Anglo-American University
School of International Relations and Diplomacy

# Terrorism, Identity, and the State:

# Genealogy of Russia's Discourse on Terrorism

Master's Thesis

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Kristina Zakurdaeva

Anglo-American University

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by

Kristina Zakurdaeva

Faculty Advisor: Daniela Lenčéš Chalániová, PhD

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Kristina Zakurdaeva

**Declaration of Consent and Statement of Originality**

I declare that this thesis is my independent work. All sources and literature are properly cited and included in the bibliography. I hereby declare that no portion of text in this thesis has been submitted in support of another degree, or qualification thereof, for any other university or institute of learning.

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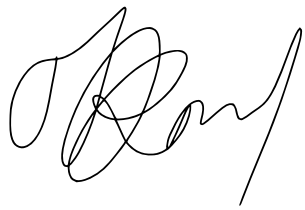

Kristina Zakurdaeva

May 24, 2021

**Dedication**

Despite the challenges of living and studying in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, I was able to write and present this Thesis. It took a lot of effort and hard work. And definitely it would have not been possible without help of many people that I am grateful to.

Foremost, I would like to thank my thesis advisor Daniela Lenčéš Chalániová, PhD, who has been not only a wonderful mentor, but also a great supporter throughout this process. She pushed me to explore unobvious connections, to read more theoretical literature, and simply to be more curious. Without her invaluable knowledge, expertise, and insightful feedback I would not have been able to present this work. Writing with her has been a rewarding experience that every student could only wish for. I am also grateful to the Anglo-American University for opportunity to study such a diverse and interdisciplinary program that helped me to attain the valuable knowledge I have now. AAU has been a part of my life for many years, it formed my academic views as well as human values. It was a journey that I am sincerely thankful for.

I also want to thank my dearest friends, close ones, and colleagues, who stood by my side and were incredibly understanding of my almost hermitage lifestyle and preoccupation with my university work. Last, but not the least, I want to thank my family, who, despite very turbulent and hard times, stayed strong as ever and supported me. I want to dedicate this Thesis to one of my biggest supporters – my grandfather Alexander, who will not be able to witness his granddaughter to graduate but who will always be warmly remembered.

# ABSTRACT

## Terrorism, Identity, and the State:
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Political violence i.e. "terrorism" is a phenomenon that is highly securitized, depoliticized, and dehistoricized. It suspends "politics as usual," it is presented as an existential threat, it justifies exceptional practices, the very existence of a state, and violation of human rights and sovereignty in the name of preservation of life. Likewise, an identity of a "terrorist," the Other, helps to constitute identity of the Self trough discourses of danger. As the state holds an exclusive authority over production of knowledge about security and holds a monopoly on the use of violence, it is critical to study the hegemonic knowledge and power practices of the state. Especially, when such discourses are used to persecute political opposition and achieve geopolitical goals.

Within academic literature on the role of terrorism discourse in modern history of Russia, there is a gap between an analysis of separate events and broader context across the years of post-Cold War state identity formation and internal consolidation of power. Looking into this period, we see that "war on terrorism" played a significant role in the constitution of Russia's identity and it was widely exploited to prosecute domestic critics like Chechen separatists during both Chechen wars and those who criticized the transformation of Russia into the quasi-authoritarian regime years later. Russian authorities also used the discourse on terrorism to reestablish a superpower identity within the existing international system after years of diplomatic isolation and economic sanctions. The goal of this Thesis is to analyze the evolution of Russian discourse on terrorism in conjunction with reinvention of state identity and power in the years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union until today.

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## 1. Introduction

Throughout the most part of its existence the Russian Federation has not been an active fighter against international terrorism until its decision to intervene in Syrian Civil War on the side of Bashar al-Assad's government in 2015. At the time Moscow declared that it would help the Syrian government to fight terrorist groups both international and domestic, which ranged from the so-called "Islamic State" and its splinter organizations to opposition in Syrian provinces. The intervention has happened despite the fact that Russia was going through a severe economic crisis caused by Western sanctions and fall of oil prices. Soon after, followed involvement with Libya, attempts to negotiate peace with the Taliban in Afghanistan, Houthi rebels in Yemen, and establishment of a military base in Sudan. All of these – under the banner of fighting international terrorism. Public Western discourse has quickly labelled Russian government's decisions to intervene in the MENA region an attempt to return to the international arena as a superpower.[1]

Nonetheless, within scholarly work it is rarely discussed how exactly has Russia been utilizing discourse of terrorism threat during "peaceful" times i.e. times of post-Cold War transformation and internal consolidation when it was not involved in an open military conflict with another country. However, looking into this period, we see that "war on terrorism" was widely exploited to prosecute domestic critics like Chechen separatists during the Chechen wars and those who criticized the transformation of Russia into the quasi-authoritarian regime years later. The goal of this Thesis is to analyze the evolution of Russian discourse on terrorism in conjunction with reinvention of state identity and power in the years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union until today. This Thesis is

