



The Use of Language in Justifying the 2022 Russian Military Operation in Ukraine: Discourse Analysis of President Putin's TV Address Speech

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Abstract

On 24 of February 2022 Russia authorised 'a special military operation' against Ukraine for regional security purposes. The manner in which the Russian government decided to intervene militarily in Ukraine prompted this investigation of Putin's discursive narratives produced to justify his decision to intervene in Ukraine. Responding to thick-constructivist and post-structuralist scholars' call for a turn to discourse, this paper conceptualises language as a form of power. In other words, it concentrates on the constitutive role played by language in international political affairs. By examining how President Putin constructed his justifications, the aim is to explore how its language functioned as an enabling device to construct a 'legal argument' for the invasion. Hence, the research paper argues that the Russian government policy of "the pre-emptive use of force/self-defence" is used a key narrative re-employed to justify its military intervention.

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1. Introduction

The Russo-Ukrainian conflict is a complex conflict that has been shaped by various actors constructing different narratives that reflect their political, national, and geopolitical interests. The media, nationalism, and international actors such as Russia and the United States of America have all played significant roles in shaping the conflict's narrative, creating a situation where competing narratives have contributed to the conflict's escalation and continuation. As such, understanding the Russo-Ukrainian conflict as a social construction and more specifically as a discursive construction requires an examination of how President Putin, through language, have constructed the justification to engage militarily in Ukraine and how these constructions have impacted the conflict's course. By so doing, this research paper offers the prominent research question to be pursued in the empirical section. The research aims at offering an alternative reading of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict by providing an extensive analysis of President Putin's Televised address announcing his special military operation in Ukraine on the 24th of February 2022. Therefore, the central research question that frames this paper is: How was it possible that the so-called 'special military operation' was brought about by Ukraine's potential membership in NATO?

The research paper studies the power of President Putin's discursive narratives in constructing social reality, and that is

military invasion. It covers President Putin's speech, which marks the official declaration of a special military operation in Ukraine on 24th of February 2022. Thick-Critical constructivism is advocated as the most advanced approach to capture the constitutive dimension of language. It also provides a comprehensive framework and alternative understanding of President Putin's policies in Ukraine.

As has been mentioned before, this research applies a Thick-critical constructivist approach to examine President Putin core justification for engaging militarily in Ukraine. As there is no 'correct' or agreed way to employ discourse analysis, there nevertheless is a range of ways to use discourse analysis (Bax, 2009). The framework this research lays out is one created by extracting the most useful and relevant parts of discourse analysis to the study of language use. In order to do so, this research requires a method that permits the qualitative analysis of non-material factors. Among several methodologies adopted in qualitative research, this paper has selected discourse analysis as the most appropriate method of analysis. The source drawn upon in conducting this research is a public speech and official statement announced by President Putin on the 24th of February 2022. This paper relied on an English translation version of President Putin's speech available at the Spectator British news magazine official Website where accuracy of the translation has been verified by experts.

It should be noted that this study does not support any of the parties involved in this conflict as it is beyond the scope and specialization of this work. The main aim here is to provide a deeper and academic exploration of the conflict and how security language was uttered by President Putin legitimated military action in Ukraine.

The research paper comprises five sections. The first section is the introduction. It sets the parameters of the argument and analyses. Section two is dedicated to the literature on the theory of constructivism and its two versions; a theoretical lens through which to consider Russian's military action in Ukraine. Section three presents a short overview of the Russo-Ukrainian dispute over nearly a decade. While section five offers an extensive discourse analysis of the research topic from a theoretical standpoint, section five provides concluding remarks.

2. Constructivism: A brief Overview

It is difficult to define Social Constructivism precisely. Many authors emphasise various issues as essential components of a comprehensive definition. They also draw on various traditions and focus on various concepts and issues. As a result, this section includes a variety of definitions supported by various key authors. For Wendt (1994, p.385):

Constructivism is a structural theory of the international system that makes the following core claims: (1) states are the principal units of analysis for international political theory; (2) the key structures in

the state system are intersubjective rather than material; and (3) state identities and interests are an important part constructed by these social structures.

