

Russian Certainty of NATO Hostility: Repercussions in the Arctic

Julie Wilhelmsen* & Anni Roth Hjermmann
Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), Norway

Abstract

How does a security dilemma dynamic between parties deemed not to hold hostile intentions toward each other emerge and escalate? This article investigates Russian official discourse on NATO engagement in Europe post-Crimea (2014), and its impact on security interaction in the Arctic. We also examine how Russia represents NATO intentions and actions in a context seen by Russia as a relation of war. We identify the effect of these changing representations of self and other for the emerging securitization dilemma in relations between Russia and NATO, arguing that they have replaced uncertainty about NATO's hostile intentions with certainty. Although Russia still articulates the Arctic as a unique cooperative region, there may be little space left for non-conflictual Russian action when encountering NATO in the Arctic. We highlight the agency and importance of evolving political rhetoric in creating a dangerous situation where lethal conflict can occur between parties who do not seek it, and also suggest that adjustments to patterns of official speech could be a tool of mitigation.

Keywords: *Russia, NATO, security dilemma, discourse, Arctic*

Responsible Editor: Njord Wegge, Norwegian Defence University College, Norway

Received: July 2021; Accepted: December 2021; Published: March 2022

1 Introduction

After the Ukraine crisis and the annexation of Crimea, Russia and NATO seem locked in a pattern of escalating tension. With talk of a new Cold War, even an arms race, the re-militarization of Europe is underway, also in the Arctic. The low-tension space between Russia and NATO has rapidly been supplanted by military exercises, bases and installations, all growing in number and scope. Whereas security experts and bureaucracies on both sides have engaged in measuring

*Correspondence to: Julie Wilhelmsen, e-mail: jw@nupi.no

the “threat” in objective terms, often taking for granted the hostile intent of the adversary, this article examines how the understanding of the other as hostile and threatening has (re-) emerged. We see the social interaction between the parties as the fundamental driver in conflictual relations, with the material manifestations of such relations being re-armament and military posturing enabled by inimical identifications.

The spiral of rising tension in Europe is part of a broader Russia–West interaction pattern which can be theorized as a process of mutual and multifaceted securitization,¹ but we focus on Russia, investigating the changing identifications of NATO in the wider context of self/other representations in Russian official texts. We theorize and empirically investigate the changing pattern in post-Crimea official statements on the strategic adversary and how such general securitization spills over into Russia’s framing of NATO in the Arctic. Thereby we address a neglected aspect in discussions on the emerging Russia–West security dilemma(s): how uncertainty about the intent behind the other party’s military build-up² has dissolved and become certainty.

Some scholars see the basic objectives of NATO and Russia in the Arctic as defensive, and explain the “tragic” action/reaction pattern in military build-up now unfolding with reference to longstanding psychological, bureaucratic and political biases and assumptions,³ or a general lack of trust.⁴ While acknowledging that historical animosity is relevant, we disagree with both the weight that it is given, as well as shallow accounts of *how* today’s distrust is (re-) produced. We argue that the power of recent political speech – including rhetoric that invokes historical animosity – must be considered in explaining how parties replace strategic uncertainty about the intent behind the other party’s actions with *certainty* of hostile intent – thus contributing to the action/reaction dynamic involving military activities and potentially leading to armed conflict.⁵ Moreover, spillover of strategic certainty from one area (Ukraine/Black Sea) to another (Arctic) occurs as a result of a discursive process in which the Other has been naturalized as a total threat.

Empirically, our study contributes fresh insight into a main protagonist on the rapidly changing European scene, as well as how Russia’s expressed views on NATO might affect relations in the Arctic. The Arctic has long been considered a strategic low-tension zone, featuring cross-cutting institutions focused on non-military issue-areas, with agreement on the primacy of UNCLOS and a healthy mix of collaboration and competition in the energy field.⁶ Even immediately after the annexation of Crimea, Russia and NATO states remained “frenemies” in the Arctic,⁷ an area now increasingly dominated by great-power rivalry where Russia–NATO interactions are pivotal. Can the Arctic be “compartmentalized” and insulated from broader developments in Russia–West relations?⁸ By reviewing a large body of Russian official texts on NATO since 2014 and examining how relations in the Arctic are re-read in light of this broader discursive change, we indicate how compartmentalization could be challenged by Russian strategic certainty of NATO’s hostile intent.

We start by presenting our theoretical assumptions and methodology as to the relevance of changing official identifications for strategic certainty and geographical spillover (2). Then follows the result of our discourse analysis of Russian official texts. We detail how Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Ministry of Defense (MOD) statements represent the state of world affairs and NATO's role in creating it (3.1), NATO's nature and intentions (3.2), and NATO's actions (3.3). We show how "certainty" of NATO hostility is construed through this discourse, gradually becoming naturalized (3.4). Finally, we examine Russian statements on NATO and NATO states in the Arctic, to see whether this region can be insulated from the overarching Russia–NATO social dynamic, and to test our empirical expectation that the social construction of strategic certainty puts relations in the Arctic under pressure (3.5). The conclusions sum up the findings of our empirical analysis, linking them to the theoretical debate on how misplaced certainty originates (4).

2 Theory and methodology

The security dilemma in its classic articulations explains how defensive measures can lead to unintended consequences and unwanted conflict.⁹ As reformulated by Wivel in 2017, a security dilemma is "a situation in which actions taken by a state to increase its own security cause reactions from other states, which in turn lead to a decrease rather than an increase in the original states' security".¹⁰ Thus, one party's actions motivated by a desire for security could be perceived by the other as offensive and threatening. In line with recent scholarship, we propose a constructivist reading of the security dilemma as a suitable theoretical lens for grasping the basics of the new Russia–NATO rivalry in Europe and the Arctic. Like Van Rythoven¹¹ we contend that the dilemma's classical formulation, with its core elements of uncertainty, choice, and tragedy, gains analytical clout when informed by constructivist scholarship: we employ his reconceptualization of the securitization dilemma, highlighting social interaction, interpretation, and process. We show how Russia increasingly discounts uncertainty about the intentions behind NATO's activities, with the prospect of a tragic outcome, an unwanted conflict.

Reinterpreted with constructivist assumptions, the *uncertainty* of the security dilemma is not, as neorealism would posit, "a problem of lacking information about others' intentions".¹² Rather than trying to unveil intention as some intrinsic quality of the adversary, judging intention is a matter of interpretation.¹³ As Mitzen notes, "[s]tates do not have the final say in whether they are security-seekers".¹⁴ States come to "know" each other as friendly or hostile through social, discursive interaction. Official political speech that promotes an image of the other party as a threat can gradually naturalize assumptions of hostility,¹⁵ resulting in misplaced certainty¹⁶ and a powerful securitization dilemma.¹⁷ Intense and repeated political agitation describing the other as threatening misleads actors to discount uncertainty and fosters the epistemological hubris that they "know" their adversaries.

We see such a securitization dilemma in Russia–West relations where, as already suggested in the scholarly literature, the entrenched Russian worldview is that the West is threatening to destroy Russia (be it through communication or force deployment).¹⁸ Viewed through our discourse-theoretical lens, Russia’s contributions to the current spiral in military posturing and build-up become possible through the multitude of self/other representations in Russian official texts undergirding this worldview. Intersubjective, discursive formations such as self/other identifications enable and constrain the policies of the political entities that evoke them and the international relations these entities contribute to creating. Here we concur with claims made within a tradition now firmly established,¹⁹ including scholarship on Russian foreign/security policy.²⁰

Self/other discourses are complex grids of signification that evolve and change over time through new (explicit and implicit) identifications, as in official statements. Political units such as states can invoke a range of self/other identifications.²¹ Establishing which categories and patterns of self/other identifications emerge in official language is an empirical undertaking (see below), but we focus on linguistic constructions that identify the Other as a threat, including what level of difference and danger these constructions imply (whether the Other is highly *securitized*).²² Broad, stabilized discourses of threat will create strategic certainty through *naturalization*, whereby the close association – created in patterns of linguistic representations – between the other entity and hostility has become so ingrained that hostile actions and intentions are taken for granted as the true nature of the other party.²³

Regarding whether the Arctic can be compartmentalized from the evolving Russia–West conflict, our theoretical perspective foregrounds the power and content of identifications in official speech. Compartmentalization of any area – including the Arctic – requires that the threat to the Self in question is not construed as total. We hold that if a discursive construction of the other political entity is both *highly securitized* and *naturalized*, the threat will reach the level of total; it will then not make much difference *where* this political entity is encountered. Having reached such a threshold, the general hostile intent and posture ascribed to NATO elsewhere will spill over, shaping understandings of NATO activity in the High North.

We therefore theorize geographical spillover not as spillover per se but as a discursive effacing of any limits to the threat posed by the Other. We observe and present below such a discursive totalization of the threatening other in representations of NATO, nurtured in official Russian statements, as almost blindly expanding and inherently aggressive. Thus, whereas it was once possible for Russian official discourse to securitize NATO as part of the “Western interventionist Other” – a recurring securitization trope in the discourse also pre-Crimea²⁴ – and simultaneously compartmentalize the Arctic, a dramatically heightened level of securitization might preclude this possibility.

However, this discursive change takes place against a backdrop of continuity. We observe – as predicted by Jackson and Krebs²⁵ – that pre-existing rhetorical tropes act

as vehicles for this dissolution of a threat's boundedness. The view of "geopolitics" as a driving force behind NATO behaviour pre-dated the 2014 watershed (i.e. before the NATO threat came to be represented as total). Moreover, this very trope is, as we shall see, also a major carrier of threat in Russia's NATO discourse post-Crimea, contributing to the naturalization and spillover of strategic certainty into the Arctic. Likewise, established rhetorical tropes on the Arctic as a "uniquely collaborative space" with rule-abiding, cooperative and trustworthy actors could serve to constrain the image of hostility, if recirculated in official speech.