[1] Pavel Baev, *From Chechnya to Syria: The Evolution of Russia's Counter-Terrorist Policy,* (Paris: IFRI, Russie.Nei.Visions no. 107, April 2018), 23, https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/baev_counter_terrorist_policy_2018.pdf; Anthony Celso, "Superpower Hybrid Warfare in Syria," *The Marine Corps University Journal* 9, no. 2 (2018): 101-4; Lukasz Kulesa, "Russia's Recent Assertiveness, Western Response, and What the Future May Hold," *Harvard International Review* 38, no. 1 (Fall 2016): 18; Julie Wilhelmsen and Kristin Haugevik, *Strategic Partners against Terrorism 2.0?: Russia's Initial Positions on Syria*, (Oslo: Norwegian Institute for International Affairs, 2016), 1, https://nupi.brage.unit.no/nupi-xmlui/handle/11250/2428288.

also an attempt to make a genealogical study of the terrorism discourse and fill the gap within the critical academic research, especially.

### 1.1 Argument

After reviewing a body of academic literature on the role of terrorism discourse in modern Russian history, I felt that there is a significant gap between an analysis of separate events and broader overview across the years, which can provide a key to the Russian identity constitution process. Moreover, vast majority of the literature on the topic consists of the positivist analyses, which have certain limitations. I also want to highlight that this work is *not* apologetic of political violence or terrorist tactics in any way, however, it is an attempt to uncover how regimes are securitizing discourses, depoliticizing issues for their benefit, and using a very value-laden terrorism discourse as both a scapegoat and a critical component of their identity formation.

The Russian authorities have been actively utilizing the terrorism discourse to reinvent country's identity throughout its modern history starting from the First Chechen War in early 1990s to interventions across the MENA region today. Furthermore, over the years, Russia's discourse on terrorism has shifted from domestic audiences, that needed to reinvent its identity after the collapse of the Soviet Union and Communist regime in its satellite-states, to inclusion of the international audiences in order to regain a superpower identity within the existing international system. The latter seemed to be critical for the Russian government, especially in the context of international diplomatic isolation and economic sanctions imposed by the Western states after the Ukrainian crisis and the annexation of Crimean Peninsula in 2014. Furthermore, official terrorism discourse has direct normative consequences within the system – the suspects in terrorist activity tend to be treated as biopolitical objects and their rights are significantly limited by the state.

During the First and Second Chechen Wars, the discourse on terrorism was predominantly used to otherize separatist forces in North Caucasus after the fall of the Soviet Union, gain support for these military campaigns, and in some cases to eliminate political competitors by labelling the ones opposing to the war as supporters of "terrorism"/"terrorists." The federal government has successfully securitized and othered Chechen rebels' identity as "terrorists" that just hated Slavic people during the First Chechen War (1994 – 1996). The peace agreement with the Chechens itself and concessions during Budyonnovsk hostage crisis in 1995 were regarded as major loss and transcended the idea of weakness for the security apparatus in Russia, which later took over in Russia, according to the members of the Parliament at the time and hostage negotiators.[2] Russia – that desperately fought to keep the identity of a strong nation after the collapse of the USSR – could not bear an idea of being forced into major decisions by a group of rebels from one of the smallest regions of the country, especially with the violence. Later, during the Second Chechen War (1999 – 2009), Moscow has additionally legitimized its policies by rearticulating the global "war on terror" discourse that sparked after the 9/11 attacks[3] and insisted that Chechens wanted to establish a global Islamist jihad and not gain independence. Moreover, the Kremlin also refuses to acknowledge that both military campaigns were actual wars – in the official public discourse they are referred to as "Counter-Terrorist Operations in North Caucasus Region." The authorities commonly referred to the rebels as "terrorists" and "thugs."

In 2010's discourse on terrorism became instrumental in suppressing critics of the regime as it transformed into more authoritarian one – when Vladimir Putin started his third presidential term. Through numerous additions to legislation on terrorism the authorities attempted to legitimize further centralization power. The Russian Parliament passed a few important legislations introducing

[2] Sergei Kovalev (Member of the State Duma in 1993-2003, former Ombudsman of Russia 1993-1995, author of the Declaration of Human and Civil Rights), interview by the author, June 18, 2020, Prague; Yulii Rybakov, (Member of the State Duma in 1993-2003, head of Subcommittee on Human Rights in 2000-2003, negotiator with Chechen separatists during both wars), interview by the author, June 5, 2020, Prague.
[3] Emil Souleimanov and Ondrej Ditrych, "The Internationalisation of the Russian–Chechen Conflict: Myths and Reality," *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, no. 7 (2008): 1203. doi:10.1080/09668130802230739.

criminal liability for "terrorist or extremist" posts or comments on the Internet and social media. Since then, criminal cases with terrorism and extremism charges against civil activists or ideological groups critical towards the current regime have become a widespread phenomenon.