Constructivism, as an alternative theory of international relations, occupies a middle ground between interpretive epistemologies such as feminism, post-modernism, and Frankfurt School-oriented critical theories, and rationalist theories such as realism, neorealism, and neo-liberal institutionalism (Adler, 2005, p. 90). He argues that:

The true middle ground between rationalist and relativist interpretive approaches is occupied...by constructivism... the manner in which the material world shapes and is shaped by human action and interaction depends on dynamic normative and epistemic interpretations of the material world (Ibid).

Nugroho (2008, p.88) summarises the two mentioned definitions by claiming that:

Constructivism differs itself from neorealism and neoliberalism by highlighting and illuminating the ontological reality of intersubjective knowledge... Material world and intersubjective knowledge interact and influence each other.

It is important to mention that Robert Jervis (1998) regards constructivism as a competitor to realism. However, this is not necessarily true because their emphasis on the intersubjective world makes them stand in different positions from the Neo-Realist and Neo-Liberalists and not necessarily Anti-Realists and/or Anti-Liberal. These definitions underline

similar key elements. They, first, consider constructivism as an alternative theory or approach to international relations that differs from neo-realism and neo-liberalism. Second, they assume that significant aspects of international relations are socially constructed and finally, they also claim that constructivism does not negate the material world. However, these definitions do not cover all aspects of constructivism as some other recognised constructivists build their definitions on different traditions and focus on other concepts and issues. For example, Kratochwil (1993, p.75-76) has also played a significant role in defining constructivism. His work is an exploration of the role of rules and norms for political life.

Onuf is another constructivist who builds his own definition by focusing on different concepts and issues. For him, constructivism “applies to all fields of social inquiry and has the potential to bring together matters which first seem unrelated” (Cited in Zehfuss, 2002:19). In other words, he starts from the belief that “social relations make us human, construct us into the kind of beings that we are” (Ibid). At the same time, through deeds and speaking, we use the raw materials of nature to make the world what it is. That is to say, constructivism is based on the notion that society and people construct each other in an ongoing process. However, his constructivism asserts “the fundamental significance of rules for social reality and consequently for a constructivist social theory” (Ibid, p.20). Hence, “this means that rules regulate aspects of world, constitute

situations in the first place and provide guidance for human behaviour and thereby make shared meaning possible” (Ibid). Despite the considerable differences between Kratochwil and Onuf’s definitions, they first, recognise each other as constructivists. Second, they both refer to Onuf’s introduction term of “constructivism” in most of their works which set the line for them to popularise this approach.

In recent years and with the end of the Cold War, the influence of both International Relations theories- Neo-Realism and Neo-Liberalism- started to decline among International Relations scholars.

Therefore, the dominant theories; neo-realism and neo-liberalism failed to explain and predict what was to happen in international politics. Consequently, constructivism emerged and developed as an alternative to the two mentioned IR theories since the late 1980s by several theorists such as Nicholas Onuf (2012); Emanuel Adler (1997) and Jeff Checkel (1998). Nicolas Onuf was and still is considered as the first theorist who introduced and presented the term “Constructivism” in International Relations theory in 1989 which resulted in reshaping the way IR scholars think. However, Alexander Wendt’s version of social constructivism is the most developed and recognisable version of constructivism and his work has helped constructivism to become accepted among International Relations scholars as the one of most contemporary mainstream theories of international relations. Hence, Wendt is recognised in the International

Relations field for popularising the constructivist approach.

An investigation of the lineages of constructivism shows that it is not entirely a new way of thinking. It is important to note that constructivism has its philosophical roots in the writings of Husserl, Weber, Wittgenstein, Vico, Kant and Karl Marx. For example, Vico writes “that God creates the natural world, while the humans make the historical one” (Cited in Jackson and Sorensen, 2013:206-207). Kant adds to Vico’s idea by stating that “humans can gain whatever knowledge about their life, however, their subjectivity will always restrain that knowledge” (Ibid).

It is widely accepted that social constructivism has become one of the most influential theoretical developments in IR. However, as outlined in the preceding paragraph, constructivism should not be understood as one single, homogenous theoretical standpoint since many constructivists have offered contending understandings of some key aspects related to this approach. In Reus-Smit’s words (2000, p.1811) “there are many constructivists and thus perhaps many constructivism.” According to Hopf (1998, p.172- 181):

constructivism itself should be understood in its conventional and critical variant, the latter being more closely tied to critical constructivism...

conventional constructivism is a collection of principles distilled from social theory but without the latter’s more

consistent theoretical or epistemological follow-through.

