

Russia's Presidential Address on Launching the "Special Military Operation"

What's the problem represented to be?

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Abstract

The Russian Federation launched a full-scale invasion of a neighboring sovereign state, Ukraine, in February 2022. Since then, the United Nations has been paralyzed to restore international peace and security in Eastern Europe. By employing the WPR approach, this thesis conducts a poststructural policy analysis of the address given by the President of Russia on February 24, 2022. The aim is to discover how the strategic challenge is represented and what discursive effects the representation is apt to have. The analysis suggests that the problem representation given by the president of the Russian Federation produces subjectification of minor states to a great power competition.

Keywords: Ukraine, Russia, NATO, United Nations, poststructural analysis

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1 Introduction

Since the Arab Spring in 2011, there has been growing tensions in the UN Security Council. NATO's alleged overreach in Libya was followed by disagreement on how to respond to the civil war in Syria because of competing interests in the wider region. The repeated illegal use of force in the pursuit of regime change as in Kosovo and Iraq became viewed as a US-driven assault on global order. After Vladimir Putin returned to presidency in 2012, Russia has adopted a more confrontational stance on the West. Russia's invasion and annexation of Crimea in 2014 led to a breakdown of East-West relations. (Weiss and Daws, 2018, p. 156.)

On February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine by launching a "special military operation", initiating a new phase of the armed conflict in Ukraine. The member states of NATO and EU quickly sided with Ukraine in concrete terms, providing economic and military assistance to Ukraine's war effort. Concurrently Russia, UK, France and the USA – as well as China – are permanent members of the UN Security Council, which within the UN system, has the primary responsibility for maintenance of international peace and security (Henriksen, 2019, p. 259).

1.1 Research problem and research gap

Since the second World War, the ongoing invasion of Ukraine is the first interstate armed conflict, where a major power in the international system – Russia – seeks both territorial gains for itself and the subjugation of another state through regime change (Davies, Pettersson and Öberg, 2023, p. 691). Thus, the underlying research problem in this thesis is, what kind of understanding of international security does Russia's justification of the war promote. Given that the UN was established in 1945, the same year the second World War ended, the invasion of Ukraine appears unprecedented in the history of the UN system. Therefore, it should be studied for understanding the contemporary challenges for the world organization to uphold international peace and security.

The five permanent members of the UN Security Council were originally granted right to veto any resolution "to ensure great-power cooperation and to avoid war against a major power" (Weiss and Zach, 2018, p. 300). However, 'our' security often relies on others' insecurity, and policies making 'us' secure are often making others insecure (Åhäll, 2018, p. 90). Therefore, Russia's invasion of Ukraine calls into question what implications it may have for future security, or rather insecurity, of minor states in the contemporary international system.

In the previous research on Russia's policies on security and conflict management, Lewis (2022, p. 654) suggests that Russia's involvement in conflicts since the 1990s has ultimately contested the underlying norms of liberal peacebuilding. Reflecting a distinct normative position, Moscow has prioritized order over justice, state over civil society, and authority over representation (Lewis, 2022, p. 654). However, the study does not cover the 2022 invasion of Ukraine and according to Lewis (2022, p. 654) Russia's policies are always context-specific and responsive to competing sets of institutional, security and political logics.

Another study has covered the recent invasion of Ukraine in 2022 in terms of Russia's legal justifications. Cavandoli and Wilson (2022, p. 383) note that Russia's claims mirror those made for its prior interventions in the former Soviet space. Russian legal justifications appeared as a confused blend of self-defence and humanitarian necessity (Cavandoli and Wilson, 2022, p. 387). What comes to the potential wider implications of the Ukrainian situation, Cavandoli and Wilson (2022, p. 404) argue that international law is limited in the face of the application of might by a major power. The study does not attempt to unpick the strategic and policy objectives of the invasion in detail (Cavandoli and Wilson, 2022, p. 403).

Poststructuralist analysis of war is interested in the politics of language and meaning making. It interrogates the discursive power of knowledge, and security as a logic informing war as practice, seeking to expose 'the political' involved in how 'security' is practiced. (Åhäll, 2018, p. 87.) I did not encounter any poststructural policy analysis using the WPR approach on Russia's presidential announcement of the invasion of Ukraine.

1.2 PACS relevance

Peace and conflict studies is interested in, amongst else, how do armed conflicts arise and how to manage them (Malmö University, 2024a). To maintain international peace and security, the UN Charter outlawed the use of force except in self-defence or with authorization from the Security Council (Weiss and Zach, 2018, p. 299). The Russian invasion of Ukraine constitutes to neither one.

Peace and conflict studies is concerned with the UN's role and challenges as the upholder of international peace and security (Malmö University, 2024b). Paralysis within the Security Council reflects the inability of its key members to agree on a course of action. While the veto-power has ensured that the P-5 buy-in to the UN's collective security mechanism, it can also prevent a Council response to crises in which a veto-holding member sees its interests threatened or is involved. (Weiss and Daws, 2018, p. 160.) Not the only example of this, but apparently the most extreme one is Russia's so-called special military operation in Ukraine.

1.3 Research question and aim

Exploring the security discourse, this analysis asks how the President of Russia justifies the invasion of Ukraine. The aim is to discover how the strategic challenge is represented and what discursive effects it is apt to have. The question is answered by reviewing the Presidential address concerning the special military operation given by the president of the Russian Federation on the day the operation was launched. The analysis is performed inductively by employing the method known as the WPR approach, an analytic strategy of poststructural policy analysis. Instead of focusing on *who* is saying what, it concerns with *what* is said.

By disregarding the idea of a policy as a causal outcome of circumstances, poststructural policy analysis studies policy as “productive” instead of merely reactive. It is the human meaning and perception that give birth to conflict (Lederach, 1998, p. 63). The WPR – standing for “What’s the problem represented to be?” – considers how “problems” are constituted within policies, the unexamined forms of thinking they rely upon, the practices that generate them, and the effects they produce. A WPR analysis does not offer fixed solutions to assumed problems. It encourages reflecting on how policy “problems” are produced within the policies. It is through these problem representations that “governing” takes place. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 108.) The attention is not on “who” produces, but “how” the “problem” is produced.

1.4 Outline of the thesis

The thesis begins with a presentation of the background to the conflict in chapter 2. Previous research of different approaches to the address is presented in chapter 3. Chapter 4 contains a theoretical framework for conducting poststructural policy analysis in the context of war. The method and the material are described in chapter 5, accompanied by a discussion of validity and reliability of the analysis. Chapter 6, the analysis, is focused on presenting the results. Chapter 7 provides a final discussion of the results as well as the ethical and social considerations.

2 Background

In 1991, Russia, Belarus and Ukraine agreed to dissolve their 1922 treaty on the formation of the Soviet Union and replaced it with a form of confederation, named The Commonwealth of Independent States, and abbreviated as CIS (D'Anieri, 2019, p. 35). Sevastopol, located in Crimea, had been home to Russia's Black Sea Fleet, but since 1991, the territory has been part of the legally independent Ukraine (D'Anieri, 2019, p. 28). In the CIS agreement, the fleet was, however, considered part of the CIS military (D'Anieri, 2019, p. 39). In Russia, Sevastopol was regarded as a military city having "all-Union status", therefore belonging to Russia, the successor state of the Soviet Union (D'Anieri, 2019, p. 39). Russia tried to maintain the unified military, but at a meeting of the defense ministers in April 1992, Ukraine, along with Azerbaijan, refused to sign any of the drafts on common defense structures. Additionally, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, and Azerbaijan refused to sign a Collective Security Treaty, an agreement similar to NATO's Article V. (D'Anieri, 2019, p. 36.)

In December 1991, Ukraine also held a referendum on independence, simply asking "do you support the Declaration of Independence of Ukraine?", with the result of 92.3 percent voting in favor of it. A majority in every region supported independency, although in Crimea and Sevastopol, the majorities were much smaller than elsewhere, being merely 54.2 and 57.1 percent. However, in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, 83.9 percent voted for independence. (D'Anieri, 2019, p. 34.)

In May 1992, the Russian Congress of People's Deputies rejected the legality of the 1954 transfer of Crimea to Ukraine. Ukraine's parliament stated that "the fate of Crimea as a constituent part of Ukraine cannot be the subject of negotiations between states." It was agreed in June that the Black Sea Fleet would stay under CIS control until it could be split. (D'Anieri, 2019, p. 40.) In 1995, Ukraine agreed to the port of Sevastopol remaining the primary base for the Russian fleet on the Black Sea (D'Anieri, 2019, p. 80).