Today, the discourse on threat of international terrorism has become a driving force behind Russia's foreign policy that through otherization of terrorist groups in the MENA region and some of the Western states wants to reinvent Russia's identity as a superpower and an ultimate peacemaker – an image that the collective West cannot achieve[4]. After the introduction of international sanctions and fall in oil prices, Russia was hit by an economic crisis. Nonetheless, Moscow is getting involved in expensive military campaigns across MENA region and Asia claiming to fight international terrorism notwithstanding a significant economic decline. The Russian authorities have also successfully antagonized identities of the opposition groups inside Syria to legitimize their military operations in support of Bashar al-Assad's rule – by labelling armed/non-armed opposition forces, civilians, and NGOs workers as either "Islamic terrorists" or their sympathizers.

### 1.2 Literature Overview

One of the pieces that comes near the purpose of this thesis is a policy report From Chechnya to Syria: The Evolution of Russia's Counter-Terrorist Policy which is written by a security studies researcher and PRIO's political analyst Pavel Baev and published by the French Institute of International Relations (IFRI) think tank. Baev outlines major trajectories of Russia's domestic and foreign policies on counterterrorism through the years and key events that helped to shape the approach[5]. However, his analysis is concerned with the policy targeting combatants solely. As the analysis of the issue happens on a positivist epistemology and ontology levels, ha barely touches

[4] Baev, *From Chechnya to Syria: The Evolution of Russia's Counter-Terrorist Policy,* 17-9.
[5] Baev, *From Chechnya to Syria: The Evolution of Russia's Counter-Terrorist Policy*, 5-6.

upon the discourse, identities, and meta-narratives, which are the primary focus of the thesis. Additionally, the report omits the period between the Chechen wars and military involvement in Syria, which I find to be a crucial point for the history of terrorism-related discourse in Russia – state-repression of the critics.

Similar problem faces a research of Aglaya Snetkov, who performs a social constructivist analysis of Russian security policies during first 12 years of Vladimir Putin's rule from 2000 to 2012. According to Snetkov, after the Soviet Union collapsed Russia had a weak state-identity that prioritized domestic security, including the issue of terrorism, however, through Putin's presidency Russia grew "strong" and the priorities shifted to otherizing the West.[6] Nonetheless, the research time span is limited, and her analysis is predominantly concerned with the military threat, even though Snetkov acknowledges the widening notion of "terrorism" in the official discourse.

A significant piece for this part of my research is a journal article by the Charles University-based scholars Emil Souleimanov and Ondrej Ditrych "The Internationalisation of the Russian–Chechen Conflict: Myths and Reality" as it analyzes Chechen military campaigns both on the level of policy and on the level of discourse/identity and power/knowledge nexi. The authors are critically examining how Russian authorities were able to securitize and ascribe the "terrorist" identity to the Chechen rebels, including through legislature. The authors argue – above all – that the political establishment has also utilized the "war on terror" discourse during the Second Chechen War to further legitimize indiscriminatory bombings and other atrocities that the federal forces were responsible for in Chechnya[7].

Richard Jackson's article "Constructing Enemies: 'Islamic Terrorism' in Political and Academic Discourse" is important as a source on how the discourse on terrorism has become immensely

[6] Aglaya Snetkov, "When the Internal and External Collide: A Social Constructivist Reading of Russia's Security Policy," *Europe-Asia Studies* 64, no. 3 (2012), 521–2.
[7] Souleimanov and Ditrych, "The Internationalisation of the Russian–Chechen Conflict: Myths and Reality," 1203.

misused to justify disproportionate policies. Jackson specifically analyzes the hegemonic Western discourse of "Islamic terrorism" and shows how it has politicized and othered whole communities, contributed to increased violence, and resulted in other profound normative consequences[8]. Even though Russia in mainstream academic discourse is not referred to as Western country, Jackson's argument is specifically important as Russia had begun to actively exploit the "Islamic terrorism" narrative and labelled the Chechen separatists as "radical Islamists" only after the Second Chechen War started. Moscow has also been actively utilizing this type of discourse to suppress Crimean Tatars that are either opposing the annexation of Crimea or critical of current regime and to justify its involvement in conflicts across the MENA region today.

Another important piece is the Michael Blain's article "Social Science Discourse and the Biopolitics of Terrorism." By applying Michael Foucault's and Antonio Negri's framework he analyzes the biopolitics of counterterrorism policies, changes in academic discourse on terrorism in general, and explores the power/victimage ritual/knowledge dynamic. Blain stresses, resistance groups were historically labelled as "terrorists" for the convenience of the power elites that wanted to secure their rule[9]. He also argues that "terrorists" – especially "Islamic terrorists" – within modern states are portrayed as uncivilized tyrants, villains, and "outsiders" that are possessing a threat to the societal morals and secure way of life.[10] According to Blain, power elites with this discourse had created new biolpolitical objects whose decision to use violent tactics as a mean of resistance is determined by their psychological health conditions: "terrorists" are usually described as psychotic, inadequate, irrationally violent and hateful individuals[11]. The very same approach is taken by the Russian authorities in their official discourse towards the groups/individuals accused of "terrorism." Moreover, the authorities also target those who criticize them for excessive use of "terrorism" threat