Three broader aspects related to flexibility, audience, and power in processes of discursive securitization are relevant for explaining why compartmentalization of the Arctic may become difficult. First, identifications of the Other in official speech tend to remain fairly consistent. As Krebs and Jackson argue, "rhetorical innovation, while possible and even inevitable in the long run, is far less likely in the short run.... coherent political action would be impossible if rhetorical universes were in a state of continuous deep flux. Relative rhetorical stabilities must emerge to permit the construction of political strategies ...".²⁶ This bounded character of official speech is related to the second point, on audience. A state leadership communicates with a domestic audience. Political leaders engage in ontological security production – i.e. the creation of a sense of continuity in a political community's selfhood– by invoking identifications of Self in contrast to Other(s), feeding society's need to know itself and how to act vis-à-vis other political communities.²⁷ A leadership that has heavily mobilized an identification of a significant Other (such as NATO) as hostile, thereby securing the sense of self (Russia), can hardly invoke contradictory identifications without losing credibility in the home audience. Third, the Schmittian logic which is unleashed in processes of high securitization – which implies that the cry *our security is threatened* allows the leadership to act "beyond rules that would otherwise bind" – ensures that security concerns are prioritized over other societal concerns in the polity.²⁸

All three points are particularly salient for today's Putinite state, where identifications in official and media discourse have become so one-sided and repetitive that scholars attach the label "propaganda" to Russian official rhetoric. We can hardly expect Russian official speech on NATO activities in the Arctic to be very different from such speech on other regions. Further, Russia's ontological security has been forged by official invocation of an existential threat: first in the form of "international terrorism," then increasingly in the form of the "West."²⁹ Thus, we expect that invoking social entities associated with the West as "hostile," also in connection with the Arctic, will foster the production of ontological security. Finally, in Putin's Russia the Schmittian logic has not been circumscribed by a democratic political system and is spreading unimpeded throughout the political system.³⁰

Based on these theoretical assumptions, we expect that official Russian discourse on NATO in the Arctic will evolve into a pattern of identification consistent with identifications of NATO elsewhere. As to the overall picture of Russia–West

relations, discourses of high threat such as those detected in our analysis delineate a boundary for acceptable action, making policies of military build-up and force logical and legitimate. In a next step – beyond the scope of our enquiry – it will be up to NATO and associated states to interpret whether such Russian actions are offensive or defensive. This judgement will be shaped by various factors, including how these political entities themselves have represented – spoken about – Russia in recent years. With this overarching theoretical approach, we highlight the importance of spoken language and how evolving political statements contribute to creating a dangerous strategic certainty that drives the action-reaction spiral upwards.

By warning about the prospect of tragedy should this course continue, we hope to contribute to a “securitization of securitization,” as “the fear of fear can in a specific sense be seen as a desecuritizing resource.”³¹ Placing agency in words, as we do in this study, does not relieve politicians of responsibility. Quite the opposite, rhetorical prudence might help to mitigate today’s securitization dilemma. *Restraining othering in official language* should be added to the list of suggested “mitigation modalities” in the literature.³²

2.1 Data and method

In order to study Russia’s official representations and sensemaking of NATO we scrutinized public documents from the Russian Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in the period 2014–2020. Despite the high level of propaganda in Russian official speech, studying *public* sources is epistemologically and ontologically crucial because our object of study – the effect of political speech – takes place in public.³³

Further, although texts from the MOD and MFA in this period do not exhaust the total body of speech by the Russian leadership, they do capture the main lines of reasoning on international affairs, including what role Russia and other major players, such as NATO, are said to have in these affairs. Texts from President Putin (retrieved from kremlin.ru) often address such questions, but usually align quite closely with representations in MFA texts and focus more on domestic politics. Texts from the MOD are useful because they focus on military affairs and we are interested in representations of NATO, while texts from the MFA allow us to place representations of NATO in the broader context of Russian foreign policy discourse as such. Importantly, studying evolving statements (speeches, explanations of military strategy, comments on current events, answers to journalist questions, etc.) instead of static official texts such as the foreign policy concept or the military doctrine, indicate how official speech changes, and potentially how representations of NATO as hostile become naturalized. We have merged the findings from MFA and MOD texts as a reflection of what we see as collective sensemaking in the Russian security policy leadership.

As we aimed to analyse the explicit representations of NATO in detail and over time, the quantitative *corporaexplorer* software³⁴ was used to retrieve bodies of texts

according to threshold criterion of “mentions of NATO”: 34 texts from the MOD with at least three mentions, and 122 MFA texts with a minimum of seven mentions. The reason for the different thresholds is that we needed to balance the size of the text bodies from these two agencies. Because MFA issues far more material, the MFA threshold is higher. MOD texts from 2017 onwards come from a slightly smaller sample – only texts by Minister of Defence Sergei Shoigu and Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov were analysed – due to technical issues. This latter text corpus is referred to in the notes as MODX, and the former two simply as MFA and MOD. For the review of Russian representations of NATO in the Arctic (3.5) we added a sample of MFA texts from 2020 and 2021 mentioning both “NATO” and “Arctic”. These texts were identified using the MFA website search engine. Due to the smaller size of this sample, all texts with a minimum of one mention of each term were included. These are referred to as MFAA. The numbers indicate specific texts, detailed in appendixes with dates and URL links.

Texts were submitted to in-depth discourse analysis in an analytical process focused on delineating the changing discursive landscape and the significant categories within it.³⁵ Given our focus on self/other identification patterns that might naturalize the notion of hostility (thus creating strategic certainty), we tracked explicit representations of NATO in the texts, with special attention to the level of difference and danger that these representations implied. This mapping relied on well-known analytical strategies in discourse analysis: identifying chains of equivalence and difference,³⁶ employing predicate analysis,³⁷ unearthing historical analogies and how certain binary oppositions structure meaning in the texts.³⁸

The categories that structure our empirical section have been derived through a hermeneutical process between theorizing and in-depth analysis of official texts. As noted by Fierke, “the danger of going to any particular set of texts with a range of predetermined categories for purposes of coding, as with content analysis, is that the world of analysis is limited from the start by the choices, and thus arguably the interpretation, of the analyst.”³⁹ Thus, whereas our discourse-theoretical reading of securitization directs us toward *identifications of the other* as empty categories (here specified in two subcategories: “NATO’s nature and intentions” and “NATO’s action”), the level of danger attached to such identifications and the content of the categories are derived through the reading of texts.

Moreover, while the empty categories “NATO’s nature and intentions” as well as “NATO’s actions” suggested themselves from our theory, the first category “The state of world affairs and NATO’s role in creating it” was initially less obvious. It emerged from our work with the texts, as follows: In reading the texts, we soon discovered that a core story-line in Russian official language that imbues “NATO” with a high danger-level is that the world is becoming increasingly dangerous and that NATO is the source of this development. Having noted this as a possible category, we analysed texts diachronically, to ascertain what the content of this description of world affairs amounted to in the entire body of texts, so that we could then revise

and specify the initial category “The state of world affairs and NATO’s role in creating it” into “A dangerous world, and NATO as its source”. Similarly, “NATO’s false offensive nature” was the most apt description of NATO’s nature and intentions as identified in the body of Russian official texts studied. The category “NATO’s hybrid toolkit” grasps the essence of Russian official representations of NATO’s actions. Here our method was a form of grounded theory in which analytical categories arising from data were considered empirically validated when new texts no longer gave rise to new or refined categories.⁴⁰

In sum, the three empirically and theoretically derived categories presented in sections 3.1–3.3 are taken as a means of measuring NATO *hostility* in Russian official speech, while the repetition and intensification of representations of hostility over time presented in 3.4 is a means of measuring *naturalization*. Together they provide a proxy for strategic certainty.

The criterion for selecting texts was mentioning NATO, but they were read in their entirety. A striking feature to emerge from our analysis is that “NATO”, “USA” and “West” are often used interchangeably and explicitly expressed as identical in Russian discourse (“saying NATO, you understand the USA”)⁴¹ – thereby collapsing these distinct actors into one social entity. We do not claim that these actors *are* the same – only that Russian official discourse construes them as such. This merging of a NATO identity with that of other social entities proved to be significant for the representation of *hostility*, as the level of danger attached to one of these actors immediately travels to the others. The discursive merging of different Western actors occurs throughout our body of texts on NATO in general and is reflected in our presentation in 3.1–3.4. Often NATO, the USA and the West are mentioned with only a slash (/) between them. In texts on NATO in the Arctic, which were read with an eye to replication and signs of spillover, Russian official discourse only partially reflects a unitary-opponent view of relations with various NATO countries. For example, Norway may be framed as a good neighbour with which Russia has productive cooperative relations, but as hostile when associated with NATO.⁴²

3 Empirical analysis

Here we turn to our findings from the discourse analysis of texts, ordered as follows: After presenting Russia’s image of world affairs as perilous and unstable, we show how NATO is projected as the source of this situation, in contrast to the just and orderly world that Russia is allegedly creating. We then explain how NATO’s very being and use of means are framed as hybrid, false and offensive, in contrast to Russia’s defensive posture, and how this identification of NATO is intensifying year by year.

This empirical account provides the “evidence” for our finding that the evolving Russian discourse constitutes the NATO Other as clearly different and dangerous to Russia. NATO is so highly securitized that the threat implied in the pattern of

identification is almost total (3.1–3.3). Further, while securitization of NATO is stable in the sense that there is always some level of threat attached, the threat seems to be ever-increasing. We see this surge as indicating naturalization: the dangerous climate created by NATO metastasizes from the epicentre in Ukraine to new events and spaces (3.4). In the final section we focus on official representations of NATO in the Arctic, showing how the general pattern of representation is replicated and informs Russian views of NATO and NATO states in the region (3.5).