In 1994, the US became involved in Ukraine's security, inviting Ukraine to join NATO's Partnership for Peace. Ukraine became the first state to formally do that. Thus, NATO was decided to expand. (D'Anieri, 2019, p. 65.)

In 1997, Ukraine and Russia established the Friendship Treaty, in which the Black Sea Fleet was divided and port facilities together with the Sevastopol base were leased to Russia through 2017. In Article 2, it was stated that the parties "shall respect each other's territorial integrity and reaffirm the inviolability of the borders existing between them." (D'Anieri, 2019, p. 82.)

Despite Ukraine becoming a legally sovereign state in 1991, its economy remained subsidized by Russia, who kept providing gas to Ukraine at below-market prices. Moving to market prices would have caused poverty. A question of who would control the gas trade has remained central to politics of independent Ukraine. (D'Anieri, 2019, pp. 43–44.)

Between 2007 and 2010, the global recession caused a sharp incline in Ukraine's gas bills. In April 2010, prime ministers Mykola Azarov and Vladimir Putin engaged in negotiations in Moscow, which was followed by signing of the Kharkiv Pact by Presidents Viktor Yanukovich and Dimitry Medvedev. (D'Anieri, 2019, p. 182.) By the deal, Russia agreed to selling gas with up to a 30 percent discount to Ukraine, in exchange for continued lease of the Black Sea naval base in Sevastopol through the year 2042 (Medetsky, 2010). The deal sparked violent protests within the Ukrainian parliament as the nationalists, in opposition, regarded the fleet's presence as tantamount to Russian occupation (Kyiv Post, 2010).

The Euromaidan protests began on 21 November 2013, after it was announced that Ukraine was suspending discussions over the EU Association Agreement. Prime minister Azarov insisted the continuation of the negotiations with the EU, but the Vilnius summit ended on November 29 with no progress. On the same evening, about ten thousand protesters turned out in Kyiv. Beginning at 4:00 the next morning the Interior Ministry's elite Berkut forces arrested several protesters. Since this attack the situation escalated into a contest over the future of the Yanukovich regime. Three months later, Russia was provided the opportunity and excuse to seize Crimea and intervene in eastern Ukraine, as Yanukovich fled the country. (D'Anieri, 2019, p. 211.)

As a protocol meant to implement an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine, the Minsk agreements were signed on 5 September 2014, between Germany, France, Ukraine, and Russia (Kasamara and Sorokina, 2017, p. 268). On 2 November 2014, general elections were held in the proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic and Lugansk People's Republic and were recognized by Russia as complying with the Minsk agreements (Kasamara and Sorokina, 2017, pp. 267–268).

The UN (OHCHR, 2022) has estimated that there were somewhat 51,000–54,000 conflict related casualties between 14 April 2014 and 31 December 2021. Over half of those, 37–39,000 are regarded as injured, involving 7,000–9,000 civilians. Out of the injured combatants, approximately 14,000 were members of the Ukrainian forces and around 16,000 belonged to armed groups. Out of the 14,200–14,400 casualties regarded as killed, at least 3,404 were civilians, while 4,400 were members of the Ukrainian forces and 6,500 belonged to armed groups.

3 Previous research

This chapter presents an overview to the previous research on the presidential address of Russia given on the launching day, February 24, of the so-called special military operation in 2022. These studies represent three perspectives of research, legal analysis, critical discourse analysis of language and strategic studies. What is common to them is that they don't interrogate how the issues at stake in the address came to be represented as security "problems".

3.1 Legal justifications

Cavandoli and Wilson (2022, p. 397) identified the strands of two central justifications presented in Russia's presidential address of 24 February 2022. Those are self-defence and humanitarian intervention (Cavandoli and Wilson, 2022, p. 398). The address represents NATO's eastward expansion as threat to Russia, although there is no suggestion that NATO members have attacked Russia. Similarly, the address appeared to fail to cite any specific military action taken by Ukraine against Russia. (Cavandoli and Wilson, 2022, p. 399.)

It was claimed that Ukraine had denied the right to self-determination to Russian speakers, and condemned attacks and crimes of genocide against such minorities in the Donbas region (Cavandoli and Wilson, 2022, p. 387). On the other hand, the UN Charter does not recognize humanitarian intervention as one of those which military force may be exercised as an exception to the prohibition on the use of force. It is necessary to identify its emergence as a principle of customary international law. (Cavandoli and Wilson, 2022, p. 401.)

Attempts were made to question Ukraine's entitlement to statehood, suggesting that historically it had no significant record of independence. It was also claimed that ethnically Russians and Ukrainians were the same. The core theme appeared as characterisation of Ukraine as posing a threat which needed to be removed. (Cavandoli and Wilson, 2022, p. 387.)

3.2 Structure of language

Ugoala (2022, p. 177) states that the speech delivered by President of Russia on February 24, 2022, announcing a special military operation against Ukraine is full of "flaming devices". Ugoala (2022, p. 171) utilizes the concept in reference to derogatory words, phrases and clauses that the President uses when referring to Ukraine, US, and NATO.

By employing Critical Discourse Analysis, as inspired by Teun A. van Dijk, the study examines the flaming devices in the speech, aiming to demonstrate how language determines the outcomes of its usage in intergroup and interpersonal relations (Ugoala, 2022, p. 171). That is, pointing out the “potential danger President Putin advertently and inadvertently sends” (Ugoala, 2022, p. 172).

Ten excerpts were chosen from the speech (Ugoala, 2022, p. 171). The evil “them”, or Ukraine, US and NATO appeared to be referred to with negative and derogatory adjectives (Ugoala, 2022, p. 177). According to Ugoala (2022, p. 171), such flaming devices tend to infuriate the audience and elicit negative reactions. Further, it is argued that discourses of prominent persons should not contain those since views, feelings and thoughts pertaining a situation can be passed across to the target of a speech (Ugoala, 2022, p. 177). If language was structured without flaming devices conflicts could be brought to the minimum (Ugoala, 2022, p. 172).

3.3 Aims of the special military operation

Hill (2022, p. 30) argues that while President Putin stated in his 24 February speech, that “it is not our plan to occupy the Ukrainian territory”, Russia also did not seem to have committed sufficient resources for it. According to the speech, the special military operation was launched with a view to honouring “treaties of friendship and mutual assistance with the Donetsk People’s Republic and the Lugansk People’s Republic” (Hill, 2022, p. 29).

According to Hill (2022, p. 31), the special military operation had at the time four clearly stated aims. Firstly, it aimed to protect and sustain the territorial integrities of the Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics. Secondly, it was to guarantee the security of Crimea from future Ukrainian attempts to reincorporate it into Ukraine. Thirdly, it aimed to halt the incorporation of Ukraine into the NATO alliance. As for the fourth, a vaguer one, it aimed to “demilitarise” and “denazify” Ukraine, which seemed to have suggested imposing a government on Ukraine favourable to Russia. (Hill, 2022, pp. 31–32.)

4 Theoretical framework

Carl von Clausewitz defined war as ‘an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfill our will’, implicating that the parties to war are states and the war is waged for definable political interests of them (Kaldor, 2012, p. 17). However, the UN Charter was born out of a vision that force should be used only in the common interests of international community (Henriksen, 2019, p. 255).

In 1945, the belief was that this is best achieved if the major powers, the winners of the Second World War, agree on resort to the use of force. Thus, China, France, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, and the United States became the five permanent members of the newly formed UN Security Council and were granted a right of veto. The Council can determine the existence of a threat to international peace and security, and authorize measures to respond to the threat, but only if none of the P5 use their right of veto to block such an initiative. (Henriksen, 2019, p. 259.)

4.1 Self-determination, territory and statehood

After the Second World War, the right to “self-determination” became a fundamental principle of international law, and as such it stipulates that all people have a right to freely determine their political status and pursue their economic, social, and cultural development (Henriksen, 2019, p. 66). Controversial about the principle is the extent to which it allows a section of a population to secede from an existing state in case no acceptance is given by the government of that state. (Henriksen, 2019, p. 67.) For international stability it is favorable to keep territorial integrity of states intact, hence people should in first place pursue their right to self-determination within their existing state. (Henriksen, 2019, p. 68.)