[8] Richard Jackson, "Constructing Enemies: 'Islamic Terrorism' in Political and Academic Discourse," *Government and Opposition* 42, no. 3 (2007): 395.
[9] Michael Blain, "Social Science Discourse and the Biopolitics of Terrorism," *Sociology Compass* 9, no. 3 (March 2015): 162-5. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12246.
[10] Blain, "Social Science Discourse and the Biopolitics of Terrorism," 162-3.
[11] Blain, "Social Science Discourse and the Biopolitics of Terrorism," 166.

and label them as either sympathizers of "terrorism" or supporters of the specific group, thus, eliminating space for the critical public discussion on the phenomenon of political violence. Moreover, the authorities are attempting to infringe individuals' freedoms and their lifestyle – especially falsely accused of terrorism – on the grounds of a targeted legislation. Throughout my thesis I will analyze how biopolitical mechanisms are applied within specific periods.

## 2. Theoretical Approach

### 2.1 Poststructuralism

To analyze the evolution of Russian discourse on terrorism in conjunction with reinvention of state identity and power in the years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union until today, I have chosen to adopt a poststructuralist approach. It is a useful tool for exposing links among ideologies, identities, and power relations which frame, (re)produce, and legitimize the authority and subsequently its domestic and foreign policies.

While poststructuralism does not fall into a category of a self-sufficient paradigm that creates a model of International Relations as a field or comes up with a limited range of issues to highlight, it is a critical approach that analyzes how these modes of hierarchies came into place, how power relates to knowledge and politics of identity, it treats theories as disciplining practices and helps to understand how these relationships influence global affairs.[12] Poststructuralists argue that it is impossible to understand what security or peace is without explanation of what danger or terrorist threat per se is, without constituting an identity of a terrorist; there cannot be an intervention or a military action without explanation of who are the people or a phenomenon that the action is taken against.[13] Additionally, this theoretical

[12] Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith, "Poststructuralism" in *International Relations Theory – Discipline and Diversity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 225.
[13] Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (London: Routledge, 2006), *xvi.*

approach establishes that within the field of International Relations especially policies and identities are in a mutually constitutive relationship rather than in a causal one.

Works of Michel Foucault, Lene Hansen, David Campbell, and Richard Jackson are the main inspiration for this thesis. While rooting the research in the concept of power/knowledge theorized by Foucault, Hansen and Campbell developed a poststructuralist analysis framework for foreign policy in international relations specifically, however, still working within a broader perspective on security issues. Whereas Jackson's works operate on the same epistemological and ontological assumptions are more focused on the critical terrorism studies, which is a primary direction of this research.

Concepts such as power/knowledge, discourse, identity, biopolitics and securitization are key to this thesis and will be used throughout the work, they are explained below.

## 2.2 Power/knowledge

### *What Is It and Where It Resides*

The concept of power/knowledge is central to the poststructuralist approach. Michel Foucault argued that power is directly related to knowledge and vice versa, however, it does not mean that they are synonymous. He theorized that power/knowledge nexus is a form of a social network of power relations that depends on specialized knowledge, thus making power not an object of possession but a productive performative practice.[14]

While Foucault has been exploring the fabrics of the societies' mindsets in general, he insisted that power/knowledge is not centralized, it is rather dispersed throughout the society.[15] He argued that starting from the 18th century and the beginning of a Western secular state the

[14] Jenny Edkins and Nick Vaughan-Williams, *Critical Theorists and International Relations,* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 163.

[15] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, edited by Colin Gordon (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 39.

agency and the nature of power was reinvented: the source of it was no longer coming *from above*, but it started to exist *within* a social body, it was dispersed among family relations, institutions, states, and other products of society.[16] This means that power is embedded in human discourse, behaviors, norms, morals, attitudes, everyday life decisions, and it flows up to the social, political, and international orders. Within such system, individuals are becoming the objects of power/knowledge: they are being normalized, disciplined, and punished; however, they are also becoming the agents of this power/knowledge by perpetuating the very practices they were conditioned in.[17]

Foucault's most prominent bodies of work were concentrated around the evolution or *genealogy* and *archaeology* of discourses of existing power/knowledge structures, how perception of and knowledge about madness, crime, or sexuality changed over time and what performative changes these discourses entailed. Thus, it is critical to stress that power/knowledge nexus is not a universal, monolithic, or fixed structure: after exposure of internal inconsistencies or a struggle of forces it tends to adjust to the new realms and modify itself.[18]

***Power/knowledge in International Relations***

Even though within the studies of International Relations scholars like Campbell, Hansen, Jackson, Laclau, and Mouffe among others extensively rely on Foucault's work, they do locate the agency of power/knowledge predominantly within the state and its bureaucratic apparatus. They treat politicians, ministries, and state itself as a primary actor engaged in

[16] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, 39.
[17] Edkins and Vaughan-Williams, *Critical Theorists and International Relations,* 163-4.
[18] Edkins and Vaughan-Williams, *Critical Theorists and International Relations,* 166-7; Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 183; Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*, *22-3, 26, 42.*

production of discourses, identities, and practices as its very existence depends on it.[19] States produce and reproduce bodies of knowledge on security, trade, human rights, terrorism and other fields in order to legitimize certain practices and vice versa. More detailed elaboration on how power/knowledge is related to identity and discourse can be found in the following subchapters of the Theory section of the Thesis. In the analysis of the Russian discourse on terrorism I will mostly rely on this interpretation of power/knowledge.