Thus, it is apparent that Thin-conventional constructivism and Thick-critical constructivism do share some comparable theoretical fundamentals. Since this study is going to take a more Thick-critical constructivist approach, it is essential, first, to sketch out some of the shared features between conventional constructivism and critical constructivism by briefly highlighting the core assumptions they have in common. Then, Thick-critical constructivism will be discussed in detail and how it can provide the best possible framework for this analysis.

2.1 The Common Premises of Thick-critical Constructivism and Thin-conventional Constructivism

The main contention of constructivism is that people are essentially creating the world in which they live. Put differently, the international system is socially constructed, meaning it is made up of the various ways that people interact and think about each other. According to Wendt (1992, p.396-397) “a fundamental principle of constructivist theory is that people act towards objects, including other actors, on the basis of the meaning that the objects have for them.” These constructed meanings and practices might be stable at a certain period, but they are never fixed because ideas and practices differ over time and space. Therefore, the

patterns that once looked unchanging may change as well.

Materialism as an opposing approach to social constructivism in world politics proposes that material objects have a direct effect on the outcome. Neo-Realism and Neo-Liberalism share explicitly materialist aspects. They seek to explain the international patterns and behaviours as a result of purely material forces (Reus-Smit and Snidal, 2008, p.300). To illustrate, Mearsheimer (1995, p.91) argues "the distribution of material capabilities among states is the key factor for understanding the world politics." Constructivists disagree with such a materialistic point of view. They claim that the domestic and international system "is not something there like a solar system" (Busse, 1999, p.44-45). In contrast, they suggest that ideas give shape to international politics, which is a product of an intersubjective awareness¹ amongst persons who live in that world. Hence, the international system is not constituted by material factors but rather by human ideas and beliefs. Legro (2005, p.6) argues that "ideas are not so much mental as symbolic and organizational; they are embedded not only in the human brain but also in the collective memories, government procedures, educational system and the rhetoric of the statecraft". This means that the material forces must be understood through the social concepts that define their meaning for human life.

Constructivism, in contrast, "treats identity as an empirical question to be

theorized within historical context," whereas Neo-Realism holds that all units of global politics have only one meaningful identity—that of self-interested states (Hopf, 1998, p.175). In summary, states can acquire a range of identities or selves based on the social, political, cultural, and historical context. Therefore, identities, according to Hopf (Ibid), carry out three essential functions in society: They tell you and others who you are and tell you who others are. By so doing; they strongly imply a particular set of interests or preferences with respect to choices of action; the identity of a state implies its preferences and consequent actions.

There is a shared assumption between constructivism and Neo-Realism that interests imply choices, but Neo-Realism further assumes that states have the same *a priori* interests. In contrast, constructivism focuses on "the social content involved in the production of state interests" (Reus-Smit and Snidal, 2008, p.302). What further differentiates constructivism from other approaches is the idea of the formation of interests. For example, Neo-Realism takes interests as fixed and given. However, for constructivism "the influences on interests are social" (Legro, 2005, p.4). Identity, therefore, is considered to be one of the primary factors in producing states' interests. For example, Hopf (1998, p.176) clarifies this notion by demonstrating that a particular state "having the identity 'great power' implies a particular set of interests different from those implied by identity 'European Union member' and that identities are multiple, constructivist logic precludes acceptance of pre-given interests." This means that interests are in part products of those identities.

Another aspect of the constructivist approach that is thought to be inherent is

¹ Means the collective meaning that constitute the structures, which organise our actions.

the notion that structures and agents are mutually constituted. According to this theory, states' actions shape international institutions and norms, which in turn help to define, socialize, and impact the states. (Reus-Smit and Snidal, 2008:304). In other words, both structures and agents are subject to an alteration in a particular process. Hopf (1998, p.173) has demonstrated this idea by applying it to a specific event. For instance, military intervention made the United States a great power to the extent that American appeasement in Vietnam was impossible due to the country's identity as a great power. The act of appeasement was unthinkable. The United States replicated its own identity as a great power by taking part in the "enabled" action of intervention, as well as the framework that gave its action meaning. So, this means that US intervention in Vietnam maintained and extended the international intersubjective understanding of great powers as those states that use military power against others. Undoubtedly, constructivism's premise challenges the core principles of others approaches of co-constitution of states and structures. For example, neo-realism emphasises the interaction effects between the units and the system level but in a way that maintained the states as unchanging units (Waltz, 2001, p.80).