Related to creation of states is an existing state’s acquisition of additional territory. A state can do this through so-called cession, accretion, erosion, avulsion, occupation and prescription. (Henriksen, 2019, pp. 69–70.) Since 1945, states can no longer obtain territory through conquest, which is the use of force to conquer foreign territory. The UN General Assembly responded to the annexation of Crimea in 2014 by reaffirming that state territory shall not be acquired by force and that attempts to disrupt territorial integrity of a state are not aligned with the purposes and principles of the UN Charter. (Henriksen, 2019, p. 72.)

4.2 Sovereignty and international order

The peaceful coexistence of sovereign states requires basic rules dictating how states may or may not behave (Henriksen, 2019, p. 13). The most basic is the principle of territoriality derived from state sovereignty. It holds that a state has jurisdiction over all acts committed on its territory and over everyone located there. (Henriksen, 2019, p. 85.) Article 2(1) of the UN Charter reflects the obligation to respect the sovereignty of other states. Territorial sovereignty means that a state may not exercise its physical power in any form in the territory of another state. A violation constitutes a breach of sovereignty. (Henriksen, 2019, pp. 257–258.)

States accept that they are members of a society of states (Henriksen, 2019, p. 13). The decision makers must consider, in addition to direct costs, the political and normative costs of using force. Even political allies may disapprove of a violation of international norms and repeated violations are apt to undermine international order. If states decide to break international law, they seek to justify their actions in terms of it. (Morris, 2016, p. 107-109.) When Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, it claimed that its acts fell outside those prescribed by international law. Russia affirmed the existence of the international legal system by justifying its actions with legal arguments. (Henriksen, 2019, p. 13.)

4.3 Producing of the strategic challenge

The task of government is often viewed as simply to address and to attempt to solve “problems that exist” (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 16). However, in relations between states, the security dilemma consists of two levels, which are dilemma of interpretation and dilemma of response. Dilemma of interpretation about motives, intentions, and capabilities of others makes each actor decide whether perceived military developments are for defensive or offensive purposes. (Booth and Wheeler, 2018, p. 133.)

Policies do not simply address problems that “exist” (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 16). If a dilemma of interpretation is resolved by determining another state as a definitive threat to one’s own national security the relationship becomes a strategic challenge (Booth and Wheeler, 2018, pp. 135–136). Hence, strategic challenge becomes one only through interpretation.

Resolving a dilemma of interpretation is followed by a dilemma of response, as decision makers must determine how best to react (Booth and Wheeler, 2018, p. 133). According to Clausewitz’s political philosophy of war, the political authority employs the military instrument because of rational decision making. The challenge is to achieve such rationality despite the fluctuating relationships between the people, the government, and the military. War would be a legitimate instrument of state policy but it should have a clear purpose. (Williams, 2018, p. 181.)

Strategy is the essential link between political objectives and military force. It is about making force usable for political purposes, and ultimately, how to win

wars. (Mahnken, 2016, pp. 53–54.) When Clausewitz described war as an outcome of rational decision making, he meant that war is not started, or at least shouldn't be, without a clear understanding of the intended achievements and how the war would be conducted. Calculating costs and benefits carefully is one characteristic of a successful strategy. (Mahnken, 2016, p. 54.)

4.4 Security as a logic informing war as practice

Because strategic challenge does become one only through interpretation, it follows that war does not simply “have” a clear purpose, unless given one. Williams (2018, pp. 177–178) suggests that war is frequently perceived as a useful response to the stories humans tell themselves about what we need, desire and, most importantly, should fear, as wars are generally launched to prevent a frightening future from materializing. If states tell each other and their populations such stories, geopolitical issues may seem worth fighting for (Williams, 2018, p. 178).

The meanings that actors give to their practices and the objects that they construct are important because they shape our reactions and actions (Barnett, 2018, p. 167). The maintaining of order involves categorization of “subjects”, “objects”, and “places”. To provide a few examples, a subject could be a “citizen”, object could refer to “literacy” and “Europe” could constitute to a place. The poststructural approach neglects the idea of such categories being necessary and natural ways of grouping people. Instead, they are seen as the effects of policies, calling into question how they are produced and how they translate into lived realities. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 6.)

A poststructuralist approach to security concerns with what effects particular logics of security might have (Åhäll, 2018, p. 90). It is not interested in military destructive power but the political power of language and meaning-making (Åhäll, 2018, p. 89). Discourses are seen as practices of power because they produce by fixing meaning (Åhäll, 2018, p. 90). Meaning is given to something by how it is represented (Åhäll, 2018, p. 91). Poststructural policy analysis can be facilitated with a particular analytic strategy, the WPR approach, which stands for “What’s the Problem Represented to be?” (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 13).

5 Method

The WPR analysis of governmental problematizations intends to make visible the politics involved in the making of “problems” (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 16). This analytic strategy challenges conventional views of causality, in which a “thing” causes another. Instead, power relations are understood to result randomly to a proliferation of “events“. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 33.) The WPR is employed to identify, reconstruct, and interrogate problematizations (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 19).

The WPR analysis directs critical attention to how governmental practices produce “problems”, and how that productive activity contributes to the production of subjects, objects, and places. It asks what exactly is produced, how is it produced, and with what effects. It neglects the view that the role of governments is to simply solve problems that wait to be addressed. The goal is to make the politics involved in these practices visible. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 14.)

The approach does not attempt to question the existence of something “real”, but that “real” thing is not an object until it becomes one through practice. Neither “subjects” nor “objects” exist as essences. Instead, they emerge as “objects for thought” in practices. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 33.) In Foucault-influenced poststructural policy analysis, “practices” are conceptualized “from the inside”. Instead of asking how people in a particular context “do”, the interest is in practices constituting or “doing” subjects as particular kinds of contingent beings. There is no “natural” way of grouping or classifying people. Attention is in what is done or said rather than in the motives or intentions of people. Under investigation is how it was possible to do or say those things. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 32.)

To institute a policy, government, as understood broadly, must target something as a “problem” that needs “solving” (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 16). Phenomena are not regarded as singular, fixed, or discrete entities that can be attributed an essence, in other words things are not considered as “natural”. Since they are made to be, they involve politics, which means that objects are not clearly objects, people are not just humans, and geographical entities do not simply exist. The concern is how these “things” have come to be and continue to be made. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 14.)

Policy texts introduce “programmes of conduct” and are themselves the objects of a practice. The object of WPR analysis is “prescriptive texts”, targeting the governmental practices, including instruments, techniques, programs and policies. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 34.) It can be used to analyse material that can be understood as a form of proposal and a guide to conduct (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 18). For the analytic task of making politics visible, the WPR approach

consists of seven interrelated forms of questioning and analysis (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 13). Those are listed below as introduced by Bacchi and Goodwin (2016, p. 20):

Q1: What's the problem represented to be in a specific policy or policies?

Q2: What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the "problem"?

Q3: How has this representation of the "problem" come about?

Q4: What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the "problem" be conceptualized differently?

Q5: What effects (discursive, subjectification, lived) are produced by this representation of the "problem"?

Q6: How and where has this representation of the "problem" been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been and/or how can it be disrupted and replaced?

Step 7: Apply this list of questions to your own problem representations.

Listing the steps as separate serves a heuristic function and when applied to analysis, they do involve overlapping and some repetition (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 19). Nonetheless, each has its own goals which are elaborated in the following subchapters. These are followed by presentation of the chosen material and a discussion of validity and reliability.

5.1 Question 1

Poststructural policy analysis focuses on critically interrogating the problematizations through which governing occurs. In WPR analysis, policy is not portrayed as an exercise in rhetoric. It does not work at the level of language or political manipulation. Instead, the task is to query how "problems" are made to be within a specific policy. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 60.)

The first question is asked to identify a place to begin the analysis, a problem representation. To identify a problem representation one "works backwards" from a proposal to see what is problematized. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 20.) The objective is not to identify the intentions behind policy. The stated "solution" is not contrasted with stated "problems" for figuring out the solutions wanting. Instead, the analysis begins from a stated solution to inquire into its implicit problematization. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 21.)