3.1 A dangerous world, with NATO as its source

Official Russian texts stress that European and global stability and security are under threat; there is war in Ukraine and in the Middle East, and remilitarization and rising tensions in Europe. Several state collapses have paved the way for societal meltdown, terrorism and chaos. Particularly salient is the view of an unstable situation in which order could be replaced by chaos at any time: this description permeates the body of Russian official texts.⁴³

The main *source* of these intensifying crises seems to be NATO/USA/West. “Like lava from a volcano, demolishing on its way everything positive, accumulated over the past decade, Western countries are creating new dividing lines ... the international security system has been undermined by the actions of the US and its allies”.⁴⁴ Accordingly, the world is often said to be in a state of *controlled* instability – which springs, as explained below, from these entities’ hybrid or false nature as regards their intentions and activities.⁴⁵ The US “exclusivity” and “arrogant” approach to international law are “contagious bacteria” fostering terrorism and instability.⁴⁶

The picture of the dangerous world that NATO is contributing to create is constructed through juxtaposition to the alternative, safe world which Russia is held to build and represent: a multipolar world governed through a polycentric system. This ideal world requires the “formation of a common space for peace, security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area”, “the realisation of the principle of equal and indivisible security” and “the primacy of international law and the UN”.⁴⁷ In contrast to NATO, the OSCE is the “cornerstone of implementing equal and indivisible security”.⁴⁸ This is a world with a “balance of interests and compromises” rather than “force and aggression”⁴⁹ where “everyone has the right to express their point of view”⁵⁰ – in short a “new and more just world order”.⁵¹ In MOD texts this alternative order is said to be “gaining traction”.⁵² The MFA also notes that, post-Crimea, enmity has become an anomaly, as the “objective trend” is problem-solving through “collective efforts”.⁵³ Russia has hopes that “pragmatism in the interests of international and European security” can penetrate the “NATO system”.⁵⁴ However, in June 2018, the MFA noted an “increasingly clear” “contradiction” between the West seeking to maintain dominance and “the objectively strengthening multipolarity”.⁵⁵

This overarching narrative of current world affairs shows how NATO and the wider Western social entity subsumed under it are cast as the offensive and hostile sources of chaos and conflict – juxtaposed to Russia, fighting to defend a just and

stable world. Let us now turn to NATO's hostility as detailed in Russian official texts.

3.2 NATO as hostile and deceptive by nature

From Russian representations, we suggest that it is their diagnosis of NATO/USA/West's very *nature* that makes this entity look so hostile. The Western antagonist is construed as a Janus-faced actor, ostensibly value-oriented but ultimately driven by "colonial thinking"⁵⁶ and the unceasing desire for geopolitical expansion,⁵⁷ seeking "to glue [...] more and more geopolitical space" to itself⁵⁸ – motives that are clearly offensive. This representation is achieved through the frequent use of expressions such as "*posing* as defenders of democracy and human rights", "*allegedly* accidental shelling of civilians",⁵⁹ "citing far-fetched *pretexts* for *allegedly* necessary protection",⁶⁰ and the repeated use of adjectives such as *artificial*. For example: "NATO has a policy of artificially whipping up the situation;"⁶¹ the Ukraine situation is "artificially inflated from outside".⁶² The Russian leadership advances the dichotomy of NATO as saying one thing and doing the opposite: NATO "declarations", "solemn promises", "on paper", "words" repeatedly contradict "actual fact" and "practice"⁶³ – for instance by *proclaiming* freedom of choice but in *practice* forcing countries to choose the West, and *saying* "security for all" but in *practice* building only their own security.⁶⁴

In Russian discourse, NATO's front – including its talk of "fair democracy" and "human rights" and unfounded accusations towards Russia – constitutes a *smoke-screen* hiding its ulterior motive of geopolitical gains; the US "rhetoric of moral values" is "only on *the surface*. Of course, there is a big battle going on".⁶⁵ "Real facts are hushed up" and "accusations made to divert attention".⁶⁶ Conflict is created from nothing by "instrumentalizing"⁶⁷ and "speculating" in universal values.⁶⁸ To Russia, NATO's values are fake, but its hostility is real. The Kremlin sees offensive geopolitics as the primordial driving force at NATO's core – a posture described as "genetic" and a reflex.⁶⁹ It is NATO's "desire" that the course to deter Russia be "irreversible".⁷⁰ Moreover, NATO is seen as unpredictable: it may undertake hostile acts at any time for no reason. Indeed: "people should be prepared for [...] someone in Washington waking up the next morning in a bad mood and deciding to start a coup d'état in yet another place".⁷¹ NATO is "archaic",⁷² "full of emotions",⁷³ and "acts without explaining the reasons".⁷⁴

Underscoring our point that today's distrust is (re-) produced *inter alia* through rhetoric that invokes historical animosity, we find NATO's deceptive nature reconstituted through multiple references to broken promises at the end of the Cold War. Many of these construe the above-mentioned opposition between NATO's words and practice. In the present situation of renewed conflict, rhetoric lamenting Russia's past naïveté conveys the view that NATO was always guided by hostile intent. Recalling 1990, when Western leaders allegedly promised that NATO would not move "an inch" to the East, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov

in February 2018 concludes that “the so-called ‘gentlemen’s agreement’ which was reached, was, in fact, trampled upon by our Western colleagues. Probably, in the future we will try to better understand who is a gentleman, and who is not”.⁷⁵ Moreover, official statements assert a Cold War “*déjà-vu*”⁷⁶ and persistent Cold War thinking and rhetoric in the West.⁷⁷ These references to Cold War rivalry make it self-evident that NATO today harbours malign intentions.

The picture emerging from our analysis is that the official Russian NATO discourse is a conspiracy theory (conceived in a common-sense way): it holds that NATO is the vehicle in an anti-Russia plot in which the USA pulls all the strings. In this conspiracy discourse, NATO as an organization has very limited agency: it is sometimes described as merely an “instrument” that can be “moved” to sow division and build walls.⁷⁸ Agency lies with the USA; NATO is the Americans’ “powerful tool” for “strong influence in Europe”.⁷⁹ The USA “decides the bloc discipline”, “makes all the decisions in NATO”.⁸⁰ *Russia* is targeted: the “thesis” of “Russian aggression” features prominently in this conspiracy theory. Indeed, “anti-Russian attitudes [...] are born in Washington [...] and then implemented in Europe within the framework of the notorious ‘transatlantic solidarity’”.⁸¹

The pervasive notion of secrecy and hidden agendas bolsters such conspiracy thinking; “But when our Western partners put forward the slogan ‘either with us or against us’, addressing it to our neighbours, including the countries of the former USSR, this is actually a *veiled* way to turn someone into an enemy”.⁸² The sense of coordination exemplified here by MFA spokesperson Maria Zakharova in July 2016 hints at conspiracy: “like in a good orchestra, many Western countries, practically on a daily basis, accuse Russia of threatening someone”.⁸³ Someone must be conducting the “orchestra” – the USA is implied. As we see it, this logic of conspiracy eradicates any uncertainty as to intent, thus serving as an important mechanism by which the strategic Other is established as hostile.

In sum, the pattern of representations above projects NATO as inevitably hostile *by nature*. This identification is achieved through the mix of predicates, historical analogies and discursive juxtapositions and mergers. It contributes to constituting NATO as dangerous to Russia in a totalizing way. Given this basic identification, how then does Russia present NATO’s activities in the world since 2014?

3.3 NATO’s hybrid toolkit

Casting NATO as deceptive and ruthless by nature conditions how the MOD and MFA assess NATO’s activities. Note also that, through our discourse-theoretical lens, the nature of NATO and its use of means are seen as co-constitutive, in the sense that the elaboration of a specifically *Western* way of warfare (outlined below) reinforces the image of NATO’s hostile nature.

A core concern in Russian texts is how NATO/USA/West installs governments favourable to US foreign policy goals and can dictate the terms of other countries’ policies through an overarching strategy of instigating “colour revolutions”.⁸⁴ Here,

the NATO/US/Western approach centres on “imposing block status”⁸⁵ and “values”⁸⁶ on other nations, under the “guise of spreading democracy” and by playing to socioeconomic problems. Armed struggle, fought “according to the art of war”,⁸⁷ is indicated as part of the colour revolution approach, intensifying this “destructive process”.⁸⁸ After forcibly removing legitimate national governments, the NATO/USA/West can enjoy unhindered access to the resources in these states. Colour revolutions – an “*evil*” employed by the West to “achieve political and economic goals”⁸⁹ – serve to *create* civil war, tension and chaos. Indeed, conditions in countries that have experienced military aggression in the classical sense and in those that have experienced “colour revolutions” are practically identical.⁹⁰

The established truth is that NATO’s dangerous means may involve *anything* from playing to the popular “protest potential”,⁹¹ “organizing “fifth columns”,⁹² issuing “ultimatums”,⁹³ or using traditional military means and “information war”.⁹⁴ The latter features strongly and is said to take place in both traditional and social media,⁹⁵ where it is repeatedly invoked in expressions such as “propaganda”,⁹⁶ “the active use of double standards”,⁹⁷ “influencing public opinion”,⁹⁸ “unleashing anti-Russian hysteria in the press”,⁹⁹ and claims that Russia is “made an enemy”¹⁰⁰ through “traditional stories of aggressive Russians”.¹⁰¹

The increased allied presence in Eastern Europe post-Crimea is a grievance oft repeated in official Russian statements. That NATO has justified this presence with “a far-fetched ‘threat from the East’” confirms both the belligerent character of NATO’s advances and its dual nature. The reality of NATO’s “Eastern flank” presence – “the steps actually (*realno*) taken by NATO” – is the quest to dominate, “testifying to attempts to change the existing balance of power in Europe”.¹⁰² NATO enlargement features as a further key measure in the Western offensive,¹⁰³ with its post-Cold War expansion represented as “a provocation”.¹⁰⁴ With the entry of new states such as Montenegro in the post-Crimea period, official rhetoric strongly hints at anti-Russian conspiracy; NATO’s real intention, “to besiege (*oblozhit*)” countries that disagree with NATO, like Russia and Serbia, is “hidden behind general phrases” on increased “space for security and democracy”.¹⁰⁵ With North Macedonia preparing to join, MFA notes “manic constructions” as “a cover for the accelerated pulling of the Balkan states into the North Atlantic Alliance”,¹⁰⁶ coupling NATO enlargement with the alleged pervasive information war.