Different definitions of anarchy lead to different understandings of international politics, according to the constructivist approach than the definitions provided by neorealists and liberals. According to the Neo-Realist school, anarchies are

inherently "self-help" systems—that is, they lack both collective security and a central authority (Waltz, 2001, p.159). Henceforth, in anarchy “there is no automatic harmony and among autonomous states, war is inevitable” (Ibid, p.186). However, Wendt (1992, p.392) offers a different explanation of anarchy “as having multiple meaning for different actors based on their own communities of intersubjective understandings and practices”. Wendt further proposes a spectrum of international anarchies based on the variation of ideas that states have for themselves and others. In other words, as Wendt (Ibid) put it “Anarchy is what the states makes of it” in the sense that the nature of international anarchy seems to be conflictual if the states show conflictual actions towards each other, and conversely supportive if the states behave cooperatively towards one another. Therefore, it might be compelling that there is no “pre-given” nature of international anarchy (Waltz, 2001). But rather it depends enormously on states identities and interests.

Despite the fact that both (conventional and critical) versions of constructivism share the same assumptions of how the world is socially constructed, they partly differ in understanding some of the important aspects in their research. According to Reus-Smit (2005, p.204) “constructivism is divided ... between those who remain cognizant of the critical origins and potentiality of their sociological explorations, and those who have embraced constructivism simply as

an explanatory or interpretive tool.” The next section provides a brief overview of what critical constructivism is along with its fundamental assumptions and how it differs from conventional version of constructivism.

2.2 Thick-Critical Constructivism: A Synopsis

As previously stated, because this study takes a more Thick-critical constructivist approach, this version of constructivism will be the focus of this section. However, little will be said or mentioned about conventional constructivism (Wendt, 1992, p.1994) because it does not fit with current research interests. For the purposes of clarity and ease, it is important to acknowledge that a variety of labels have been attached to the critical version of constructivism. For example, if we follow Fierke’s (2007) description it is labelled as ‘consistent constructivism’. On the other hand, a recognised constructivist Carlsnaes (2002, p.339) has labelled it as ‘thicker constructivism’. Nonetheless, other constructivists, like Hopf (1998, p.181-187), would rather call both versions of constructivism as ‘critical or post-modernist’ versus ‘neo-classical or conventional’ “as to differentiate the epistemology and methodology between the former, whose emphasis is on interpretivism, from the latter whose retention of classical pragmatism and positivism methodology is highlighted.” In other words, the difference between the Thin-conventional and Thick-critical variant of constructivism, is that the former constructivists’ works are still assessed under positivist assumptions. i.e.

“they emphasise causality, hypothesis testing and objective truths” (Fierke, 2016, p.167). However, the latter establishes and determinates by a more post-structural agenda in which ‘understanding’ is replaced by ‘interpretation’. Fierke (2016, p.168) argues “many constructivists such as Onuf and Kratochwil have examined constructivism as part of longer lineage outside international relations with genealogy that intersects with but is distinct from post-structuralism.”

The epistemological divide between the positivist and post-positivist approaches are extremely apparent and represent determining a line of breakage among constructivists (Ibid). For example, Thin-conventional constructivism tends to use scientific methods in the field of International Relations. Positivists maintain that “the socially constructed international system contains patterns that are amenable to generalisation and falsifiable hypothesis. These patterns are the product of underlying law that govern social relations, where the law can be identified by careful scientific research” (Reus-smit and Snidal, 2008, p.307).

However, a contending view presented by critical constructivists based on a post-positivist perspective sees social life data as not fully objectifiable i.e. observers cannot be fully independent of the subject under study and the social relationship cannot be fully detached into discrete ‘cause’ and ‘effect’. Therefore, “what might be observed are inherently contingent rather than existing naturally and objectively in the world” (Reus-smit and Snidal, 2008, p.307).