Because policies are proposals for change, they produce or constitute a representation of the “problem” they address. What someone proposes to do about something indicates what they think needs to change. It is possible to “read off” the implied “problem” from specific proposals. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 16.) Policy texts are often complex constructions that may involve several problem representations (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 20).

5.2 Question 2

The second question emphasizes the place of discourses (knowledges) in governing practices (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 34). In poststructural analysis, discourses refer to knowledges rather than to language. They comprise both general background knowledge – epistemological and ontological assumptions – as well as social knowledges, such as disciplines. The task is to identify the meanings that needed to be in place for the problem representation to make sense or be intelligible. These are to be looked for within the policy and not in the heads of social actors. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 21.)

Policy proposals are commonly underpinned by assumptions of human nature, which means they sit on premises about actors. Question 2 attempts to identify such contingent ontological presuppositions in the problematization. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, pp. 49–50.) For example, the notion of “skills” in labor market policy relies upon the ontological presupposition of human beings as skill-acquiring animals (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 36).

Knowledges are not understood as “truth” but as “in the true”, or as forms of truth. For example, exercise physiology, occupational science and childhood psychology would figure as relevant knowledges to activity regimes combating childhood “obesity”. To understand how they acquire “truth” status, they must be located within the relevant networks of relations and practices producing them. Such discursive practices would be health, biology and security, among others. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, pp. 21–22.)

5.3 Question 3

The present is not a necessary outcome of trajectories. The third question does not intend to trace a direct path of “influence”, but to investigate how these practices have emerged. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 46.) It concerns how the problem representation has come to be but must not be confused with searching for origins of the identified problem representation. Instead, it directs attention to practices that produce it. Because what is, does not reflect what must be, the objective is to bring to light possible alternative developments. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 22).

The goal is to de-inevitabilize the present (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 47). Foucauldian genealogy is employed to map the discursive practices that make some

“things said” sayable. It facilitates the further phases of the WPR analysis by making it possible to reflect on the limits imposed on what can be thought or said about the issues under consideration. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 37.)

Foucauldian genealogy is different from a family history project, which attempts to trace a line of descent from an ancestor (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 45). It is concerned with the practices involved in the production of “truth”. There is a need for a “history of the present”, and one must “set out” from the contemporary problem representation. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 46.)

5.4 Question 4

As practices, discourses have effects (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 37). The effects produced by the problematization – such as the creation of “objects” and “subjects” – are considered in Questions 4 and 5 (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 34). The analyses performed in Questions 2 and 3 prepare the ground for Question 4, which encourages a critical practice of thinking otherwise. The goal is to destabilize the problem representation by drawing attention to unproblematized elements within it. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 22.)

Comparing problematizations of selected issues, across time and cross-culturally, helps to indicate that different practices can produce contrasting problematizations. The fourth question calls for imagining worlds in which the confluence of circumstances is either not problematized or problematized differently. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 22–23.)

5.5 Question 5

Discourses do not merely represent “the real”, but are part of its production (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 37). The earlier questions lay the groundwork for Question 5, which is asked to consider discursive effects, subjectification effects, and lived effects, though these need to be understood as interconnected. These effects are political implications rather than measurable “outcomes”. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 23.) Those are the ways in which the problem representation limits what can be thought, affect what it is possible for people to become, and impact on how they live their lives (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 108).

Study of the discursive effects is based on Question 4, showing how they are set by the terms of reference established by the problem representation. Attention is directed to subjectification effects by focusing on the subject positions within the discourses identified in Question 2. Lived effects are the discursive and subjectification effects translating into people’s lives. As interconnected, the effects can be regarded as “dividing practices”, functioning to separate groups of people from one another and also producing “governable subjects”. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 23.)

Political subjectivity is relevant to policy analysis, because policy proposals are commonly underpinned by assumptions about human nature, e.g. a citizen as a universal, rational, autonomous and self-interested subject, who assesses the choices in terms of costs and benefits and selects the one that maximizes their net benefits. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 49.) Policies play significant roles in subjectification processes, shaping what it is possible for people to become. It can be harmful and limiting for people. Power is a productive force. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 50.)

Subjectification is the production, or making, of provisional “subjects”. Through policy practices, political “subjects” are encouraged to adopt characteristics, behaviors and dispositions. The “subject” is an effect of politics, a product of power-knowledge relations, which is always in process. Thinking about political “subjects” as made, and as becoming, calls into question notions of an unchanging human essence, i.e. the rational, autonomous individual of Enlightenment humanism. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 49.)

Taken together, the effects bridge a symbolic-material division. Hence the fifth question enables reflecting on the implications that problematizations entail in certain contexts. It also makes it possible to promote interventions aiming to reduce harmful consequences for specific groups of people. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 23.)

5.6 Question 6

The last question pays attention to the battles that take place over knowledge (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 48). It highlights the practices behind the problem representation. It also opens up space to reflect on forms of resistance that could challenge the pervasive and authoritative problem representation. Questions 2 and 3 facilitate this part of the analysis. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 23–24.)

The term “power” commonly refers to “power over”, in which those people with power dominate others who lack power. By contrast, the WPR approach perceives power as more systemic and less agent specific. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 28.) Power relations are not exclusively about prohibition and repression. Power relations have a productive role, they make “things” come into existence. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 29.) Governmental rationalities constitute “modalities of power” and are produced to justify modes of rule. They are not the intentions or tactics of specific individuals. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 42.) As power is productive and dispersed, resistance becomes possible (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 43). Resistance, however, is not the opposite of power, because power is not a “thing” (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 31). Since it does not sit outside power, the forms of protest might also involve forms of complicity (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 112).

5.7 Step 7

Research and policy analysis are also political practices, requiring that analysts apply the WPR questions to their own proposals in a practice of self-problematization (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 34). They are treated as “subjects” in process, and as immersed in taken-for-granted knowledges that require critical scrutiny (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 8). Given one’s location within historically and culturally entrenched forms of knowledge, there is a need for ways to subject our own thinking to critical scrutiny (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 24).

For the hermeneutic tradition, people’s self-interpretations are central to understanding social organization. As posthumanist, the Foucault-influenced poststructuralism questions the existence of a sovereign subject who can access “true” meaning. It considers how governmental problematizations produce provisional “subjects”. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 40.)

Poststructural analysis interrogates the governmental problematizations that constitute what “subjects” can become, but analysts also tend to be located within the “unexamined ways of thinking” that underpin policy proposals. Therefore, analysts must engage in self-problematization, seeking out possible forms of domination in their own proposals and problematizations. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 40.) Self-problematization alerts researchers to their participation in ontological politics, making rather than reflecting “reality” (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 111).

5.8 Choice of material

Under analysis in this thesis is the address given by the President of Russia published on the day Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. It is cited throughout the analysis and included in the references of this thesis. The address was accessed on the English webpage President of Russia.

The analysed text is published in English, implying that English speakers constitute to the target audience rather than Russian or Ukrainian speakers. Because I don’t know Russian, I chose this official English translation. I am not aware of the content of any other published versions. Probably with another cultural background or with different language skills the interpretation of the speech could be different.

As published on the day the special military operation was launched, it is safe to assume that the address attempts to justify the decision, and it comes as no surprise that it contains an explicit purpose statement of the operation, which is discussed more in the analysis. Any alleged “facts” must not be taken for granted. However, any “fact checking” is not attempted in this analysis, which concerns problem representations instead of figuring out the “truth”.

There is published also a video of the President giving the speech in Russian, but the video is not under analysis in this thesis. To concentrate precisely on *what* is being said, the analysis is performed only on the textual presentation of the

address. The address appears to contain a complex representation of interrelated issues.

5.9 Validity and reliability

Qualitative validity means that certain procedures are employed for checking the accuracy of the findings (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 199). One measure is to provide detailed descriptions of the setting to convey the findings. Another one is to clarify the bias brought to the study by the researcher, i.e. how the findings are shaped by one's background. (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, pp. 200–201.) The first one is implemented by citing quotes from the material throughout the analysis as well as describing of the material in the previous subchapter. As for the second one, I hereby clarify that as a researcher, my cultural and military background affect my perception to security in Eastern Europe. The only citizenship I have is that of Finland, an autonomy within Russian Empire until obtaining independency in 1917.