It is this *combination* of different means, the hybrid character of NATO’s toolbox, that fosters the intense securitization of NATO. Large-scale exercises and military build-up close to the Russian border *combine* with false claims of Russian “aggression” or “threat” and NATO “restraint”,¹⁰⁷ “spinning the flywheel of anti-Russian sentiment in order to justify plans [... to] increase NATO’s military presence near Russia’s borders”.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, NATO is dangerous due to its willingness to exploit *any crisis* in order to contain Russia; “If there were no Crimea and South-Eastern Ukraine, the West would have come up with something else. The goal is set: to bring Russia out of balance at any cost”.¹⁰⁹ Thus, the MFA sees NATO/USA/West

as generally instrumentalizing any situation through “politicization”¹¹⁰ or “ideologization”,¹¹¹ converting any business-like and possibly benign interaction into an anti-Russian geopolitical battle.

In sum, according to the Russian script, the hybrid Western toolkit includes any means available – be it cooperation with terrorists in Syria or “the bad guys” in Ukraine,¹¹² their customary “double standards”,¹¹³ or NATO enlargement and military build-up, which will be put to use against Russia whenever possible.

In contrast to NATO’s deceptive and malign behaviour, texts construe Russia’s own ways as open and benign. Russia would be “ashamed” to act like the USA, forcing its will upon others.¹¹⁴ Russia wants “mutually beneficial”, respectful cooperation based on “natural” and “lawful” interests (especially economic),¹¹⁵ or, in the security field, “natural alliances” such as CSTO in the case of Afghanistan.¹¹⁶ The Kremlin is “willing to cooperate with anybody”¹¹⁷ and “always ready for dialogue,”¹¹⁸ including with NATO member states.¹¹⁹ Its approach includes “finding compromise solutions” and “protecting civilians”,¹²⁰ and settling crises through “political and diplomatic measures”.¹²¹ Unlike NATO, Russia does not engage in fostering enemy images.¹²² As tensions in Europe rise, it is Russia, not NATO, that has noted the need “to resume cooperation between Russia and NATO in order to resolve the accumulated problematic issues”.¹²³ Russia is pragmatic, full of good will¹²⁴ and shuns politicization, focusing instead on “purely technical aspects”.¹²⁵

Any Russian measures in the economic sphere are said to be merely *counter-measures*.¹²⁶ Moscow does not want to break off relations with NATO, but “had no choice” but to recall Russia’s chief military representative to NATO in 2014.¹²⁷ As Russia carries out formidable militarization on its own side of the re-emerging East/West fault-line, these activities are consistently portrayed in MOD texts as “transparent” and conducted according to the rules, in “full openness”.¹²⁸ Any new military activities – be they expanding or establishing new military bases, initiating snap military exercises, large-scale military exercises, long-range aviation aircraft flights or developing missiles to neutralize threats such as the missile defence system – are said to be “in response”,¹²⁹ “retaliatory measures”¹³⁰, or “forced” by the activities of the other party.¹³¹ With this framing, even the modernization of the nuclear weapons arsenal, the development of high-precisions weapons and intensive combat training become necessary, defensive measures.¹³²

In MOD texts, everything Russia does is juxtaposed with NATO activities, routinely projected or directly characterized as “defensive”.¹³³ Somewhat vaguely, MFA holds that Russia acts in a “mirror manner”, “always responds” but never “initiates action”.¹³⁴ It takes “all necessary measures”¹³⁵ and “has every opportunity” to neutralize nuclear threats¹³⁶ – given what NATO/USA/West has first done against Russia.¹³⁷ Both agencies indicate that Russia ultimately *has no choice* in relation to NATO: it is forced to mirror NATO enmity and buildup.

In sum, MOD and MFA represent *any* NATO activity after the war in Ukraine as highly dangerous, a pattern consistent with representations of the *nature of NATO*.

Again, this framing is achieved through a set of linguistic practices that systematically place NATO in a subject position as hostile and offensive, juxtaposed against a benign and defensive Russia.

3.4 NATO danger rising

Russian representations of a dangerous world created by NATO (and other Western actors), together with the implicit and explicit identification of NATO's nature and activities as highly versatile and hostile, indicate that NATO is *highly securitized*. Moreover, this identification has become *naturalized* in the years after 2014. Unequivocal statements on the hostile intent of NATO/US/West have accumulated as NATO's "return" to Europe has unfolded after 2014.¹³⁸ We note the diachronic development in how new military exercises, installations and troop deployments, as well as pre-Crimea NATO activities, are framed and linked into a chain of hostile acts committed by NATO. Non-military measures, including restrictions on diplomats and sanctions against Russia imposed by the West in spring 2014, are automatically included in this chain.¹³⁹ With 2014 drawing to an end, Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov sums up the unstable world by referring to "a number of leading Western countries stirring up 'colour revolutions' while simultaneously building up military hardware and capabilities in Europe".¹⁴⁰

In March 2015, the MFA reacts to "the rapid militarization"¹⁴¹ of Eastern Europe seen in Operation Atlantic Resolve¹⁴² and Washington's talk of "frontline states",¹⁴³ voicing "serious questions" about US and NATO plans.¹⁴⁴ In April 2015, MOD concludes that NATO expansion "to the east ... of Russia's borders", the possible incorporation of former Soviet countries and the "sharp increase in NATO military activity", acquiring a "systematic character" – coupled with exerting "political and economic pressure" – paint an alarming picture.¹⁴⁵ Also in spring 2015 (and later) Russia frames nuclear weapons into the toolbox, with references to the testing of B61-12 bombs in Nevada and allegations of potential US efforts to use these in Europe and get non-nuclear members involved in nuclear missions.¹⁴⁶

The idea of NATO hostility as being out in the open emerges, contributing to a naturalization of hostility as being self-evident. NATO's "military-political 'containment' of Russia" is described as an "open course" in April 2016,¹⁴⁷ and it is allegedly fully disclosed by January 2017 that "the coup in Kiev [...] put everything in its place" for the USA and NATO, paving the way for anti-Russian sanctions and not least military advance.¹⁴⁸ In April 2017, Gerasimov frames developments in Europe as "gradually transforming from the most stable and militarily calm region into a zone of increased tension and confrontation" as a consequence of the combination of NATO accumulating "offensive weapons along the entire Russia–NATO contact line" and continued efforts to ignite the "unresolved conflict in Ukraine" by providing military assistance to Ukraine.¹⁴⁹

Increasingly, post-Cold War history is reinterpreted to show that NATO aggressiveness towards Russia never ceased. In June 2017, Lavrov asserts NATO's

anti-Russian posture as a constant, albeit varying in intensity. Events post-1991 are presented as mere “preparations” for the current encroachment on Russian borders.¹⁵⁰ In this construction of continuity since Cold War times, we note a change from earlier statements. In November 2015, Lavrov clearly expressed that the enmity from the West was a novelty: “...political attitudes are being made to consider Russia as an enemy. This has not happened since the Cold War, and we have developed a partnership with NATO”.¹⁵¹

With every year – 2018, 2019, 2020 – more and more NATO activities are given alarmist interpretations. In 2018, the focus is on how Sweden and Finland are drawn into NATO structures, how new cyber-operation centres are being established in Finland, Estonia, Poland, Germany and France, how systems for the early storage of weapons and property are being created in Europe, how the INF Treaty is being “destroyed”,¹⁵² and how the “forced pulling of Macedonia into NATO” “confirms” NATO’s open door policy as a tool “for mastering geopolitical space”.¹⁵³ In December 2019, worries are voiced about the renewal of the START agreement, on top of the established and growing list of Russian grievances.

In 2020, Gerasimov alleges that on August 2, 2019, “under a far-fetched pretext”, Washington unilaterally withdrew from the INF Treaty – proof that the true goal of the USA was to remove bans and restrictions on building up its missile capabilities. Confirmation came with the Pentagon’s test launch of a cruise missile from a ground-based mobile launcher to a range of over 500 km, conducted two weeks after the termination of the INF Treaty. Gerasimov adds that, during the NATO summit held in London (3–4 December 2019) “Russia is assigned the status of an enemy”. Enumerating new NATO initiatives in 2019, he notes:

... the scenarios point to *NATO’s deliberate preparation for the deployment of its troops in a large-scale military conflict*. At the same time, the Western allies are promoting the thesis of the so-called Russian military threat. Any step by Russia in the field of ensuring its military security, any planned and transparently conducted event to build an army and navy, every exercise is unambiguously presented as a “threat to peace” by Western propagandists and fake media.¹⁵⁴

With this evolution in Russian statements, we may conclude that Russia expresses increasing certainty of NATO hostility – to the point where it becomes a truism that NATO’s anti-Russian course is a manifest reality that encompasses all activities by the alliance. Moreover, the military component of NATO’s offensive is progressively given more weight in Russian official texts.