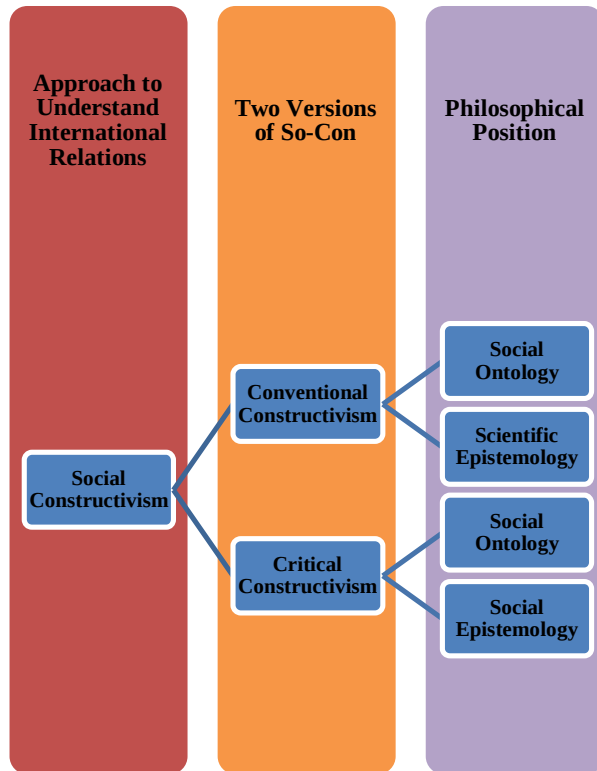
It is important to acknowledge that Thin-conventional constructivism, more precisely Wendt's constructivism has been accused of -mainly by critical constructivists and post-structuralists- not regarding the role of language as a principal understanding of social structure. According to Guzzini and Leander (2006, p.86), Wendt's theory of constructivism "is a curious type of constructivism where language is very much out of the picture." Kratochwil develops a different constructivist outlook. Unlike Wendt's constructivism, he sees constructivism "as centring on practices that are based on norms and rules" (Fierke and Jorgensen, 2001, p.63). This means that the political system is re-formed and altered through different actors' practices. Kratochwil, similarly, criticises the mainstream of IR theories- Realism, Liberalism and thin-conventional constructivism- for having an extremely narrow notion of politics and human behaviour; "having adopted a notion of rationality as instrument and their obsession with methods induced by an adherence to positivism" (Cited in Fierke and Jorgensen, 2001, p. 63).

It is important to acknowledge that Kratochwil's claim also serves the aim of the thesis. His key claim lies in the assertion that world politics "must be analysed in the context of norms properly understood" (Ibid: 64). My research is interested in how language is associated with foreign policy, i.e. to uncover the role of human rights discourse played in different US presidents' foreign policy choices with regards to Bosnia-Herzegovina. Interestingly, Kratochwil (1984, p.306) similar to other critical

constructivists (such as Fierke and Zehfuss) and unlike Thin-conventional constructivists (Wendt and Finnmore), understands language as a part of the creation of situation such as the construction of the social world. In other words, the social reality is at least to a certain degree a linguistic construction. Therefore, what needs to be considered in analyses of human behaviour is "the intentionality and goal-directedness" (Kratochwil, 1984, p.306). In this respect, to grasp the meaning of an action or a discourse, we have to locate it in an intersubjective context: "to have explained an action, often means to have made intelligible the goals for the purpose of which it was undertaken" (Ibid).

As a result, Thick-critical constructivism considers language or discourse as a crucial part in the construction of social reality. The difference between the Thin-conventional and Thick-critical variant of constructivism is summarised below in figure one.

Fig.1. The Philosophical Positions of Conventional and Critical Versions of Social Constructivism



Source: own elaboration

3. The Russo-Ukrainian Conflict: A Background Briefing

The Russo-Ukrainian dispute, also known as the Russo-Ukraine dispute or the Russo-Ukrainian Conflict, began in 2014. It involves Russia and Ukraine, two Eastern European neighbours. The conflict has had far-reaching political, economic, and humanitarian consequences not only for these two countries but also for the rest of the world. The Russo-Ukrainian dispute has its origins in Ukraine's historical and geopolitical significance. Ukraine has a rich history, a diverse population, and strategic significance due to its size and location. Ukraine was on the verge of a major political decision in 2014, deciding whether to align with Western Europe, represented by the European Union (EU) and NATO, or Russia and its Eurasian Economic Union.