***Power/Knowledge in Critical Terrorism Studies***

It is commonly observed by the scholars within the Critical Terrorism studies field that the power/knowledge structure in relation to political violence is one of the hardest to contest. Power elites tend to securitize[20], depoliticize, dehistoricize, and obscure the contexts that led certain groups or non-state actors to insurgency and switch to terrorist tactics. Instead of explaining historical or situational contexts, states tend to explain the cause of terrorism, for instance, by irrational hate towards the "civilized world," in hate towards "democracy," by intrinsic evil, or by religious fundamentalism.[21]

Within such system, any possibility of meaningful public discussion on political violence or its causes is incredibly hard to achieve. According to Stampnitzky, the issue of terrorism shifts into realm of anti-knowledge, a black box of uncontested knowledge that is held and filled by the state or certain experts exclusively.[22] As the phenomenon of political violence is extremely securitized and suspends politics "as usual" – instead of contestation, attempts to

[19] David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 73-4; Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*, 38.

[20] Here I refer to the Copenhagen School's Securitization theory specifically, it will be discussed in detail in the subchapter 2.6 of this Thesis.

[21] Jackson, "Constructing Enemies: 'Islamic Terrorism' in Political and Academic Discourse," 421; Lisa Stampnitzky, "The Emergence of Terrorism Studies as a Field." *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Terrorism Studies*, edited by Richard Jackson, (London/New York: Routledge, 2016), 59.

[22] Lisa Stampnitsky, *Disciplining Terror: How Experts Invented "Terrorism*," (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 189; Stampnitzky, "The Emergence of Terrorism Studies as a Field," 59-60.

critically interrogate this knowledge are being punished – people could be equated to terrorism-sympathizers i.e. the enemies of the state.[23] Through such identification processes and discursive practices, the authority attempts to discipline domestic audiences that challenge its power.[24]

### 2.3 Discourse

In poststructuralism, discourse plays one of the central roles. It is not limited only to the plain linguistics and it is not just a medium of communication as it is often times assumed within positivist epistemologies. Within poststructuralist framework, discourse plays a productive and disciplinary role: it is relative, social, political, material, ideational, constructive, not fixed.[25] Perhaps, this is why for many scholars it is so hard to pin it down, and even Foucault himself was never able to give a consistent definition of what the discourse is. Discourse for poststructuralists is about the production of language, social practices and norms that transcend into the way we think. It creates the *systems of knowledge* or *regimes of truth* about certain issues at any given time depending on the ideological spectrum.

Positivist scholars often criticize poststructuralists for reducing "everything to language," or denying the reality."[26] However, discourse-centric approach of poststructuralism does not reject physical reality, it rather treats the material and the ideational as inseparable: discourse helps to contextualize, institutionalize, expose meanings and their production behind the objects of reality.[27] According to Foucault and other scholars, meanings embedded in

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[23] Stampnitzky, "The Emergence of Terrorism Studies as a Field," 59-60.
[24] David Campbell, "The Biopolitics of Security: Oil, Empire, and the Sports Utility Vehicle," *American Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2005): 948.

[25] Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War, 17-21.*
[26] Dunne, Kurki, and Smith, "Poststructuralism", 235.
[27] Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, 5-7; Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," in *Language and Politics,* edited by Michael Shapiro (Oxford, 1984), 127; Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War, 22;* Erneste Laclau and Chantal Mouffe,

discourse do not come with a universal set of pre-existing notions that were created outside of a certain social structure – the material reality comes to mean things within cultures, regions and traditions of interpretation.[28] That is why Foucault dedicated time and effort to studying such structures of knowledge genealogically. According to Milliken, there are three primary analytical modes of the discourse: it is treated as *system of signification,* as a *productive power,* and as a *play of practices*[29]. Although discourse could be separated for the analytical academic purposes, in reality these functions are seen as inseparable.

***System of Signification***

*Discourse as a system of signification* predominantly relies on classical constructivist assumption theorized by de Saussure and developed later by Derrida that material objects do not mean anything or do not carry any meaning just by themselves, but rather their meanings and characteristics are constructed and attributed by societies: whether placed within a network of signifiers[30] or through binary oppositions.[31] For instance, within different ideological systems and situational circumstances a camouflage uniform could be associated with militarization of a society, with a national pride, with an exploitative system of oppression, with masculinity, with a weekend hunting trip, with dehumanization, with protection, or with an enemy – all of these meanings behind a piece of cloth are produced by different discourses.

