its quest for ontological security in the time period, was the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest. In the summit declaration, NATO “welcomed” the aspirations of Ukraine and Georgia to join the alliance and affirmed that these countries “will become members” (NATO, 2008). This meant that NATO was planning to expand further into post-Soviet territory, neglecting Russian interests (Medvedev, 2009). Compared to previous Russian discourse that puts forward each nation’s free will to decide to join NATO, the Medvedev era demonstrates the abandonment this discourse while putting forward Russian interests.

Shortly after, tensions escalated in the Caucasus, between Abkhazian and South Ossetian insurgents and Georgian authorities. Consequently, Russia intervened with the justification of assisting the insurgents and defeated Georgian forces. Following the war, Medvedev (2008d) announced the “recognition” of the two breakout republics in accordance with “the international law”. In an interview with CNN, Medvedev (2008e) indicated that the status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia was “sui generis”, similar to the Kosovar case. Subsequently, he added that every nation has its own “right to self-determination,” a statement contradictory to what Russia was advocating when Kosovo declared its independence. Then, this contradiction in Russian discourse should be evaluated from the framework of ontological security. For instance, in the Kosovo Case, Russia was trying to instrumentalize “international law” to prevent Kosovo’s declaration of independence by advocating Serbia’s territorial integrity. Whereas, in the Abkhazian and South Ossetian case, Moscow was contradicting its initial position regarding

"international law" to affirm its Self in the region and be "recognized" by the West for the pursuit of ontological security.

Following these incidents, it is possible to observe a period of rapprochement between the West and Russia (Tsygankov, 2016, p.215). For example, after the Georgian War, French President Sarkozy (2008) said that "Europe believes Russia is a great power" and that "the world needs Russia for peace and security". Moreover, the new U.S. President Obama sought "a reset" in relations with Russia (Hill, p.257), by deciding to revise the Bush administration's plan to deploy BMDS in Central Europe and to negotiate a new START Treaty. The EU also proposed the establishment of the EU-Russia Political and Security Committee as an institution to consult on strategic issues in Europe (Tsygankov, p.226). These developments illustrate that when the West "recognizes" Russian great power Self, even to some extent, there can be positive trends in relations.

Overall, the period 2008-2012 demonstrates the continuation of the construction of a new Self which is more assertive and determined in defending its interests with a different discourse than the 1999-2006 period. Also, the Russian discourse during the last years of Medvedev's presidency is divergent regarding the Russian Self and its perceptions of the West, compared to Putin era and Medvedev's first years. In other words, when the West ignored Russia's interests, the Kremlin changed its Western discourse further and formed its foreign policy accordingly. It is also apparent that Russia cooperated with the West where it is considered an "equal" which affirms its great power Self. However, Russia's quest for ontological security was problematic as NATO welcomed possible Ukrainian and Georgian membership, while the EU adopted the Eastern Partnership Program (EaP) in 2009, aimed to improve political and economic

relations with the post-Soviet countries (European Commission, 2022). Most importantly, the Euro-Atlantic bloc rejected Medvedev's Draft of the European Security Treaty which will have consequences for European security after the return of Putin to the Kremlin in 2012.

Chapter 3- The Russian Civilization (2012- 2022)

Vladimir Putin returned to the Kremlin in May 2012 and started his third term as the President of the Russian Federation. Similar to previous terms of himself and his colleague Medvedev, Russia was narrating a new Self.

First and foremost, in his inauguration speech, Putin (2012) emphasized that "Russia restored its dignity as a great nation", and "its future is dependent on Russia's ability to become the leader and center of gravity for the whole of Eurasia". In addition, he voiced Russia's intentions on strengthening "democracy". Nevertheless, if one is to recall the President's prior comments on democracy, claiming that it is affected by cultural societal characteristics of each nation, it is possible to say that the concept of democracy mentioned here is different from its "Western" connotation. Later in his speech, for instance, Putin referred to "Russia's multi-ethnic people, its cultural and spiritual traditions, its centuries long history and the values that have been the moral backbone of Russian lives" which upholds this claim. In addition, he stressed the unique role Russia plays in promoting civilization (Putin, 2012b).

Similar to Putin, Lavrov (2012) claimed that "the liberal-democratic system is not the only system under which countries can develop, and that the world has multiple centers of power." Thus, Russia believed in "an international system based on partnership of civilizations and Russia being one of these civilizational centers." In this regard, he put forward the concept of "Eurasian integration" in which Russia plays a key role assisted

by “the Russian language and culture”. Lavrov’s points also uncover an important asset for Moscow’s foreign policy, the Russian speaking people in post-Soviet countries.