It is important to provide a short overview of the events that led up to the Russia's military operation in Ukraine. The conflict's immediate catalyst was the Euromaidan protests in late 2013 and early 2014. Ukrainians took to the streets to protest then-President Viktor Yanukovych's decision to abandon plans to sign an association agreement with the EU in favour of closer ties with Russia. Short after, in February 2014, unidentified armed individuals, widely believed to be Russian soldiers without insignias, took control of Ukraine's Crimea region. In a controversial referendum, Crimea voted to join Russia, which was not recognised by the international community. Following Crimea's annexation, pro-Russian separatist movements arose in Eastern Ukraine, particularly in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. As a result, violent clashes between Ukrainian forces and separatist groups erupted, escalating into a full-fledged armed conflict (Ramani, 2023).

Fast-forward to 2019, Former comedian Volodymyr Zelenskyy easily defeated incumbent Petro Poroshenko in a presidential election. Zelenskyy's party also wins a parliamentary majority. His campaign promises include ending the war in eastern Ukraine with Russia-backed separatists and rooting out corruption in the Ukrainian government. Early in 2021, Zelenskyy cracked down on pro-Russian Ukrainian oligarchs, including Putin's close friend Viktor Medvedchuk. Following that, Putin increases troop deployments near the Ukrainian border and publishes an article claiming that Russians and Ukrainians are "one people."

By December, tens of thousands of Russian troops have been deployed to the borders, and Putin has made demands of NATO and the US. Among these demands is that Ukraine never be admitted to NATO, which the Biden administration has rejected. Following a breakdown in relations with NATO and the West in late February 2022, Putin recognised the Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk as independent states and dispatched troops to 'keep the peace'. Days after officially recognising the separatist regions, Russia invaded Ukraine in its entirety. The Donbas region of eastern Ukraine is where the special military operation started. In addition to declaring martial law, Zelenskyy formally severed diplomatic ties with Russia. Putin's actions were criticised everywhere (Ploky, 2023).

4. The Use of Language in Justifying the 2022 Russian Military Operation in Ukraine: Discourse Analysis of Putin's TV Address speech

On the 24th of February 2022, the Russian president Vladimir Putin has launched what he calls 'a special military operation' in Ukraine. According to the Russian leader, this special operation was in attempt to stop NATO's Eastward expansion. In other words, the security of Russia was prioritised as the overriding concern in the Russian government's foreign policy. Days after Russian president Putin recognition of the independence of two breakaway regions in eastern of the Ukraine Donetsk People's

Republic (DPR) and the Luhansk People's Republic (LPR), he (2022, p.1) remarked:

Let me start with what I said in my address of 21 February this year. We are talking about what causes us particular concern and anxiety, about those fundamental threats that year after year, step by step, are rudely and unceremoniously created by irresponsible politicians in the West in relation to our country. I mean the expansion of the NATO bloc to the east, bringing its military infrastructure closer to Russian borders.

This extract showcases how the Russian Government framed Ukraine's potential membership to NATO as an unprecedented security crisis. To elaborate, president Putin (p.7) explicitly stated:

For the United States and its allies, this is the so-called policy of containment of Russia, obvious geopolitical dividends. And for our country, this is ultimately a matter of life and death, a matter of our historical future as a people. And this is not an exaggeration: it is true. This is a real threat not just to our interests, but to the very existence of our state, its sovereignty. This is the very red line that has been talked about many times. They passed her.

Indeed, the narratives being used by the Russian government compounded the sense of danger that threatens Russia security and its sphere of influence. In other words, the manner in which the Russian government interpreted and

communicated the NATO expansion as an extraordinary security disaster had a powerful reality-making effect. Moreover, Putin's remarks reinforced the security issue several times when he (p.7) declared that:

Further expansion of the infrastructure of the North Atlantic Alliance, the military development of the territories of Ukraine that has begun is unacceptable for us. The point, of course, is not the NATO organisation itself – it is only an instrument of US foreign policy. The problem is that in the territories adjacent to us, I will note, in our own historical territories, an 'anti-Russia' hostile to us is being created, which has been placed under complete external control, is intensively settled by the armed forces of NATO countries and is pumped up with the most modern weapons.