The Finnish Defence Forces are approximately as old as the independent state of Finland, and they engaged in war against the invading Soviet Union between years 1939 and 1944. Finnish nationalism was developed during the 19th century, when the country belonged to the Russian Empire. Still today the national defence of Finland is based on active conscription, a somewhat unique system amongst the member states of NATO, one of which Finland also became in April 2023. I have served in the Finnish Defence Forces beyond the mandatory conscription of male citizens. Hence, I hold a particular understanding of “nationalism” and “national defence”, affecting my perceptions to the war in Ukraine, a state which seems to have something in common with the history of my own country.

Qualitative reliability means that the approach is consistent from project to project and across different researchers (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 199). However, as noted in chapter 5.7, policy analysts employing the WPR tend to participate to making rather than reflecting “reality”. Therefore, the analysis must involve self-problematization. It is recommended that in qualitative research as many steps of the procedures are documented as possible (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 201).

6 Analysis

In this chapter, the WPR questions are answered. As organized according to the seven steps of the WPR, it follows the structure of the methodological presentation in the previous chapter. For example, the first WPR question is explained in chapter 5.1, while chapter 6.1 provides the answer to it. The choice of material is discussed in chapter 5.8.

6.1 What's the problem represented to be?

In his speech, President of Russia states the solution: "...I made a decision to carry out a special military operation." This solution, the military operation, is elaborated further:

"The purpose of this operation is to protect people who, for eight years now, have been facing humiliation and genocide perpetrated by the Kiev regime. To this end, we will seek to demilitarise and denazify Ukraine, as well as bring to trial those who perpetrated numerous bloody crimes against civilians, including against citizens of the Russian Federation." (President of Russia, 2022)

There is no need to find an explicit problem statement, but often such statements do appear. A proposal may also refer simply to the desirability of some condition. For example, a government report may refer to "social cohesion", signalling that lack of it is constituted to be a problem. Such assertions provide a problem representation. (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 21.)

In the speech at hand, "security of Russia" as well as "security in Europe" constitute to such a condition, calling into question how Ukraine's internal affairs are related to those? It is signalled that an implicit problem the special military operation targets to solve ought to be something within the internal affairs of Ukraine referred to as "humiliation and genocide". That wouldn't provide a sufficient starting point for the WPR analysis, because the speech addresses to a great extent other issues like NATO's expansion and the behavior of Western politicians. Indeed, the purpose statement of the operation is complemented with a more explicit problem statement:

"Any further expansion of the North Atlantic alliance's infrastructure or the ongoing efforts to gain a military foothold of the Ukrainian territory are unacceptable for us. Of course, the question is not about NATO itself. It merely serves as a tool of US foreign policy. The problem is that in territories adjacent to Russia, which I have to note is our historical land, a hostile "anti-Russia" is taking shape. Fully controlled from the outside, it is doing everything to attract NATO armed forces and obtain cutting-edge weapons." (President of Russia, 2022)

In this problem statement, it is signalled that the hostile “anti-Russia” is not acting autonomously but rather controlled by an outside party, which appears to be NATO. Associating this statement with the previously presented statement, the actions of this hostile “anti-Russia” appear to contain “humiliation and genocide”.

A third problem statement confirms that the Russian Federation didn’t launch the special military operation only to protect mistreated people as a world police holding the veto-power in the UN Security Council and acting without the UN mandate “to demilitarise and denazify Ukraine”. Rather, the operation is depicted as a form of self-defence, since it reads as: “Russia cannot feel safe, develop, and exist while facing a permanent threat from the territory of today’s Ukraine.”

Associating the three problem statements with each other, the problem represented to be in the speech appears as “security of Russia”, threatened by hostile “anti-Russia”, which emerges in the territory of Ukraine by support of NATO, and is even controlled “from the outside”. The threat has materialized as “humiliation and genocide”, as well as “bloody crimes against civilians, including against citizens of the Russian Federation”.

6.2 What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?

The identified problem representation seems to sit on several premises that are categorized below.

6.2.1 “I am the sovereign decision maker.”

In the beginning of the speech, the narrator states that he “considers it necessary to speak again”, which implies that he alone makes the choice of when to speak about what. Moreover, if he considers it necessary to speak, it earns to be published as his speech to the citizens. The speech seems to contain statements of urgent events and important decisions, which the President apparently consider appropriate to inform the citizens about. Indeed, it is titled “Address by the President of the Russian Federation”.

As he speaks about carrying out the special military operation, he states that he made the decision “in execution” of the treaties made with the Donetsk People’s Republic and the Lugansk People’s Republic as well as “in accordance with Article 51 (Chapter VII) of the UN Charter” and “with permission of Russia’s Federation Council”. Still, the decision is not “made” by anyone else than him. The President “executes” and decides “in accordance”. If the President proposes, Russia’s Federation Council gives “permission”, but no decision. The President makes the decision.

6.2.2 “People, territory and institutions are for regimes to govern.”

In the speech, regimes are depicted as acting upon territory, people and institutions. What is called “people”, appears to remain passive, unless asking for help or making choices and sacrifices. The regimes that are primarily focused on are the “West”, the Ukrainian regime, and the one of the narrators.

Those political actors of the so-called West that “do things” are: “Western politicians”, “NATO”, “the leading NATO countries”, “military machine of the North Atlantic alliance”, “US allies”, “some Western colleagues”, “the Western coalition [in Syria]”, “the US Secretary of State”, “the United States”, “US politicians, political scientists and journalists”, “all satellites [of the US]”, “Western block [formed by the US]”, “the United States and other Western partners”, “collective West”, “NATO leadership”, “a tool [NATO] of US foreign policy”, “NATO armed forces”, “the West”, and “the empire of lies”.

Remarkably, no-one seems to act upon this so-called “West”. For example, the US citizens vote for the US politicians to be elected, but they are absent in the speech. Moreover, other regimes or the United Nations are depicted as not to control the “West”. For example, “the Western coalition” is said to have conducted combat operations in Syria “without the Syrian government’s approval or UN Security Council’s sanction”. Not even any law has power over the “West”, since they invaded “Iraq without any legal grounds”.

The so-called “West” lead by the US is depicted as the supreme regime acting upon here and there in the World, for example Syria, Libya, Iraq, Ukraine and Europe. Amongst everything else, it is said to have been “actively supporting separatism and gangs of mercenaries in southern Russia”. Not only in Libya “but in the whole region”, a tragedy was “created for hundreds of thousands and even millions of people”.

Tragedy appears to be created for people by regime. Similarly, values are imposed on people by regimes, as “they” are said to “force on us their false values that would erode us, our people from within”. Here “people” and “values” appear as possessed; “we” have people and “they” have values.

Regimes make sometimes mistakes and act in a way that is bad for their people, for example “the attempt to appease the aggressor ahead of the Great Patriotic War proved to be a mistake which came at a high cost for our people.” As for constituting to those “cost”, “we” lost “territory” and “lives”. Just like a gardener could take care of one’s plants incorrectly and lose a portion of the garden.

Mistakes happen, but regimes also take care of people, by for example stopping “that atrocity, that genocide of the millions of people”. In that case the people “pinned their hopes on Russia, on all of us”. People “pin their hopes” on “us” and we act. Of course, people’s “feelings and pain were the main motivating force behind our” action, which in that case took a form of “decision to recognise the independence of the Donbass people’s republics”. In addition, we also “supported”, “defend” and “protect” people.

Sometimes people act upon, but not individually. Our people have made sacrifices “to defeat Nazism”. They “had to make” and those sacrifices are “sacred”.

People also choose uniformly, for example “the people of Crimea and Sevastopol” chose “to reunite with Russia”. In Donbass, people possess republics that “have asked Russia for help”. Interestingly, “citizens” of those republics remain absent from the speech. All citizens presented are of Russia or the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

Ukrainian people and Ukraine differ from the Ukrainian regime, and there is no desire related to “the current events” to “infringe” on the “interests of” the former. The “ruling Ukrainian regime”, also called as the “junta” and “the Kiev regime”, is “plundering Ukraine and humiliating the Ukrainian people” and have “perpetrated genocide”. This regime is associated with “the forces that staged the coup in Ukraine in 2014” and “seized power”, which “we can see”. In addition to have been plundered, Ukraine has been “taken hostage”, but “we seek to denazify” it.