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*Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics,* 2nd ed. (New York: Verso, 2001), 108.

[28] Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," in *Language and Politics*, 127; Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity,* 6; Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics,* 107-8; Jennifer Milliken, "The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods," *European Journal of International Relations* 5, no. 2 (1999): 229.

[29] Milliken, "The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods," 229.

[30] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics,* (London: Fontana, 1974).

[31] Jacques Derrida, *Positions,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

***Productive Power***

Understanding *discourse as a productive power* is a significant part of the poststructuralist analysis in International Relations field and some feminist approaches. It is theorized that discourse produces *identities* and certain *regimes of truth* in which these identities are being disciplined, normalized, and conditioned to operate.[32] These identities are being constantly reproduced through linguistic practices in order to sustain their credibility. Based on these discourses certain groups could be endorsed, excluded, discriminated against, or empowered. Within these *regimes of truth* discourses – among other purposes – serve as a foundation for strategies of national, international and security policies that are being legitimized through identities. According to Campbell, danger in IR is not an objective condition, but it is rather an effect of interpretation that can possibly undermine the status quo or position of an actor within the existing system[33]. Under the social contract, the state is granted monopoly on the use of force and violence to protect its citizens from internal or external threats, therefore governments' existence, legitimacy, and this monopoly are dependent on constant replication of discourses of danger.[34] Through these discourses of danger, the state constructs identities of the Self and the Other that mutually constitute each other and legitimizes practices towards them.[35]

***Play of Practice***

Poststructuralists also study discourse as a *play of practice* – a network or grid of discourses that is considered to be both hegemonic and unstable. Authorized actors are constructing whole social/political systems with its values and normativity through constant production

[32] Milliken, "The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods," 229.
[33] Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity, 1-3.*
[34] Didier Bigo and Anastassia Tsoukala, *Terror, Insecurity and Liberty: Illiberal practices of liberal regimes after 9/11,* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 15.
[35] Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity, 60-8, 73-4.*

and reproduction of discourse, simultaneously they legitimize practices based on this normativity.[36] However, this approach also treats hegemonic discourse as inherently unstable, therefore it demands form actor being constantly involved in (re)production of knowledge and identities – only through this they would be able to fix *regimes of truth.*[37]

Nonetheless, this approach does not deny the existence of marginalized discourses or subjugated knowledges. These discourses, according to the theoretical framework, are resisting to the prevailing power/knowledge system.[38] In turn, this contest can lead to the adjustment, profound change, or even discontinuation of the hegemonic discourse.

### 2.4 Identity

In poststructuralism and critical study of terrorism especially, identities play a vital role as an ontological and epistemological center of analysis. Categories of people or their identities are often constituted through differentiations or juxtapositions, usually operating within a set of binaries like masculine/feminine, civilized/barbaric, rational/irrational, hateful/peaceful to name a few.[39] In classical poststructuralist analysis the Self is constructed in relation to the Other, especially it is seen while analyzing the discourses of a "national identity". Such discourse does not only constitute identities, it also disciplines, punishes for disobedience, and attempts to homogenize them.[40]

According to Campbell, discourses of identity, danger, human security, and otherness are crucial not only on the level of national identity creation within certain country, but it also

[36] Milliken, "The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods," 230, 242.
[37] Milliken, "The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods," 230.
[38] Milliken, "The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods," 230.
[39] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,* (London: Routledge, 2007), 24-5; Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*, 20-1, 37; Jackson, "Constructing Enemies: 'Islamic Terrorism' in Political and Academic Discourse," 421.
[40] Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (Vintage. New York, 1995), 183.

shapes its actions in international politics. Both Campbell and Jackson argue that national identity is defined "in relation to difference," whereas governments' foreign policy is formed primarily through "representation of danger" and its promises to defend its citizens from the external forces, which are presented as an imminent threat to the existence, stability, order, and the values of the society.[41] Nation states' discourses of danger and (re)production of identities of Self and the Other is also seen as an attempt to secure domination over the power/knowledge structure because neither discourse, nor identities are eternally fixed.[42] However, Hansen argues, the identity in relation to the governmental policies is not exclusively national: it could be also regional or cultural and it could be formed not only in relation to the dangerous and radical Other, but also through more ambiguous differentiations situated in a web of other identities.[43] Similarly, contemporary Russia is attempting to establish its identity as alternative to both "imperialistic" West as well as a "sneaky" East. Within the poststructuralist framework, policy too is a discursive practice which is ontologically connected to identity: power elites construct and (re)produce identities through performance of foreign or domestic policies, however, they are justifying these policies by exactly the same identities they claim to protect.[44]

This discussion is particularly interesting in the analysis of a terrorism discourse as it illustrates the most radical form of othering in relation to national identity. Identity of a terrorist is the one which is depoliticized, dehistoricized, and decontextualized – as a rule,

[41] Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, 3-9; Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War,* 38; Ondrej Ditrych, *Tracing the Discourses of Terrorism,* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 6*;* Jackson, "Constructing Enemies: 'Islamic Terrorism' in Political and Academic Discourse," 420.
[42] Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, 3-9; Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 183.
[43] Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*, 39-41.
[44] Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,* 25; Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, 8-9, 31-2; Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*, 19.