In contrast to the period 1999-2012, the abovementioned statements signify the complete differentiation of the new Russian Self from the West. Then, Russia started to construct a Self that has the duty to spread civilization through its “culture, language and economic power”. For instance, in order Russia to become a leader in Eurasia, Putin aspired the integration of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), first with the establishment of a customs union and later with the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) (Tsygankov, 2016, p.251). He defined the process as “a project for maintaining the identity of nations in the historical Eurasian space and an opportunity for the post-Soviet region to become an independent center, rather than remaining on the outskirts of Europe and Asia” (Putin, 2013).

The idea of establishing “a Eurasian space” co-existing with Europe and Asia is significant as it was an attempt to pursue ontological security for Russia with its new “civilizational” Self. For example, the Kremlin was skeptical about the introduction of the EU’s EaP and its possible consequences. During the EU-Russia Summit of 2014, Putin criticized the EaP by claiming that “it creates new dividing lines”, and that he was concerned regarding the “stability and prosperity” of post-Soviet countries. He continued by emphasizing the importance of creating “a unified Europe based on mutual cooperation between the EU and the EEU.” These statements demonstrate how Russia saw its Self “equal to the EU”, and how it wanted to be “recognized” as a “civilization.” Moreover, “creating dividing lines” was not a new phrase in official Russian discourse since it had been used multiple times regarding European security affairs. However, this

time, it was pointing out to Moscow's perception the EU as an obstacle to the recognition of its Self.

At this point, Ukraine stands out as a critical country. First, as declared at the 2008 NATO Summit, Kiev's intention to join the alliance was welcomed. On the other hand, under the framework of the EaP, the EU proposed the Association Agreement (AA) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) to Ukraine, while Moscow wanted Kiev to join the EEU (Hill, p.350-353). Meanwhile, Putin (2013b) was claiming that Ukraine has "common roots with the Russians" and both are "one people". He further indicated that "when both countries merged into one 'Rus', Ukraine developed by industrializing and building infrastructure". These remarks imply Russia's previous impact on Ukraine's road to "civilization", while hinting why Ukraine should choose Russian institutions instead of the EU's. In this regard, the struggle over Ukraine should not be considered apart from Russia's pursuit of ontological security through its "civilizational" Self.

By late 2013, Ukrainian President Yanukovych announced that Ukraine would join Russia's EEU. Upon this decision, Ukrainian people seeking closer ties with the EU took to the streets and wanted the Yanukovych's resignation. Both Putin (2014) and Lavrov (2014) referred to the protesters as "Nazi" and called the events taking place as "threatening the Russian speaking people." Furthermore, Putin (2014b) called the regions of Ukraine constituting Russian speakers "Novorossiya (New Russia)", a term used to refer to the conquered territories during the reign of Empress Catherine the Great. In this regard, it would be correct to evaluate the words chosen within the broader civilizational discourse. For instance, both terms designate a specific historical period in which the "Russian civilization" expanded. Then, the protests taking place were perceived as an

impediment to the expansion of Russian civilization, which would have been realized with the entrance of Ukraine into the EEU.

Under these circumstances, Russian forces infiltrated Crimea, and in a referendum, Crimeans voted in favor of joining the Russian Federation. According to Putin (2014c) the referendum was "democratic and in accordance with international law" as it was "the right to self-determination." Yet, the UN condemned the referendum and declared it illegitimate (UNGA, 2014). Then, by deciding to annex Crimea, Russia was having a similar posture to the 2008 Georgia Crisis. That is, instrumentalizing "international law" and the right to "self-determination" for the pursuit of ontological security.

After the aggression, the West introduced sanctions and froze high-level institutional ties such as the EU-Russia Summits, and NATO-Russia Council, undermining the "recognition" of the Russian Self. Following these, the only organization left for dialogue concerning European Security was the OSCE. For de-escalating the conflict in Ukraine, the Minsk Agreements were adopted under the framework of OSCE while Putin (2015), referred to the process as an opportunity to build a "civilized" Ukraine. However, as mentioned previously, Russia had a negative opinion of the OSCE because the organization entailed a bloc approach. In fact, the peace settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh War of 2020 showed that the Kremlin may act individually and sideline the OSCE for the pursuit of ontological security, because the peace deal illustrated that Russia was "the only player" in the Caucasus (de Waal, 2020).

The overall state of European security was in a stalemate after 2014, and the proposed frameworks for dialogue and peace did not work as the ceasefires were violated multiple times (Al-Jazeera, 2020). The period in which Donald Trump was the U.S.

President sparked existential debates regarding European security as he called NATO "obsolete" (Parker, 2016). Yet, this did not have any impact on Russia's pursuit of ontological security. Eventually, Joe Biden replaced Trump in January 2021 and has voiced "full support" the current European Security architecture and the liberal-democratic world (Biden, 2022).