In Ukraine, there are “neo–Nazis” seizing “power” and “far-right nationalists” supported by “NATO countries”. Territory, which is “Ukrainian”, is under ongoing efforts of NATO “to gain a military foothold” of. A threat occurs from the territory of “today’s Ukraine”. Today is different from yesterday or tomorrow and regimes “occupy” the Ukrainian territory. However, that is not “our plan” and “we do not intend to impose anything on anyone by force”. Nevertheless, regimes can “address” who they want to, for example, the President of Russia “would like to address the citizens of Ukraine” as well as “the military personnel of the Ukrainian Armed Forces”. While US has NATO as its “tool”, the citizens of Ukraine and Ukrainian Armed Forces seem to remain under competition of regimes to utilize.

6.2.3 Construction of the problem representation

Second, we identify which concepts and binaries does the problem representation rely upon (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 21). In addition to many sharp binaries such as “our/their values”, “their/our interests”, “NATO’s expansion/Russia’s security”, “Nazism/self-determination”, the problem representation seems to rely on an interesting combination of three timeframes or eras, the past, the present and the future. Different parts of the problem representation seem to be “placed” in different eras.

The historical Russia is that of the USSR and the Soviet Union. After the disintegration of the USSR, Russia is said to have accepted the “new geopolitical reality”. Soviet regime was “totalitarian”, but after the collapse, the “new, modern Russia” was ready to “work honestly with the United States and other Western partners”. Although Russia lost “a considerable part” of its military capabilities, “today’s Russia remains one of the most powerful nuclear states”. The threatened Russia appears the future one, since US and its allies are said to exercise a policy of “containing Russia”, which is a matter of “our historical future as a nation” and “a very existence of our state”.

Future, another one of the three historical eras, does not seem to be associated with any other state than the Russian Federation. For the sake of “our common future”, the audience is asked to “work together” to “strengthen us from within as

a single whole, despite the existence of state borders”. The future is more important than existing state borders and in the end of the speech it is added that “the future of Russia is in the hands of its multi-ethnic people”.

Future is associated with people more generally than with states and is accompanied with freedom, “freedom to choose independently our future and the future of our children”. This right is generalized to “all the peoples living in today’s Ukraine” and “anyone who want to do this”.

Apparently both past and the present are associated with Ukraine. The territory of today’s Ukraine is that where the faced threat is said to come from and where today’s neo-Nazis are said to seize power. People are said to be “living in territories which are part of today’s Ukraine”, but these people are placed in the historical era by stating that they “were not asked how they want to build their lives when the USSR was created or after World War II”. The Ukrainian territory seem to be associated with “territories adjacent to Russia”, which are generally “placed” in the past era by labelling them as “our historical land”.

In terms of different timeframes, the problem representation seems to be constructed as future Russia facing a threat from today’s Ukraine. In history, Russia was, today it remains, but its future is threatened from the outside of its borders. The Kiev regime occurs in the present but resembles the Nazis and “the Ukrainian nationalists” of the past and is acting upon people and territory that were there before the regime seized power. The Kiev regime is now acted upon by the US-lead West, which used to act elsewhere. The future of the people is going to be in the hands of neo-Nazis backed by NATO unless “we” don’t act. The enemy of the past, the “far-right nationalists”, won’t “forgive the people of Crimea and Sevastopol” for their choice to “reunite with Russia”. Rather, it is taking shape as the “hostile anti-Russia”.

6.3 How has this representation of the problem come about?

State decision makers can never be certain about the current and future intentions of those who can harm them militarily. This so-called unresolvable uncertainty is the basic predicament creating the security dilemma. (Booth and Wheeler, 2018, p. 132.) Even though the performance of the UN Security Council relies on co-operation between the P5, they can never be certain about each other’s intentions. Therefore, it is possible for Russia to represent the US and NATO in the way described in this analysis so far.

There are also other practices that produce this problem representation, namely the great powers utilizing “self-determination” as a justification to war, even way before the UN Charter was written. According to Sanborn (2014, p. 237), it was during the First World War that the defense of “self-determination” dominated the negotiations between great powers. Finally, through the treaty of Brest-Litovsk,

signed on 3 March 1918, Revolutionary Russia and the Central Powers came to declare that “the state of war between them has ceased” (Sanborn, 2014, p. 233).

The treaty brought an end to the Russian Empire in Eastern Europe as the Soviet delegation agreed that territories west of the “line agreed upon by the contracting parties which formerly belonged to Russia, will no longer be subject to Russian sovereignty”. (Sanborn, 2014, p. 233.) In the negotiations, German General Homann accused Trotsky and the Soviet delegation of “relentlessly suppressing all who think differently,” also in Belarus and Ukraine. Additionally, he stressed Germany’s right to operate without foreign interference and argued that it was threaten by the spread of Bolshevik propaganda amidst German workers and soldiers. Trotsky accepted the inclusion of the Ukrainian delegation in the negotiations up until the Ukrainian Rada lost control of Ukraine. When the treaty was signed, he stated that it was a peace “which Russia, grinding its teeth, is forced to accept. This is a peace which, whilst pretending to free Russian border provinces, really transforms them into German States and deprives them of their right of self-determination”. (Sanborn, 2014, p. 237.)

In addition to the open proxy war of 1918 in Ukraine, the Central Powers had prepared – already months before the treaty – the ground for pro-German declarations of “self-determination” in, for example, Estonia by launching a propaganda campaign in November 1917 to support the idea that Estonia wished to be annexed by the Reich (Sanborn, 2014, p. 237). The Petrograd Bolsheviks had signed the peace treaty, but the Kharkiv Bolsheviks fought on in Ukraine. The transition from Great War to Russian Civil War was seamless – not even the uniforms changed. (Sanborn, 2014, pp. 237–238). By the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, Russia withdrew from the First World War, but the device of national self-determination didn’t suggest peace emerging from war, but the shift from an interstate war to an intrastate war, in which outside forces affect the political struggles to define the nation, as well as the military conflicts surrounding those struggles (Sanborn, 2014, p. 237).

Apparently, already at the time of the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, “self-determination” of minor states or people or nations, so to say, was negotiated between the major states who made the agreement over the heads of minor ones. Given the rights and power granted for the UN Security Council, it seems that this practice continues within the UN system. Indeed, the decision making of the UN Security Council is not even supposed to be “democratic”, because “states are not all of equal importance” (Henriksen, 2019, p. 259). Thus, the complex problem representation, where defence of Russia seems to be associated not only with NATO’s expansion, but also Ukraine’s internal affairs, starts to make sense when the security of a great power, in this case Russia, is understood as more important than the security of Ukraine. Accordingly, NATO is designated in the speech as “a tool of US foreign policy”, suggesting that the alliance is not serving the foreign policy or security of its members like the United States’.

6.4 What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the problem be conceptualized differently?

In the problem representation at hand, reference is made to “territories adjacent to Russia” as “our historical land” where “anti-Russia” is “taking shape”. This problematization, the allegation of “our historical land” in particular, must be reviewed in the context of nation making and state making processes that have taken place in Eastern Europe since the late 19th century.

In the very beginning of the 20th century, a large part of Eastern Europe was still under the rule of the Russian Empire and was mostly transferred into Soviet Union through the Russian Civil War. The collapse of the Russian Empire and foundation of the Soviet Union are discussed in this sub chapter from a more general perspective of century long nation making and state making in Eastern Europe, calling into question what constitutes to “hostile anti-Russia” in the speech. This discussion is needed because the problem representation in the speech is constructed around NATO’s expansion and the United States, while Russia’s very own relation to its “historical lands” is not problematized.

During the period between serfdom – which dominated the Russian Empire until 1860s – and the First World War, national ideas were developed in different ways and at different paces in Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Armenia, and among other colonial peoples in the periphery (Sanborn, 2014, pp. 10–11). Less than two weeks after the October Revolution in 1917, the Ukrainian Rada proclaimed the creation of a new Ukrainian People’s Republic, thereby refusing to recognize Bolsheviks’ seizure of power. The elections to the Constituent Assembly were held in November and Bolsheviks took just 4 percent of the votes in Kyiv province. In Poltava they lost the election to the Ukrainian Socialist Revolutionaries, which took strong nationalist positions. The results suggest that the majority supported autonomy, and if the Bolsheviks had really supported self-determination, Ukraine would have established an autonomous socialist state as the year ended. Instead, the Bolsheviks sought to impose their own idea of democratic legitimacy. (Sanborn, 2014, pp. 228–229.)