"terrorists" are depicted as irrational, hateful, illiberal, violent, uncivilized and fanatical.[45] Discourse on terrorism is a powerful tool, which once the authorities initiate, the Other is stripped of its rights to dialogue, humane treatment, fair trial, and in some cases even life.

### 2.5 Biopower and biopolitics

#### *Private Is Political*

Foucault in his research has also argued that with the acceleration of capitalism power has changed its nature from a punishing force into normalizing and disciplining modes. As power/knowledge disperses through social structures creating a certain normativity, it also takes the form of so-called biopower. This biopower acts under the pretension of preserving life – it regulates life of an individual and in some cases decides if a person deserves to be spared of one, it treats human body as a machine that can be optimized and as a mechanism of propagating biological processes associated with this body[46]. Foucault and Agamben argue that there is no distinction between politics and individual life choices, therefore private is inseparable from biopolitical.[47] Moreover, the biopolitical discourse of preserving life in some cases manipulates and efficiently masks violence that it, in fact, promotes.

#### *Biopolitics of Terrorism*

Agamben, who worked extensively on the topic of biopolitics and heavily relied on Foucault, argued that, under certain conditions, authority can violate human rights and sovereignty in

[45] Jackson, "Constructing Enemies: 'Islamic Terrorism' in Political and Academic Discourse," 420-1.
[46] Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, and Population. Lectures at College de France 1977-78*, edited by Michel Senellart, (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 75-6; Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley, (New York: Random House, 1978), 139; Michael Dillon and Julian Reid, *The Liberal Way of War: Killing to Make Life Live*, (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2009), 20-1.
[47] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life,* translated Daniel Heller-Roazen, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998) 3-9; Edkins and Vaughan-Williams, *Critical Theorists and International Relations,* 22, 164; Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction*, 139-43.

the name of life – as the defense of life happens in a grey area, where is no distinction between violence and societal laws.[48] Hence, biopolitical discourses can also serve as a justification for regulating access to certain services, initiating discrimination, structural violence, wars and counter-terrorist operations – as soon as the authority decides that the Other is a threat to the Self.

According to Blain, mainstream academic and public discourse has transformed terrorists into biopolitical objects that are studied through either an individualizing/behaviorist approach or totalizing/policy-oriented approach. The first category treats a terrorist as a type of specific personality and attributes a set of certain characteristics like: irrational, hateful, psychologically unstable, violent etc.[49]; the second type of discourse treats a terrorist as a member of a group and is concerned with identifying and punishing certain risk groups that could potentially show terrorist inclinations or already existing ones.[50] Both of these approaches create a certain body of mostly uncontested, decontextualized – yet authoritative – knowledge about the phenomenon, it later constitutes identities, narratives, and policies that reinforce this type of knowledge.[51] This leads to racial profiling, discrimination within bureaucracies, torture of suspects, indiscriminate military operations, overseas penitentiary facilities where national laws do not apply, mobilization of public support for all of the mentioned above and legitimization of the state and its power.

## 2.6 Securitization

### *Classical Copenhagen School Approach*

[48] Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life,* 3-9; Campbell, "The Biopolitics of Security: Oil, Empire, and the Sports Utility Vehicle," 949-50; Dillon and Reid, *The Liberal Way of War: Killing to Make Life Live*, 20-1; Ditrych, *Tracing the Discourses of Terrorism, 121.*
[49] Bigo and Tsoukala, *Terror, Insecurity and Liberty: Illiberal practices of liberal regimes after 9/11*, 62; Jackson, "Constructing Enemies: 'Islamic Terrorism' in Political and Academic Discourse," 421.
[50] Blain, "Social Science Discourse and the Biopolitics of Terrorism," 165-6.
[51] Ditrych, *Tracing the Discourses of Terrorism, 121;* Stampnitsky, *Disciplining Terror: How Experts Invented "Terrorism*," 189.

Securitization is a concept developed and explored in-depth by the representatives of the so-called Copenhagen school: Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, Jaap de Wilde, and Lene Hansen. Even though the majority of them work within a conventional social constructivist framework, securitization concept is coherent with the subject of this thesis research and also encompasses work with the discourse (though it is predominantly treated as a speech act), its performative manifestations, and depoliticization process.

Within the securitization theory there are securitizing actors, discourses of threats and referent objects or the audience. According to the classical Copenhagen school interpretation, to securitize means to push a certain issue – a thereat – beyond regular politics, in fact to suspend the politics "as usual," and to make it an issue of a survival in the eyes of the referent objects.[52]

Through discourses of danger authorities socially and politically construct terrorism as an *existential* threat, only through this they, besides maintaining their own existence, can legitimize exceptional practices like consolidation of power, excessive use of force, and even suspension of certain rights.[53] Likewise, the Russian government throughout different time periods refers to different audiences – whether on domestic or international levels – actively attempts to securitize separatism and in some cases  even criticism as an existential threat of terrorism.