We would hold that the structure (in content) and growing intensity (in numbers) in Russian representations of NATO activities uncovered in our analysis indicates a discursive *naturalization* of NATO as highly threatening. Finally, then, we ask: does this galloping securitization of NATO/USA/West affect Russian representations of NATO in the Arctic, challenging the historical compartmentalization of this region as one of “peaceful interaction”?

3.5 Spillover: NATO in the Arctic and Arctic relations

Given the finding that NATO hostility has been naturalized as near-total in Russian official statements since 2014, we would expect the general hostile intent and posture ascribed to NATO elsewhere to spill over, shaping understandings of NATO in the Arctic. Here we seek to uncover whether the pattern of identification of NATO elsewhere is replicated in Russian statements on NATO in the Arctic region. We also investigate whether the established discourse on the Arctic as a “uniquely collaborative space” is reiterated and whether (or not) it restrains the securitization of NATO or the level of hostility attached to diverse Western actors in this region.

In Russian representations of the Arctic we find a dual pattern; on the one hand, resistance to securitization emanating from the discourse on the Arctic as a cooperative space with cooperative actors; on the other, full “contamination” in terms of NATO hostility. Tellingly, despite many references to NATO in a range of contexts in these Arctic texts, we have not encountered a single instance where NATO is mentioned in *non-hostile* terms. Further, there is evident replication in the representations of NATO across the three analytical categories outlined above.

While the Baltic region is identified as being subjected to “militarization” before the Arctic,¹⁵⁵ in April 2015 this region is actively framed as part of the *new dangerous world* which NATO is creating. Defence Minister Shoigu notes that “with the geographical concentration of the NATO exercise areas, exclusively on the eastern flank of the alliance and the Arctic region ... the alliance has dropped its propaganda clichés of past years about cooperation with Russia”.¹⁵⁶ NATO/USA are repeatedly identified as the sole source of this new situation, for instance: “Speaking about potential sources of mounting tensions in the region, it would be logical to consider the United States and its allies’ military activities in the Arctic that go hand-in-hand with belligerent rhetoric. In fact, NATO and NATO member states, including non-Arctic countries, are carrying out provocations there and are doing so on an increasingly regular basis”.¹⁵⁷

The notion of NATO’s *false nature* is also prominent: NATO is alleged to be consistently dishonest in its statements, “turning the facts on their head”.¹⁵⁸ NATO’s Janus-faced nature is reinforced when Russia declares that statements and policies in the Arctic are “based on completely perverse facts on an imaginary Russian threat” to justify its own existence.¹⁵⁹ NATO is also renegeing on old promises and agreements, such as the 1997 Russia–NATO Founding Act and the Norwegian policy of ‘self-imposed restraints’.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, the representation of NATO as *necessarily* offensive is recirculated, including by use of the geopolitics trope, in claims such as “The North Atlantic Alliance [has] set eyes on the Arctic as an area for its long-term military plans and interests, while the activities of the NATO member states in the Arctic region are increasingly becoming systemic and provocative thus transforming the Arctic into a ground of geopolitical competition”.¹⁶¹ The latter statement also shows that the conspiracy-theory view of NATO/West is manifest in the Arctic. Concerted efforts are allegedly being made by NATO and its Arctic members to

dismantle the state of cooperative and peaceful relations in the Arctic while simultaneously asserting a more hostile military posture. Russia is on the receiving end of this conspiracy.¹⁶²

NATO's *hybrid ways* are restated when NATO's statements on the need for deterrence in the Arctic are described as a "... corruption of logic, facts, common sense, or any idea of decency and respect ..." and when NATO activities in the region are repeatedly referred to as 'provocations' close to Russia's borders.¹⁶³ Such statements reflect deep concern about *any* NATO manoeuvre in the Arctic. Every new development is noted by the MOD and painted as yet another dangerous move against Russia.¹⁶⁴ Symptomatically, a specific grievance like the US rotational bases in Norway in July 2018 is cited as evidence of a larger trend of increased "tension and destabilization of the situation in the northern region ..., an element of the US-led military preparations, which have intensified against the background of anti-Russian propagandist hysteria".¹⁶⁵ Indeed the presence of NATO in the Arctic is presented as destabilising and hostile: "... we are convinced that these wargames as well as the general build-up of NATO's military presence in the high latitudes by no means facilitate the strengthening of peace and stability in the Arctic".¹⁶⁶

Arctic peace and stability are constantly invoked in Russian discourse, whereas the NATO Other is routinely projected as a rising threat to this unique area. Thus, rather than contributing to halt the securitization of NATO in the Arctic, Russia's invoking of the peace and stability trope while juxtaposing it to NATO's nature and activities creates the opposite effect. Moreover, in these texts *Russia* is construed as the protector of peace and stability, in line with its law-abiding, benign and defensive nature – in alleged contrast to NATO, thereby underlining NATO hostility. For example, "... the Russian Navy ... complies with international law without creating any security threats for Norway".¹⁶⁷ "Everything Russia is doing there is absolutely legal."¹⁶⁸ Russian efforts to augment its own military forces in the region are presented as merely responding to NATO's efforts at containment.¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, Russia sees itself as trying to defuse tensions in the region, but its efforts are ignored and frustrated by a NATO that is unwilling to alter its course: "We have proposed discussing issues of mutual concern on numerous occasions. Regrettably, we do not see any response".¹⁷⁰

Beyond the highly securitized and naturalized Russian representation of NATO as hostile in the Arctic, what of the Arctic NATO states? While the cooperative baseline still frames such individual countries to some extent, their increasing engagement with(in) NATO leads to overall representations of them as hostile. Norway, for example, has figured as a "good neighbour" in connection with bi- and multilateral cooperation, such as a 2010 maritime delimitation agreement.¹⁷¹ Increasingly, however, Norway is identified as a loyal and eager NATO member – and thereby partially conflated with it being an unreliable and hostile agent that threatens Russia from all directions. Examples include allowing US forces to deploy to Norway for extended rotation periods, or hosting NATO exercises or NATO nuclear

submarines.¹⁷² Norway's signing a bilateral defence cooperation agreement with the USA in April 2021 is seen as "fully in line with the policy of military build-up and an active involvement of NATO in the Arctic"... "We regard such activities, especially in direct proximity to the Russian border, as Oslo's deliberate and destructive line towards aggravating tensions in the Euro-Arctic region and destroying Russian-Norwegian relations".¹⁷³

Norway is further included in the hostile NATO sphere through statements such as "The territory of Norway has been turned into a bridgehead for NATO's advance to the Arctic".¹⁷⁴ The image of a "false" NATO/Norway is evident in expressions such as "The statements made by Norway's political authorities about their *alleged* desire to maintain good relations with Moscow [which] contradict the country's *actual* destructive policy of deterrence against Russia".¹⁷⁵ Clearly, the words/actions dichotomy firmly established in Russian discourse on NATO as such (see section 3.2) have travelled into the discourse on Norway and the Arctic. Given such alleged Norwegian dishonesty in their relations, Russia "will have to take this into account when making national security plans".¹⁷⁶ Thus, although Norway still has a dual identification, it is increasingly construed as a hostile actor and its Arctic territory as hostile ground. In view of such mounting strategic certainty, new national security plans will be made on the Russian side.

Norway is not the only NATO country with a dual identification. If MFA statements are taken at face value, Russia is not certain about US hostile intent as regards the Arctic: In February 2019 Lavrov states that he "do[es] not know" whether the USA wants conflict in the Arctic, but that he "very much hope[s]" that the American "habit" of "aggravating relations ... will not manifest itself in the Arctic".¹⁷⁷ In fact, the USA is often framed in positive terms in connection with certain events and initiatives, as in a press release on a Russian-American Pacific Partnership meeting – but this holds only for non-military issues.¹⁷⁸ Likewise regarding the UK: for example, statements on commemorations of the WWII Arctic Convoys include phrases such as "Russia will always remember with gratitude how the anti-Hitler coalition members extended a helping hand to the Soviet Union".¹⁷⁹ Similar historical sentiments are expressed about Norway in relation to commemorations of the 1944/1945 liberation of Finnmark, where Foreign Minister Lavrov declared himself "really touched by their attention".¹⁸⁰ Representations of hostility are tempered by the recirculation in official Russian speech of historical events that bind Russia and several NATO members together as brothers in arms facing the existential Nazi threat – in contrast to the previously noted Cold War analogies.

As to representations of the Arctic as such, the majority of MFA statements continue to emphasize international cooperation and economic opportunities in this region.¹⁸¹ The Arctic Council is still said to be "a very useful organization" and "probably one of the few structures that is not affected by geopolitical squabbles".¹⁸² Our concern is that although individual Arctic NATO countries still enjoy dual identification as "frenemies", the latter part of this identification is accentuated. We

would hold that this kind of identification encourages Russia to assume NATO-country hostility in a cooperative area like the Arctic and in the Arctic Council, now and in the near future: the logic of the MFA and MOD establishes hostility/cynicism as the safest bet. Indeed, recent Russian statements indicate that cooperation in the Arctic Council is under pressure from the “strategic certainty” of NATO hostility: “This desire to militarize the Arctic and use the region for implementing the notorious policy of containing Russia causes legitimate concerns. Unfortunately, the facts of the Arctic Council member states’ participation in these military actions are piling up. We believe that this conduct does little to maintain an atmosphere of trust and cooperation between the Arctic countries”.¹⁸³ We might be facing a smothering Russian ability to distinguish the Western Arctic Council countries from the hostile face of NATO. With such conflation distrust can spill over and effect relations in the Arctic Council.