Depicting the events in Eastern Europe as rise of nationalism imply that the collapse of the Russian Empire was a struggle between nations seeking liberation and the empire holding on to control. That view assumes, that a single political and military process took place to move from colonial dependence to national sovereignty. However, many of the states that emerged in World War 1, were multinational, hence anti-imperial independence movements giving birth to new states were first and foremost interested in decolonization, although they adopted the national idiom, which had consequences for political beliefs and practices when deployed. (Sanborn, 2014, pp. 4–5.) Thus, Sanborn (2014, p. 7) suggests that the state institutions emerging and strengthening in Eastern Europe in the 1920s aren’t

best classed only as revolutionary, democratic, or national, but should be noted also as postcolonial.

The Bolsheviks' idea was that only politically "conscious" workers should determine the fate of the nation, and one's "consciousness" was proved by supporting the Bolshevik Party. To seize local power and to implement this idea, they tried to leverage whatever "indigenous" support they enjoyed. Even in Finland, Lenin continued to support communists during the country's civil war in the spring 1918, although tactically they thought it prudent to allow Finland to separate, which wasn't the case with Ukraine. (Sanborn, 2014, pp. 229–230.)

In the wake of the October Revolution, the only soviet in Ukraine to support Bolsheviks rather than the Ukrainian Rada had been in Kharkiv, located in eastern Ukraine, which was more industrial and more ethnically Russian. When Bolsheviks failed to sway the Kyiv Soviet to their side, they convened the First All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets of Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies to establish a government in Kharkiv. After that, they ordered the Rada to close within 48 hours or consider itself at war "against the Soviet government in Russia and Ukraine". The Rada turned to outside help requesting recognition as a partner in ongoing peace negotiations between the Bolsheviks and the Central Powers at Brest-Litovsk. That marked Ukraine's decolonizing moment, with internal political groupings making claims for their own legitimacy, while neighboring imperial powers pursuing their own interests of control. (Sanborn, 2014, p. 230.)

Within days since the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, German and Austrian troops had begun their fighting to drive the Red forces out of Ukraine, and German troops arrived also in Finland in order to fight the Red Guards in the country's civil war (Sanborn, 2014, p. 234). As soon as on 15 March 1918, Soviet general Bonch-Bruevich urged Lenin to reimplement conscription to fight hostile German forces, to which Lenin agreed upon at the end of the month. A month later in his speech to the Soviet leadership, Trotsky reiterated that the main threat to the Bolshevik regime was not domestic counterrevolution but Imperial Germany. (Sanborn, 2014, p. 234.)

In the spring of 1918, both the Whites and the Reds of Russian Civil War sought domestic and foreign allies. After occupying Ukraine, the Germans made their way to Rostov-on-the-Don in Southern Russia. As Germany was moving also towards Petrograd in the North, and supporting the Finnish Whites, the Allies warranted the expansion of British troops in Murmansk by several hundred, while Japanese and British marines moved into Vladivostok in the East. (Sanborn, 2014, p. 240.)

By early November 1918 the German military had been defeated, and the last emperor Wilhelm II abdicated. Thus, the treaty of Brest-Litovsk was disregarded as obsolete. Within days, local Bolsheviks were setting up Soviet republics with the Red Army's help in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Ukraine. Lenin even encouraged German far-left socialists to form a German Communist Party. (Service, 2009, p. 107.) In autumn 1919, the Red Army defeated the Whites in Orel, 350 kilometers south of Moscow. In December they captured Kyiv and re-

established the Ukrainian Soviet Republic, thereby winning the civil war not merely in Russia but also in Ukraine and Siberia. Since then, the Red Army was able to intervene other armed conflicts elsewhere in the former Russian Empire, namely those that were waged in Transcaucasia. (Service, 2009, p. 113.)

Ukrainians didn't necessarily favor their subjugation to Russian rule, so the country was proclaimed as a Soviet Republic in its own right. After a successful conquest of Transcaucasia in March 2021, the device was repeated, and similar Soviet Republics were founded in Belorussia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. The Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic established bilateral relations with each of them. The Bolsheviks didn't incorporate those lands directly in the RSFSR, because they struggled to win support in the non-Russian borderlands of the former empire. (Service, 2009, pp. 114–115.)

However, the boundaries of the RSFSR were not set exclusively according to national and ethnic geography, since in central Asia there was no republic on the model of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic. The lands of the Kazakhs, Kirgiz, Tajiks, and Uzbeks were perceived as belonging to the Turkestani Region, which was included in the RSFSR. Nevertheless, both the RSFSR and other Soviet Republics were ruled by the Politburo, since the Party Rules drawn up in March 1919 regarded all the communist organizations in the Soviet Republics as regional organizations of the Russian Communist Party. Moreover, there were not merely bilateral relations between the RSFSR and other Soviet Republics, but the other republics were disallowed to have ties with each other, which was to enable the Politburo to exercise party centralism and control all the Soviet Republics from Moscow. (Service, 2009, pp. 115–116.)

The First World War, also called the Great War, was more than a culmination of competition between imperial powers. Not limited to a manifestation of a single conflict, it was a conglomeration of multiple conflicts that proceeded simultaneously. One of those conflicts was about the existence of imperial control as such, making the Great War a war of European decolonization. (Sanborn, 2014, pp. 3–4.)

For Eastern Europe, the First World War appears to have been a conflict of future between ideologies, a struggle to establish "national self". In Eastern Europe, the First World War was a competition between empires over territory. As the outcome of it, one empire, the German Reich, lost the competition and fell. The same is probably true for Russia, but not for the colonized borderlands of the Russian Empire. Those were not transformed into "German states", as Trotsky feared, although some areas were briefly occupied by Nazi Germany during the Second World War. The RSFSR probably was founded upon national self-determination, an ideal that served each negotiating party as the key rhetorical tool in Brest-Litovsk, but the Soviet Union wasn't. What is discussed throughout this sub chapter, suggests that it was established as the exact opposite: hierarchically coerced totalitarian heir of the Tsarist Empire.

The majority of the empire's borderlands were set to stay under totalitarian and imperial rule of Moscow until as late as 1991. Since then, those countries have been distinguished as the 14 post-Soviet states and Russia itself. They have become independent states and faced the opportunity and need to determine "national self". That is true also for the Russian Federation, which has been going through a complex process of transiting from a huge authoritarian empire with centralized economy to a smaller and more open market democracy.

Given the history of Eastern European state making, NATO's eastward expansion must be understood as a matter likely to appear differently if viewed from Russia's "historical lands" than simply "US foreign policy". The Soviet Union was a revolutionary, communist, and unstable postcolonial state, with weakly functioning, but violently coercive institutions (Sanborn, 2014, p. 261). In the Russian Civil War, the borderlands of the Russian Empire were apparently prevented, via coercive military means, to not separate from Russia. The Bolsheviks tried to maintain the borders of the former empire and sought to impose their own rule over the territory. On the contrary, to become a member of NATO, a state must apply to the membership instead of being coerced to it. Hence, the old imperial practice of "coercion" marks the difference between NATO's enlargement and Russia's efforts to expand or maintain its territory since the collapse of the tsarist Empire.

The fundamental difference between NATO's enlargement and Russia's efforts – i.e. between "voluntariness" and "coercion" – is left unproblematic in the problem representation targeted by this analysis. Hence, the problem can be conceptualized differently. Any state located in the former borderlands of the Russian Empire, can be regarded as a sovereign state instead of "our historical land". Instead of depicting Ukraine as "fully controlled from the outside", Ukraine can be recognized to decide independently whether for example to apply for NATO's membership or to build closer ties with Russia. Instead of coercing another state to act according to certain interests, a state can choose to problematize diplomacy to influence other's motives. Alternatively, to obeying great powers who impose violence on them, Eastern European states can be perceived as willing to co-operate with those who respect their independency and let them decide voluntarily.

6.5 What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?

By evoking the strategic "self-determination" of the First World War, a particular discursive effect seems to be produced regarding the "special military operation". The operation is depicted as a rivalry against another great power, the US, since Ukraine is depicted as "fully controlled from the outside" by the US and NATO. In such discourse, the attention is directed away from Ukraine – or security of other minor sovereign states – to the self-determination and security of the major regimes.