Following Biden's election, the disputes regarding the security architecture started once again over Ukraine. In an article, Putin (2022) manifested a historiography of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, claiming that the three states are descendants of the "Ancient Rus" and that they once constituted "the biggest Slavic State, bounded by a common Slavic language and the Orthodox Christian faith". However, he defended that "Ukraine and Crimea were separated from Russia by the Soviet leadership. Nevertheless, according to him, when the Soviet Union collapsed, Russia "helped" Ukraine to establish itself as an independent country. Despite this and the "common past", Putin told, "the political leadership in Kiev propagates Russophobia in collaboration with neo-Nazis, NATO and the EU, which is something cannot be accepted by Moscow".

These statements display the continuance of the civilizational Self and Ukraine's significance for the recognition for the pursuit of ontological security. In this regard, the two draft treaties sent to Washington and Brussels on December 17, 2021, demanding "security guarantees", were indeed a foreign policy move for the recognition of the narrated Self. This at the same time resembles Medvedev's initiative to introduce a European Security Treaty in 2008/2009 both in terms of the content of the treaty and its objective. However, the West "rejected" Russian demands after a period of negotiations, disrupting the pursuit of ontological security as a consequence. This eventually led to

Russia's recognition of the two breakaway regions of Ukraine, namely, Donetsk, and Luhansk, and most importantly started the Russo-Ukrainian War of 2022.

In summary, the period 2012-2022 illustrates the narrative of a new Russian Self, which is as a great power and a civilizational center. The "non-recognition" of the Russian Self and the discontent over the European security architecture as a consequence of ontological insecurity, first took place over Ukraine. Because Russia considered Ukraine as a part of its Self, it could not tolerate the West influencing Kiev. To feel ontologically secure, Russia first annexed Crimea and supported insurgents in Donetsk and Luhansk. However, it could not stop Ukraine's rapprochement with the West, while Moscow maintained its assertive position on Ukraine. If the two draft treaties were to be accepted, it would have made Russia ontologically secure as it would recognize Russia's cultural, political, and military influence over Ukraine, as well as its authority on European Security. Nonetheless, when the West rejected the demands, Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine for the quest for ontological security.

Conclusions

This thesis has explained the Russian Federation's desire to reform the post-Cold War European security architecture applying the ontological (in)security theory. In particular, by analyzing the Russian identity between the years 1999-2022, it has claimed that Russia feels ontologically insecure due to non-recognition of its Self by the West in the European security architecture. Therefore, Russia wanted to reform the security architecture in accordance with its identity, for the pursuit of ontological security. Upon the rejection the treaties, Russia attacked Ukraine in February 2022.

During the relevant time period, Russia narrated 3 different Selves which always embodied greatness, but differed in terms of their proximity to the West. There have been

incremental changes in the Russian Self each time the West undertook unilateral actions concerning European security affairs. This change is associated with Moscow's pursuit of ontological security because Western unilateralism meant the non-recognition of the Russian Self. As a consequence, each time, Russia constructed a new identity with which it can continue the quest for ontological security. On the other hand, Kremlin's foreign policy, particularly, its reaction to the critical events is correlated to how the Russian Self was positioned vis-a-vis the West. For instance, when Russia had a Western Self, the Kremlin discursively criticized the security structure rather than being assertive. Yet, when Russia narrated a Self completely different from the West starting in 2012, it started to follow an aggressive foreign policy. Despite all, Russia could never achieve ontological security.

Today, it is almost certain that a Russia which disregards a country's right to pursue an independent foreign policy and security by declaring war, thus violating international law and the OSCE principles, will not be "recognized" as a "civilizational center". In fact, Russia is isolated from international governance than ever before. Therefore, it is thought-provoking how Russia intended to be "recognized" as a civilizational center while following such foreign policy. Also, the concept of ontological security is significant as it might lead a state to arbitrarily conform or neglect international law depending on political circumstances, as in the Russian case. In the end, time will tell whether a new Russian Self will be narrated for the quest of ontological security in the future, either by the Putin regime or a novel administration.

In this context, the thesis introduces a new perspective to the existing academic research which does not provide sufficient explanations to the question why Russia wants to reform the European security architecture. Specifically, it illustrates that interpreting

Moscow's perception of the European security architecture from the lens of post-structuralism and ontological (in)security, reveals new perspectives that cannot be captured by the grand theories of IR.

Following this pattern, future research may analyze other significant countries in the world which have distinct identities and histories than the West. For example, analyzing Chinese, Indian, Persian, and Turkish self-narratives may contribute to ontological security studies, as well as to understanding how they form their foreign policy, why they follow certain policies, and what roles these states may undertake in the post-liberal world order. By all means, identity is a significant determinant of international relations and politics, and studying it reveals valuable insights for understanding the past, the present, and the future.

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