4 Conclusions

Our empirical analysis in 3.1-3.4 shows that Russian official discourse in the years following the conflict in Ukraine construes NATO as “genetically” set on grabbing ever more geopolitical space while claiming to seek security for all states. Russia generally represents NATO as a two-faced actor, hiding its true agenda of incessant expansion behind the “invented” “thesis” of Russian threat and distractions like “instrumentalized” universal values. This idea of a false West hiding the real reasons for its value agenda has deep roots in Russian thinking.¹⁸⁴ Our analysis shows that this view fundamentally structures Russia’s interpretation of NATO, in turn illustrating how discursive change – the making of hostility through intense securitization and naturalization – takes place on the background of continued, long-nurtured rhetorical tropes.

Our analysis has also shown how all spheres and actions are entangled, seen as part of NATO’s war-like campaign targeting Russia. The Russian leadership conflates Russia-critical statements and conventional military build-up into a single package of hostility. We conclude that MOD and MFA representations post-Crimea attach a near-total level of danger to NATO and associated Western others. Here we wish to emphasize the extreme density and repetitive nature of these representations in our material. They confirm previous scholarly claims that the entrenched worldview in the Kremlin is that the West with NATO is threatening to destroy Russia.¹⁸⁵ Our study has shown how such a worldview is constructed through official statements on a day-to-day basis, becoming naturalized. Further, the overall impression is that Russia deems conspiracy as the signature tune of both NATO and the USA. The “lesson learned” as per official speech post-Crimea thus seems to be that Russia should never trust NATO promises again – anywhere.

From our analysis of texts on NATO in the Arctic we find that the dramatically heightened level of securitization of this Western antagonist is almost fully replicated

in this polar region. We cannot ignore the pattern of representation of NATO as hostile by nature, with its every move in the Arctic as the next step in a planned offensive against Russia. This image is achieved through use of predicates, juxtapositions of selves and others (Russia *embodies* cooperative Arctic in the face of NATO threat), the recirculation of rhetorical tropes of enmity and discursive merger of social entities that might have been framed as distinct and “friendly”. By these mechanisms, relations with individual Arctic NATO states are increasingly rephrased through the prism of NATO hostility, with Norway as a prime example.

Although our findings may indicate the impossibility of compartmentalizing the Arctic away from rising Russia–NATO enmity, our material also shows Russian resistance to the securitization of relations in this region – as when interactions and institutions in the Arctic are recirculated as benign encounters and arenas or when official language invokes dual identifications of NATO countries, using historical tropes or predicates of amity. Indeed, the discursive lumping together of different Western political entities into one hostile agent is not complete in the Arctic context.

Entering these findings into the framework and debate about the securitization dilemma, locating them as part of a broader Russia–West interaction pattern, addresses several questions. As to how misplaced certainty about the other party’s intent emerges, we suggest that Russia *creates* certainty about NATO’s hostility through the way it repeatedly and with increasing fervour speaks of this political entity. Moreover, with NATO’s growing European presence and concerns over the “Russian threat”, Russian leaders increasingly indicate that the West’s previously hidden agenda is now out in the open. This “uncovering” cements the view of NATO’s intent as undeniably hostile.

As to the question of distrust, so often said to be the driver of security dilemma dynamics, we hold that the power of *spoken* words is underrated.¹⁸⁶ Although assessing such emotional qualities is beyond the reach of our methodology, we would highlight the contingent nature of trust – thus rejecting distrust between Russia and NATO as something given and unchanging. The historical animosity between Russia and NATO does matter for the growing securitization dilemma in the Arctic and elsewhere in Europe, because political speakers *make* it matter – for example, by repeatedly re-inserting Cold War references into the debate and re-phrasing Cold War relations as sheer hostility. Also, trust can be rebuilt, by imagining and giving voice to positive identifications of and cooperative experiences with the Western Others. Here the Arctic has a clear potential, but that can be realised only if political actors decide to act.

As our study has shown, the constant invoking of NATO activity as hostile in contrast to Russia’s allegedly reactive and defensive posture serves as the core legitimizing argument for the upgrading and modernization of the Russian military – already a practical reality. However, in facing this practical reality it will be up to NATO, not Russia, to judge the underlying intentions. Here emerges the larger picture of a downwards spiralling of mutual securitization between two actors who both

claim to be seeking security only. On this background, we feel that holding back the rhetorical trench war is a necessary step toward mitigating tragedy (in the security dilemma sense). For these representations matter beyond the nuisance of a loud and aggressive Russia–West conversation – they matter in order to avoid a military conflict that neither side wants.

References

- Åtland, Kristian. “Interstate Relations in the Arctic: An Emerging Security Dilemma?” *Comparative Strategy* 33, no. 2 (2014): 145–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01495933.2014.897121>
- Åtland, Kristian, and Ihor Kabanenko. “Russia and Its Western Neighbours: A Comparative Study of the Security Situation in the Black, Baltic and Barents Sea Regions.” *Europe-Asia Studies* 72, no. 2 (2020): 286–313. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2019.1690634>
- Balton, David. “Can the US and Russia Return to Co-operation in the Arctic?” *Global Asia* 15, no. 4 (December 2020): 34–38.
- Booth, Ken, and Nicholas J. Wheeler. *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Boulègue, Mathieu, and Duncan Depledge. “New Military Security Architecture Needed in the Arctic.” *Chatham House*, May 4, 2021. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/05/new-military-security-architecture-needed-arctic>
- Buzan, Barry, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde. *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998.
- Campbell, David. *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*. Rev. ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.
- Clunan, Anne L. *The Social Construction of Russia’s Resurgence: Aspirations, Identity, and Security Interests*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009. <https://doi.org/10.1353/book.3410>
- Der Derian, James. *On Diplomacy: A Genealogy of Western Estrangement*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1987.
- Doty, Roxanne Lynn. *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Dunn, Kevin C., and Iver B. Neumann. *Undertaking Discourse Analysis for Social Research*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016.
- Epstein, Charlotte. *The Power of Words in International Relations: Birth of an Anti-Whaling Discourse*. MIT Press, 2008.
- “Fact Sheet: U.S. Army Europe and Africa Support to Atlantic Resolve.” U.S. Army Europe and Africa, July 6, 2021. https://www.europeafrica.army.mil/Portals/19/documents/Fact%20Sheets/AtlanticResolveFactSheet_07062021.pdf
- Fierke, K. M. *Critical Approaches to International Security*. Cambridge: Polity, 2007.
- Fridman, Ofer. *Russian “Hybrid Warfare”: Resurgence and Politicisation*. London: Hurst, 2018.
- German, Tracey. “Harnessing Protest Potential: Russian Strategic Culture and the Colored Revolutions.” *Contemporary Security Policy* 41, no. 4 (October 1, 2020): 541–63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2020.1757251>
- Gjerde, Kristian Lundby. “Corporaexplorer: An R Package for Dynamic Exploration of Text Collections.” *Journal of Open Source Software* 4, no. 38 (June 13, 2019): 1342. <https://doi.org/10.21105/joss.01342>
- Hagmann, Jonas. *(In)Security and the Production of International Relations: The Politics of Securitisation in Europe*. London: Routledge, 2015.
- Hansen, Flemming Splidsboel. “Russia’s Relations with the West: Ontological Security through Conflict.” *Contemporary Politics* 22, no. 3 (July 2, 2016): 359–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2016.1201314>
- Hansen, Lene. *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*. The New International Relations. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Holzschelter, Anna. “Between Communicative Interaction and Structures of Signification: Discourse Theory and Analysis in International Relations.” *International Studies Perspectives* 15, no. 2 (2014): 142–62.

- Hopf, Ted. *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities & Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002.
- Huebert, Rob. "A New Cold War in the Arctic?! The Old One Never Ended!" *Arctic Yearbook*, 2019. <https://arcticyearbook.com/arctic-yearbook/2019/2019-commentaries/325-a-new-cold-war-in-the-arctic-the-old-one-never-ended>
- Jackson, Patrick Thaddeus. *Civilizing the Enemy: German Reconstruction and the Invention of the West*. University of Michigan Press, 2006.
- Jensen, Leif, and Geir Hønneland. *Handbook of the Politics of the Arctic*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9780857934741>
- Jervis, Robert. "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma." *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (1978): 167–214. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009958>
- Jonsson, Oscar. *The Russian Understanding of War: Blurring the Lines between War and Peace*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019.
- Krebs, Ronald R., and Patrick Thaddeus Jackson. "Twisting Tongues and Twisting Arms: The Power of Political Rhetoric." *European Journal of International Relations* 13, no. 1 (March 1, 2007): 35–66. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066107074284>
- Kydd, Andrew. "Trust, Reassurance, and Cooperation." *International Organization* 54, no. 2 (ed 2000): 325–57. <https://doi.org/10.1162/002081800551190>
- Lackenbauer, Whitney P., and Ryan Dean. "Arctic Exceptionalisms." In *The Arctic and World Order*, edited by Kristina Spohr, Daniel S Hamilton, and Jason C Moyer, 327–55. Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins University SAIS, 2020.
- Lewis, David G. *Russia's New Authoritarianism: Putin and the Politics of Order*. Edinburgh University Press, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.3366/edinburgh/9781474454766.001.0001>
- Milliken, Jennifer. "The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods." *European Journal of International Relations* 5, no. 2 (June 1, 1999): 225–54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066199005002003>
- Mitzen, Jennifer. "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma." *European Journal of International Relations*, 2006. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066106067346>
- Mitzen, Jennifer, and Randall L. Schweller. "Knowing the Unknown Unknowns: Misplaced Certainty and the Onset of War." *Security Studies* 20, no. 1 (March 21, 2011): 2–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2011.549023>
- Morozov, Viacheslav. "Resisting Entropy, Discarding Human Rights: Romantic Realism and Securitization of Identity in Russia." *Cooperation and Conflict* 37, no. 4 (2002): 409–29.
- . *Russia's Postcolonial Identity: A Subaltern Empire in a Eurocentric World*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- Neumann, Iver B. *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations*. Routledge, 1995. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203428566>
- . *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations*. 2nd edition. London: Routledge, 2017.
- . *Uses of the Other: "The East" in European Identity Formation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- Pynnöniemi, Katri, and Minna Jokela. "Perceptions of Hybrid War in Russia: Means, Targets and Objectives Identified in the Russian Debate." *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 33, no. 6 (July 20, 2020): 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2020.1787949>
- Rathbun, Brian C. "Uncertain about Uncertainty: Understanding the Multiple Meanings of a Crucial Concept in International Relations Theory." *International Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (2007): 533–57.
- Snetkov, Aglaya. *Russia's Security Policy under Putin: A Critical Perspective*. Routledge, 2014.
- Stengel, Frank A. *The Politics of Military Force*. University of Michigan Press, 2020. https://www.press.umich.edu/10154836/the_politics_of_military_force
- Van Rythoven, Eric. "The Securitization Dilemma." *Journal of Global Security Studies* 5, no. 3 (July 1, 2020): 478–93. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogz028>
- Wilhelmsen, Julie. *Russia's Securitization of Chechnya: How War Became Acceptable*. Routledge, 2017.
- . "Spiraling toward a New Cold War in the North? The Effect of Mutual and Multifaceted Securitization." *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogaa044>
- Williams, Michael C. "Securitization and the Liberalism of Fear." *Security Dialogue* 42, no. 4–5 (August 1, 2011): 453–63. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010611418717>