The Ukrainian territory is depicted as the battlefield, while the two belligerents are the innocent people of Donbass with the help of Russia and the Western backed Nazi regime of the Kyiv.

Along with protecting people of Donbass against the Ukrainian regime, Russia is said to be defending itself also against NATO's expansion. If not questioning this narrative, one could easily deduce from the problem representation that "causal explanation" to the war in Ukraine would be the US foreign politics; because of the US, Russia must invade Ukraine. The president even emphasizes:

"They did not leave us any other option for defending Russia and our people, other than the one we are forced to use today. In these circumstances, we have to take bold and immediate action." (President of Russia, 2022)

In this discourse, the conflict would be discussed and negotiated as a conflict between great powers, which resembles the strategic reading of the concept "self-determination" in the First World War. In addition, the problem representation suggests that Ukraine's own regime wouldn't be recognized as sovereign and legitimate, having control over its territory, since it is depicted merely as Nazis, who were already fought against and overthrown in the Second World War. Those who became great powers back then, can intervene in the territory of Ukraine – as if it was the Nazi Germany – without the permission of the government. Depicting that policy as universal, the Western coalition is said to have done the same in the past. Ukraine's role wouldn't be an independent and sovereign state, but a subject to great power competition.

As for other subjectification effects, the speech suggests that since the collapse of the Soviet Union, states are no more subjects to a norm based international system, but the so-called US foreign politics, because the fundamental norms adapted after the Second World War "came in the way of those who declared themselves the winners of the Cold War". Again, the US is to blame, while Russia is merely a subject to the malevolent West, just as NATO is merely "a tool" to US foreign politics.

This discourse is apt to undermine the central principles of state sovereignty discussed in chapter 4 of this thesis. The self-determination of a great power seems to be represented as more valuable than international order, territorial integrity of states and even sovereignty of another state. All in all, this problem representation, produces a strategic challenge that resembles more that which is expressed by a negotiating great power in Brest-Litovsk than by a member of the UN Security Council.

6.6 How and where has this representation of the problem been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been or how can it be disrupted and replaced?

It is evident from the speech that in addition to giving the problem representation, the author made the decision to carry out the so-called “special military operation”. The special military operation constitutes to “war” in the Clausewitzian sense and is still being waged while the writing of this thesis. The WPR analysis can’t resolve the exact intentions of the speech but thinking about policy not only as problem solving but problem making, the problem representation can be understood as producing of the strategic challenge that the war is supposed to respond to.

The previous research presented in chapter 3 of this thesis have disrupted this problem representation in terms of international law, the language used for depicting the enemy and by showing how the strategic aims were more about influence over Ukraine than defending of Russia. The WPR analysis directs attention to the “knowledges” that underlie the “rationality” of this representation of the strategic challenge.

Given that the P5 of the UN Security Council are exempt from UN sanction (Morris, 2016, p. 113), the UN is not able to prevent China, NATO, and Russia using force against other states, or against each other, in case they perceive the benefits as outweighing the costs. Therefore, it may not be helpful to argue against the problem representation by referring to international agreements. There is no question of what a veto-power holding regime “can” or cannot do.

The realist perception is that sovereign states remain the highest authority in the prevailing anarchic world where their interaction is regulated by the exercise of power, ultimately in military means. However, international order couldn’t remain stable if a sufficiently high proportion of states wouldn’t perceive it as just and conducive to their own interests. (Morris, 2016, p. 104–105.) While the problem representation targeted by this analysis suggests that the contemporary international order is merely a US hegemony with unbalanced power-relations, this analysis argues that the problem representation is apt to make the international environment unequal and unpredictable for smaller states, because it subjects them to great power competition by favoring “self-determination” or any other interest of a great power over international order, peace and security.

The problem representation appears to promote a view of the international order and law to be serving the great powers and their interests, while smaller states are depicted as merely for them to control. Arguing against that great power centrism could be helpful in disrupting the problem representation, because that could challenge the “rationale” of the special military operation. By giving voice to the minor states and promoting the view of the Eastern European states being sovereign actors who have joined NATO voluntarily, it can make it appear “irrational” to prevent NATO’s expansion by invading those states, because those interventions

are apt to motivate the small states to seek for allies for the sake of their own security.

Another way to challenge the “rationality” of the problem representation could be making it visible that it lies upon a complex representation of different timeframes. While Eastern European states remain depicted as targets of control in great power rivalry, the alternative approach is to acknowledge them as sovereign states who are no longer “fully controlled from the outside”, but have become independent negotiators – states amongst states. The “our historical land” does not “exist” in the present. It could be promoted that Ukraine is no more possessed by Russia and the so called “Kiev regime” is as much of “colleagues” to the Kremlin as are the so-called “Western colleagues”. Concepts of “sovereignty” and “self-determination” could be promoted to mean that Russia’s future is not dependent on that of “adjacent territories”. Each state or nation has their own independent future, and another state developing into its own direction does not have to cause a “permanent threat” to the development or existence of any other state. This could make the alleged “permanent threat” emerging from “territories adjacent to Russia” seem more as a product of imagination than evidence-based observation.

6.7 Self-problematization

As noted in chapter 5.9, a particular understanding of “nationalism” and “national defence” in the context of Eastern Europe underpins this analysis. It has been estimated that the end of the Cold War probably replaced the modern war between states and groups of states with other types of warfare related to different models of state transformation (Kaldor, 2003, p. 119). The US still has the capacity to act unilaterally, and it is the primary undertaker of spectacle warfare, where high-tech warfare is used against so-called rogue states sponsoring terrorism. That is also called risk-transfer war because the risk is transferred to local allies on the ground and to enemy forces and civilians. (Kaldor, 2003, pp. 123–125.)

This analysis, however, argues that in the context of Eastern Europe, the history of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union can’t be ignored. Ukraine should not be depicted merely as waging a “risk-transfer war” for the US. Adopting such a perspective would neglect the idea of Ukraine as sovereign. It would depict Ukraine merely as “a tool” of US foreign politics. In accordance to such a US centric worldview, it could also be easily argued that Ukraine is Russia’s “historical land” and thereby “belonging to” Kremlin.

The US centric or Russia centric perceptions are countered by this analysis, which argues that Russia should be recognized as one of the major regimes in the world with a long history as an empire. It is one of the five veto-power holding states in the UN. From this viewpoint, Russia and the US appear as “equals” in the contemporary world politics, while Ukraine appears as “unequal” to Russian Federation.

This analysis does not attempt to compare the legal grounds of the special military operation to any military campaign of NATO or the US. It remains for other research to assess the potential similarities in terms of international law. This analysis merely argues that the war can be depicted differently than that of “a spectacle war” waged by the US against Russia.

7 Conclusion

This thesis aims to discover how the strategic challenge is represented in the address given by the President of Russia on the February 24, 2022, and what discursive effects the representation is apt to have. The research question is how the President of Russia justifies the invasion of Ukraine.

The analysis suggests that the problem representation given by the president of the Russian Federation produces subjectification of minor states to the great power competition. It favors self-determination over international order. It neglects the central principles of territorial sovereignty of states. By attempting to improve the security of a great power, it makes neighboring states insecure. This security discourse appears to conflict with the central principles of the United Nations.

Further research may be done for understanding how the war in Ukraine is shaping the contemporary international order. The security discourse produced in the address could be reviewed for example against Galtung's structural theory of imperialism for understanding better the characteristics of Russia's security discourse.

Instead of the great power rivalry, attention could be directed to promoting of Ukraine's sovereignty and independency. The problem statement identified in this analysis assumes that NATO simply "expands" to Eastern Europe. What is left unproblematized is that Eastern European states apply for its membership voluntarily. Therefore, security in Eastern Europe and the war in Ukraine could be problematized from perspectives of the Eastern European states rather than simply depicting them as "tools" to great power competition between the US and Russia.

What comes to the social and ethical implications, this analysis does not intend to undermine Russia's security concerns or construct any image of Russia as enemy. This analysis is concerned merely with what implications the Russian invasion may have for international peace and security. People who did not make those decisions are not to be blamed.

Finally, it must be noted that this analysis concerns a problematization that was represented in 2022. It is possible that such problematizations have been replaced since then. It remains for future research to review more recent presidential addresses. In addition, the WPR analysis could be applied to the statements of other world leaders, to investigate the possible differences or similarities to the problem representation analyzed in this thesis.

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