Elsewhere, President Putin asserted that "what I am talking about now concerns not only Russia and not only us. This applies to the entire system of international relations, and sometimes even the US allies' themselves" (p.2). This shows that Putin classified the US attempts to expand the NATO Bloc to the East not only as a Russian security crisis but as a threat to the entire international relations.

Here it is clear that language matters. Categorising the expansion of the NATO Bloc to East as a security matter allowed Russia to frame its actions in terms of accepted legal norms of self-defence. Outlining the right to take offensive

measures to protect Russia now and in the future. President Putin (p.9) declared that:

In this regard, in accordance with Article 51 of Part 7 of the UN Charter, with the sanction of the Federation Council of Russia and in pursuance of the treaties of friendship and mutual assistance ratified by the Federal Assembly on 22 February this year with the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic, I decided to conduct a special military operation. Its goal is to protect people who have been subjected to bullying and genocide by the Kiev regime for eight years. And for this we will strive for the demilitarisation and denazification of Ukraine, as well as bringing to justice those who committed numerous, bloody crimes against civilians, including citizens of the Russian Federation.

The construction of military intervention in Ukraine as a legal and justified self-defence under the notion of international law was stressed by Putin (p.10):

I repeat, our actions are self-defence against the threats posed to us and from an even greater disaster than what is happening today. No matter how difficult it may be, I ask you to understand this and call for cooperation in order to turn this tragic page as soon as possible and move forward together, not to allow anyone to interfere in our affairs, in our relations, but to build them on our own, so that it creates the necessary

conditions for overcoming all problems and, despite the presence of state borders, would strengthen us from the inside as a whole. I believe in this; in this is our future.

Taken collectively, such ideas and remarks demonstrate that Russia using force in self-defence, in accordance with Article 51 of part 7 of the UN Charter, to defend itself against threat deriving from Ukraine. According to Putin's narrative, there is an existential threat to Russia from Ukraine that requires immediate action to prevent, and that an imminent threat did not need to exist in order for military action to be justified. This argument is strikingly similar to the one used by President George W. Bush to justify his 2003 war in Iraq and finds direct echo in President Putin expressions (3-4):

However, a special place in this series is occupied, of course, by the invasion of Iraq, also without any legal grounds. As a pretext, they chose reliable information allegedly available to the United States about the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. As proof of this, publicly, in front of the eyes of the whole world, the US Secretary of State shook some kind of test tube with white powder, assuring everyone that this is the chemical weapon being developed in Iraq. And then it turned out that all this was a hoax, a bluff: there are no chemical weapons in Iraq. Unbelievable, surprising, but the fact remains. There were lies at the highest state

level and from the high rostrum of the UN.

There is no doubt that President Putin is making it challenging for the US and its Western allies to effectively criticize him, and they have undermined the UN charter's prohibition on the use of force to support their War on Iraq in 2003. According to this narrative, President Putin used prior transgressions of international law as rhetorical weapons to justify his actions in a novel way. Needless to say, such discourse provided President Putin and his administration with great deal of agency ad manoeuvre. In other words, several of President Putin core justifications for intervening in Ukraine derived directly from the language of security and pre-emptive self-defence constructed as a result of the threat posed to Russia by NATO's expansion. Therefore, President Putin drew on language of Article 51 of part 7 of the UN Charter to argue that inaction was not a viable option.

Moreover, language was an essential tool employed by President Putin to build an argument that Ukraine possessed Weapons of Mass Destruction and had direct links with NATO's expansion. Making this connection plain, President Putin (p.8) asserted:

The entire course of events [Ukrainian potential membership in NATO] and analysis of incoming information shows that Russia's clash with these forces is inevitable. It is only a matter of time: they are getting ready; they are waiting for the right time. Now they also claim to possess nuclear

weapons. We will not allow this to be done.

This discursive linkage provided the Russian government with another forum to construct their argument that conducting 'a special military operation' was the only viable option for addressing this existential threat.

In fact, language continued to reinforce President Putin's actions in Ukraine. Constructing black and white distinctions enabled the Putin government to assert the US not just posed a threat to Russia, but a threat to the entire system of international relations and more specifically to the US allies themselves. According to Putin (p.2):

Persuasion and requests do not help. Everything that does not suit the hegemon [the US], those in power, is declared archaic, obsolete, unnecessary. And vice versa: everything that seems beneficial to them is presented as the ultimate truth, pushed through at any cost, boorishly, by all means. Dissenters are broken through the knee.