- Wilson Rowe, Elana. "Analyzing Frenemies: An Arctic Repertoire of Cooperation and Rivalry." *Political Geography* 76 (January 2020): 102072. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2019.102072>
- . *Arctic Governance: Power in Cross-Border Cooperation*. Manchester University Press, 2018.
- Wither, James Kenneth. "An Arctic Security Dilemma: Assessing and Mitigating the Risk of Unintended Armed Conflict in the High North." *European Security*, June 28, 2021, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2021.1942850>
- Wivel, Anders. "Security Dilemma." In *Encyclopedia Britannica*, March 22, 2017. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/security-dilemma>
- Yoder, Brandon K., and Kyle Haynes. "Signaling under the Security Dilemma: An Experimental Analysis." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 65, no. 4 (April 2021): 672–700. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002720968261>

NOTES

1. Julie Wilhelmsen, "Spiraling toward a New Cold War in the North? The Effect of Mutual and Multifaceted Securitization," *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogaa044>.
2. Or "unresolvable uncertainty": Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 30.
3. Rob Huebert, "A New Cold War in the Arctic?! The Old One Never Ended!," *Arctic Yearbook*, 2019, <https://arcticyearbook.com/arctic-yearbook/2019/2019-commentaries/325-a-new-cold-war-in-the-arctic-the-old-one-never-ended>.
4. Kristian Åtland, "Interstate Relations in the Arctic: An Emerging Security Dilemma?," *Comparative Strategy* 33 (2014): 145–66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01495933.2014.897121>; James Kenneth Wither, "An Arctic Security Dilemma: Assessing and Mitigating the Risk of Unintended Armed Conflict in the High North," *European Security*, (2021) <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2021.1942850>; Brandon K. Yoder and Kyle Haynes, "Signaling under the Security Dilemma: An Experimental Analysis," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 65 (April 2021): 672–700, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002720968261>.
5. The first level of the security dilemma concerns the interpretation of the motives, intentions, and capabilities of the other. Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, 4.
6. Leif Jensen and Geir Hønneland, *Handbook of the Politics of the Arctic* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.4337/9780857934741>; Elana Wilson Rowe, *Arctic Governance: Power in Cross-Border Cooperation* (Manchester University Press, 2018); Whitney P. Lackenbauer and Ryan Dean, "Arctic Exceptionalisms," in *The Arctic and World Order*, eds. Kristina Spohr, Daniel S Hamilton, and Jason C Moyer (Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins University SAIS, 2020), 327–55.
7. Elana Wilson Rowe, "Analyzing Frenemies: An Arctic Repertoire of Cooperation and Rivalry," *Political Geography* 76 (January 2020): 102072, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2019.102072>.
8. Kristian Åtland and Ihor Kabanenko, "Russia and Its Western Neighbours: A Comparative Study of the Security Situation in the Black, Baltic and Barents Sea Regions," *Europe-Asia Studies* 72 (February 2020): 286–313, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2019.1690634>; David Balton, "Can the US and Russia Return to Co-Operation in the Arctic?," *Global Asia* 15 (December 2020): 36; Mathieu Boulègue and Duncan Depledge, "New Military Security Architecture Needed in the Arctic," *Chatham House*, May 2021, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/05/new-military-security-architecture-needed-arctic>.
9. Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30 (1978): 167–214, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009958>.
10. Anders Wivel, "Security Dilemma," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, March 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/security-dilemma>.

11. Eric Van Rythoven, "The Securitization Dilemma," *Journal of Global Security Studies* 5 (July 2020): 478–93, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogz028>.
12. Brian C. Rathbun, "Uncertain about Uncertainty: Understanding the Multiple Meanings of a Crucial Concept in International Relations Theory," *International Studies Quarterly* 51(2007): 534.
13. Van Rythoven, "The Securitization Dilemma," 486.
14. Jennifer Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma:," *European Journal of International Relations*, 2006, 357, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066106067346>.
15. Wilhelmsen, "Spiraling toward a New Cold War in the North?" On the naturalization and hegemonization of large security projects through discourse, see Frank A. Stengel, *The Politics of Military Force* (University of Michigan Press, 2020), 32–54, https://www.press.umich.edu/10154836/the_politics_of_military_force.
16. Jennifer Mitzen and Randall L. Schweller, "Knowing the Unknown Unknowns: Misplaced Certainty and the Onset of War," *Security Studies* 20 (March 2011): 2–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2011.549023>.
17. Van Rythoven, "The Securitization Dilemma," 482.
18. Ofer Fridman, *Russian "Hybrid Warfare": Resurgence and Politicisation* (London: Hurst, 2018), 125, 139. Tracey German, "Harnessing Protest Potential: Russian Strategic Culture and the Colored Revolutions," *Contemporary Security Policy* 41 (October 2020): 556, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2020.1757251>.
19. James Der Derian, *On Diplomacy: A Genealogy of Western Estrangement* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987); Iver B. Neumann, *Uses of the Other: "The East" in European Identity Formation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Roxanne Lynn Doty, *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North–South Relations*, *Borderlines*, v. 5 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, rev. edn. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Jennifer Milliken, "The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods," *European Journal of International Relations* 5 (June 1999): 225–54, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066199005002003>; Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*, *The New International Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2006); K.M. Fierke, *Critical Approaches to International Security* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007); Charlotte Epstein, *The Power of Words in International Relations: Birth of an Anti-Whaling Discourse* (MIT Press, 2008); Anna Holzscheiter, "Between Communicative Interaction and Structures of Signification: Discourse Theory and Analysis in International Relations," *International Studies Perspectives* 15 (2014): 142–62; Jonas Hagmann, *(In)Security and the Production of International Relations: The Politics of Securitisation in Europe* (Routledge 2015).
20. Iver B. Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 1995), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203428566>; Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities & Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Anne L. Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence: Aspirations, Identity, and Security Interests* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), <https://doi.org/10.1353/book.3410>; Viacheslav Morozov, *Russia's Postcolonial Identity: A Subaltern Empire in a Eurocentric World* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Aglaya Snetkov, *Russia's Security Policy under Putin: A Critical Perspective* (Routledge, 2014); Julie Wilhelmsen, *Russia's Securitization of Chechnya: How War Became Acceptable* (Routledge, 2017).
21. Fierke, *Critical Approaches to International Security*, 75–77.
22. Wilhelmsen, *Russia's Securitization of Chechnya*, 26.
23. Fierke, *Critical Approaches to International Security*, 86.
24. Morozov, *Russia's Postcolonial Identity*, 138–39.

25. Ronald R. Krebs and Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, "Twisting Tongues and Twisting Arms: The Power of Political Rhetoric," *European Journal of International Relations* 13 (March 1, 2007): 35–66, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066107074284>.
26. Krebs and Jackson.
27. Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics."
28. Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998), 25.
29. Wilhelmsen, *Russia's Securitization of Chechnya*; Morozov, *Russia's Postcolonial Identity: A Subaltern Empire in a Eurocentric World*; Flemming Splidsboel Hansen, "Russia's Relations with the West: Ontological Security through Conflict," *Contemporary Politics* 22 (2016): 359–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2016.1201314>.
30. David G. Lewis, *Russia's New Authoritarianism: Putin and the Politics of Order* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.3366/edinburgh/9781474454766.001.0001>.
31. Michael C. Williams, "Securitization and the Liberalism of Fear," *Security Dialogue* 42, no. 4–5 (August 1, 2011): 453–63, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010611418717>.
32. This list includes abandoning crude ideological fundamentalism, addressing the core security concerns that generate arms race, establishing cooperative diplomatic relations, developing an understanding of the other side's security fears (Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, 165–70) and "costly signalling" (Andrew Kydd, "Trust, Reassurance, and Cooperation," *International Organization* 54, no. 2 (ed 2000): 326, <https://doi.org/10.1162/002081800551190>).
33. Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, *Civilizing the Enemy: German Reconstruction and the Invention of the West* (University of Michigan Press, 2006), 32.
34. Kristian Lundby Gjerde, "Corporaexplorer: An R Package for Dynamic Exploration of Text Collections," *Journal of Open Source Software* 4, no. 38: 1342, <https://doi.org/10.21105/joss.01342>.
35. See, e.g., Kevin C. Dunn and Iver B. Neumann, *Undertaking Discourse Analysis for Social Research* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016).
36. Hansen, *Security as Practice*.
37. Milliken, "The Study of Discourse in International Relations."
38. Dunn and Neumann, *Undertaking Discourse Analysis for Social Research*, 55.
39. Fierke, *Critical Approaches to International Security*, 85.
40. Milliken, "The Study of Discourse in International Relations," 234.
41. MFA41, also MFA52: US and NATO are "like twin brothers".
42. MFAA14.
43. MOD1, MOD4, MOD7, MOD13, MOD22, MOD25, MODX1, MODX3, MFA24, MFA42, MFA45, MFA89.
44. Quote from MOD10, see also MOD22, MOD27, MODX6. NATO creating instability and "new dividing lines" is a strong reference in MFA texts also, with Ukraine as a prime example (e.g. MFA22), as well as the Middle East and North Africa: MFA45, MFA59, MFA65.
45. MFA73: Here "controlled chaos" is defined as a US instrument of geopolitical influence, practised involuntarily in Afghanistan, but deliberately in Iraq and even more so in Syria, and Libya. Other texts indicate that "controlled chaos" was the case also in Ukraine and Georgia: MFA29.
46. MFA37.
47. MOD4, MOD8, MOD17, MOD24.
48. MFA19.
49. MOD13.
50. MOD16.
51. MOD22.

52. MOD25.
53. MFA15.
54. MFA15.
55. MFA87.
56. MFA62.
57. MFA11, MFA12, MFA20, MFA24, MFA31, MFA42, MFA44, MFA51, MFA65, MFA67, MFA73, MFA76.
58. MFA19.
59. MOD4, our italics.
60. MOD5 on the BMD, our italics. The word pretext prevails in MFA texts also: MFA6, MFA11, MFA15, MFA16, MFA26, MFA29, MFA41, MFA42, MFA51, MFA53, MFA59, MFA62, MFA65, MFA67, MFA69.
61. MOD1.
62. MFA39. Also MFA8, MFA15, MFA31, MFA42, MFA55, MFA57.
63. MFA13, MFA24, MFA42, MFA73. The view of the West as saying one thing and doing the other is very strong. in MOD1, MOD2, MOD16, MOD19.
64. MFA1, MFA6, MFA11, MFA13, MFA14, MFA17, MFA24.
65. MFA4, MFA12, our italics.
66. MOD8.
67. MFA7.
68. MFA12.
69. MFA7, MFA11.
70. MFA33.
71. MFA7.
72. MOD4.
73. MOD2.
74. MOD15.
75. MFA83.
76. MFA3.
77. MFA14, MFA4. See also MFA10, MFA12, MFA13, MFA22, MFA26, MFA24, MFA25, MFA30, MFA65, MFA69.
78. MFA17.
79. MFA36.
80. MFA39.
81. MFA65. See also MFA40, MODX2.
82. MFA31, our italics.
83. MFA56, see also MFA84 (“synchronized” diplomat expulsion).
84. On the “colour revolution” concept see Fridman, *Russian “Hybrid Warfare”*; Oscar Jonsson, *The Russian Understanding of War: Blurring the Lines between War and Peace* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019); Katri Pynnöniemi and Minna Jokela, “Perceptions of Hybrid War in Russia: Means, Targets and Objectives Identified in the Russian Debate,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 33, no. 6 (July 20, 2020): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2020.1787949>; German, “Harnessing Protest Potential.”
85. MFA13.
86. MOD4, MOD13, MOD26. MFA11, MFA12, MFA14, MFA84.
87. MOD4.
88. MOD7.
89. MOD22, our italics.
90. MOD22.
91. MOD4.

92. MFA39.
93. MFA31.
94. MOD2, MOD4, MOD12, MOD27.
95. MOD7.
96. MOD4, MOD7, MOD5, MOD7. MFA44, MFA45; “unprovoked” in MOD1; “unfounded accusations” in MOD2, MOD3; “false” in MFA7; “using primitive graphic forgeries” in MOD7; “spreading of horror stories” in MOD2, MFA47; “crazy paranoid slogans” in MOD10; “issuing verdicts” on the Russian regime in MFA62; offering “perverse interpretations” in MFA39; “lies and slander” in MOD13; “rumours and insinuations” in MOD17; “jaded theses” in MFA56; “malicious speculation” in MFA28.
97. MFA4.
98. MFA13; “conducting information work on Russian society” in MFA51.
99. MOD3, “militant Russophobia” in MFA18.
100. MOD10, MFA30, threats are “invented” in MOD13, MOD18.
101. MFA72.
102. MFA38.
103. Often described as coming in “waves”: MFA17, MFA20, MFA67, MFA76.
104. MFA13.
105. MFA51. On Montenegro MFA67, MFA73.
106. MFA80.
107. MOD12, MOD13, MOD14, MFA10, MFA26.
108. MFA18.
109. MFA11.
110. MFA2, MFA5, MFA8, MFA15, MFA47.
111. MFA12.
112. MFA76.
113. MFA4, MFA6, MFA9, MFA10, MFA11, MFA15. MOD14, MOD18.
114. MFA20.
115. MFA8, MFA13, MFA14, MFA38.
116. MFA17, MODX2, MOD10.
117. MOD5.
118. MFA20, also MOD8, MOD13.
119. MOD22, MOD24, MOD25.
120. MOD7.
121. MOD13, MOD22, MOD26.
122. MFA31.
123. MODX6.
124. MFA14.
125. MFA15.
126. MOD8.
127. MOD1.
128. MOD1, also MOD19 and MOD27.
129. MOD27.
130. MOD4, MOD8, MOD14, MOD20.
131. MOD3, MOD26.
132. MOD22.
133. MOD1.
134. MFA15.
135. MFA17.
136. MFA28.

137. MFA55.
138. Also expressions such as conflict potential “being accumulated” (MOD4) “the turbulence in international relation continues to increase” (MOD19) “relations between states are becoming more and more tense” ...“Struggle for resources intensifying ... increase in chaos and anarchy” (MOD22) contribute to this idea of rising danger.
139. MOD2.
140. MOD7. Similar description by Deputy Minister of Defence Anatoly Antonov (MOD10).
141. MFA28.
142. Atlantic Resolve involves “the deployment of ready, combat-credible U.S. forces to Europe (,,). There are approximately 7,000 regionally allocated soldiers participating in nine-month Atlantic Resolve rotations at any given time”. Headquarters is deployed to Europe since February 2015. “Fact Sheet: U.S. Army Europe and Africa Support to Atlantic Resolve” (U.S. Army Europe and Africa, 6 July 2021), https://www.europeafrica.army.mil/Portals/19/documents/Fact%20Sheets/AtlanticResolveFactSheet_07062021.pdf.
143. MFA25, MFA26.
144. MFA29.
145. MOD14.
146. MOD15, again in April 2017 (MFA74), also MO-TX1.
147. MFA48.
148. MFA69.
149. MOD26. The diagnosis is echoed by the Russian Minister of Defence Sergei Shoigu (MOD27).
150. “We have repeatedly become convinced that all these preparations, which are now being implemented in practice, as NATO infrastructure is approaching our common borders, as new units are sent there, and under the slogan of constant rotation, which means constant deployment in all practical ways, that all these pretexts, which are used to justify this kind of action, are made up. [...] NATO plans never changed and with varying degrees of intensity were aimed at greedily mastering (*osvaivat*) the geopolitical space which, as they believed, turned out ‘ownerless’ after the collapse of the Soviet Union.” (MFA77).
151. MFA29.
152. MODX2, MODX 3, MODX4.
153. MFA89.
154. All citations from MODX6, our italics.
155. MFA38 and ‘militarization’ in MFA53, MODX1, MFA21.
156. MOD5.
157. MFAA7.
158. MFAA2.
159. MFAA2.
160. MFAA14, MFAA8.
161. MFAA6.
162. MFAA1, MFAA5.
163. MFAA6, MFAA7.
164. MODX1, MODX4.
165. MFA87. In November 2018, increased visits of NATO submarines in Norwegian waters and plans to build submarine infrastructure in Northern Norway signal the “implementation of NATO’s plans to increase the Alliance’s presence in the Arctic region” (MFA99). In December 2018 infrastructure being built to deploy the new Globus-3 radar station in Norway 60 km from the Russian border is framed similarly (MODX4).
166. MFAA3.
167. MFAA1.

168. MFAA9.
169. MFFA6.
170. MFAA5.
171. MFAA15.
172. MFAA14, MFA99.
173. MFAA8.
174. MFAA8.
175. MFAA5, our italics.
176. MFAA5.
177. MFA101.
178. MFAA11, see also MFAA4, MFAA5, MFAA10.
179. MFAA12, MFAA13.
180. MFAA14.
181. MFA8, MFA39, MFA51, MFA76, MFA81, MFA108, MFA109, MFA117.
182. MFA101.
183. MFAA7.
184. Iver B. Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations*, 2nd edition, *The New International Relations Series* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017); Viacheslav Morozov, "Resisting Entropy, Discarding Human Rights: Romantic Realism and Securitization of Identity in Russia," *Cooperation and Conflict* 37 (2002): 409–29.
185. Fridman, *Russian "Hybrid Warfare,"* 125, 139. German, "Harnessing Protest Potential," 556.
186. Huebert, "A New Cold War in the Arctic?"; Yoder and Haynes, "Signaling under the Security Dilemma."