Also, he (p.2) remarked "what I am talking about now concerns not only Russia and not only us. This applies to the entire system of international relations, and sometimes even to the US allies themselves." The compelling way in which President Putin's remarks on the way the US adopted and pushed for decisions that were beneficial only for themselves and not their key allies reinforced the aforementioned binary. To illustrate, President Putin (p.4-5) made it

crystal clear that US actions in Iraq (2003), Libya (2011) and Syria (2011):

The tragedy [the US military force in Iraq, Libya and Syria], which doomed hundreds of thousands, millions of people not only in Libya, but throughout this region, gave rise to a massive migration exodus from North Africa and the Middle East to Europe.

It quickly became apparent that the president Putin classified the US international policies as bunch of lies and hypocrisy to advance its interests, ignoring international laws and state values. Making this assessment crystal clear, he (p.5) continued to remark that:

[US and its allies] attempts have not stopped to use us in their own interests, destroy our traditional values and impose on us their pseudo-values that would corrode us, our people from the inside, those attitudes that they are already aggressively planting in their countries and which directly lead to degradation and degeneration, because they contradict the very nature of man. It won't happen, no one has ever done it. It won't work now either.

Most evident in these statements was an attempt to place the United States outside the box as the leader of world and hegemon and depicts it as "the very empire of lies" (President Putin, 2022, p.5, 11).

By framing his justification for intervening on the basis that Ukraine was an imminent threat, President Putin was also dependent on framing Russian

response in terms of other legal norms, which is the Responsibility to protect norm. by triggering this norm, Russia is acting to avert a genocide of Russians in Eastern of Ukraine. President Putin explicitly stated that:

It was necessary to immediately stop this nightmare: the genocide against the millions of people living there, who rely only on Russia, hope only on us. It was these aspirations, feelings, pain of people that were for us the main motive for making a decision to recognise the people's republics of Donbass... Circumstances require us to take decisive and immediate action. The people's republics of Donbass turned to Russia with a request for help. Its goal is to protect people who have been subjected to bullying and genocide by the Kiev regime for eight years...as well as bringing to justice those who committed numerous, bloody crimes against civilians, including citizens of the Russian Federation.

What is interesting is that President Putin confirmed the morality of his mission by amplifying a humanitarian intervention argument, which was operationalised. Therefore, it is evident that there is a discursive link between going to war against Ukraine as an imminent threat to Russia and to protect Russian civilians who have been subjected to 'genocide' in Eastern of Ukraine.

Drawing on the critical constructivist turn is a good starting point for thinking about language as a form of power. As

previously stated, critical constructivism assigns language's power to its ability to construct reality and social practices. Hence, assuming that language matters in international relations provides an alternative interpretation of how President Putin could justify using military force against Ukraine. As previously stated, his justification for launching a military operation in Ukraine aided in the establishment of agency within an intersubjective framework, specifically Article 51 of Part 7 of the UN Charter and the Responsibility to Protect norm. To summarize, President Putin's language and arguments provided justification for 'pre-emptive military operation' in Ukraine.

4. CONCLUSION

This research paper examined the arguments constructed and then implemented by President Putin to justify his military intervention in Ukraine (2022) and the role played by international law discourse in this construction. By doing so, it highlighted how President Putin's foreign policy decisions to intervene in Ukraine were understandable through language. A Thick-Critical Constructivism approach was adopted to highlight that words really matter. Here the suitability of Thick-critical constructivism for examining the role of language as a form of power was presented. A Critical Constructivist approach was used as it offers an alternative theoretical lens for thinking about the Russo-Ukrainian dispute. Rather than supposing that President Putin decision to take action in Ukraine was an inevitable outcome of

Ukraine's potential membership in NATO, it became a social construction and more specifically as a discursive construction. As shown in the analysis, President Putin's discursive justification for invading Ukraine helped establish legitimate grounds to take pre-emptive military action against Ukraine. In other words, the language employed by him to legitimate the Ukraine involvement gave him agency by tailoring his justification to coincide with the boundaries of international law.

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