***Poststructuralist Framework of Securitization***

Drawing from the classical securitization theory, Laclau, Mouffe, Hansen, Bigo and Tsoukala had reinterpreted the ontology of identity and had adapted the framework for a poststructuralist analysis. They argue that identities play a key role in securitization processes,

[52] Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security. A New Framework for Analysis*, (London: Rienner, 1998), 24-5.
[53] Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde, *Security. A New Framework for Analysis*, 23.

they are contingent and unstable, even though the hegemonic discourse insists otherwise. They also situate discourse within a poststructuralist framework[54], rather than treating it as a speech act. Supporting Campbell's argument, they insist that (in)security is neither positive, nor negative, nor objective condition, it is rather a socio-political construction by the *regimes of truth.*[55]

According to Laclau and Mouffe, securitization process can happen through hegemonic discourses and subsequent formation of identities – predominantly of the Self and the Other[56]. The Other does not necessarily constitute a threat, however, there are different degrees of otherness, which explain how certain issues and identities are simply discussed and others extremely securitized. The degree of otherness depends on a position on the moral axis of "Good" versus "Evil": the closer the identity to the "Evil" side, the more radicalized discourse becomes, the more securitized certain issue becomes.[57]

Bigo and Tsoukala, however, disagree with Buzan et al. that international security itself is necessarily an issue of survival and should be regarded as politics of exception, they argue that "politics on terror" cannot be easily distinguished from mundane politics and separated from actions of traditionally accepted agents of democracy (media/private stakeholders/bureaucratic agencies) – these areas are rather intertwined, and each body is competing for defining whose security is important.[58] This competition, in context of a terrorism threat especially, can lead to so-called field effects – shift in boundaries of spheres of knowledge and truths (whether about weapons of mass destruction, rules of military conflict, human rights, terrorism, rules of confinement etc.), this results in infringement of

[54] See Chapter 2.3 of this Thesis.
[55] Bigo and Tsoukala, *Terror, Insecurity and Liberty: Illiberal practices of liberal regimes after 9/11*, 4, 12; Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity, 1-3.*
[56] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics,* 115.
[57] Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 20, 52, 75; Marcos Cardoso dos Santos, "Identity and Discourse in Securitisation Theory," *Contexto Internacional 40*, no, 2 (2018): 233-4.
[58] Bigo and Tsoukala, *Terror, Insecurity and Liberty: Illiberal practices of liberal regimes after 9/11*, 5.

civil liberties within national borders, installment of surveillance, self-authorized expansion of state authority beyond the borders of the state itself.[59] When boundaries of different fields cross they create a *ban-opticon dispositif*, which stimulates the discourse of exception, exclusion, "abnormality," it normalizes monitoring of certain groups that might share the identity of the Other, it pushes this identity beyond socially acceptable norms of morality and justice.[60] It also creates room for state to interventions, similar to what Russia did in both Chechen Wars and is doing these days in the MENA region.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Genealogy and Discourse Analysis

This Thesis examines the evolution of Russia's discourse on terrorism, its ideological foundations, production of identity, and legitimation of state (power) policy through discourses of danger. I have combined genealogical method and Discourse Analysis – as both these approaches are consistent with the goal of this research. Discourse Analysis is a specific technique that allows to analyze not only speech acts, but also broader discourses,[61] how they interact with socio-political knowledge. This method also helps to identify and contextualize specific identities, find consistencies and discontinuities within hegemonic discourses and systems of knowledge.[62]

Within a genealogical study, Discourse Analysis also helps "to see ruptures in given discourse and interrogate silences in order to expose marginalized voices or subjugated knowledge."[63] Throughout

[59]Bigo and Tsoukala, *Terror, Insecurity and Liberty: Illiberal practices of liberal regimes after 9/11*, 16-8, 64-5, 74.
[60] Bigo and Tsoukala, *Terror, Insecurity and Liberty: Illiberal practices of liberal regimes after 9/11*, 2, 22, 31-3.
[61] See Chapter 2.3 of this Thesis.
[62] Kevin C. Dunn and Iver B. Neumann, *Undertaking Discourse Analysis for Social Research*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 103-5, doi:10.3998/mpub.7106945; Ditrych, *Tracing the Discourses of Terrorism, 21-2;* Richard Jackson, "Genealogy, Ideology, and Counter-Terrorism: Writing Wars on Terrorism from Ronald Reagan to George W. Bush Jr," *Studies in Language and Capitalism* 1, (2006), 164.
[63] Dunn and Neumann, *Undertaking Discourse Analysis for Social Research*, 105.

the work, I am performing a double reading or deconstruction[64] of the collection of texts by, firstly, identifying major narratives within Russia's discourse on terrorism and their hierarchical organization within a specific period, secondly, by searching for inconsistencies and implications to events in a broader context. Predication, subject positioning and mapping of discourses are among other tools that are applied to analyze the transformation of Russia's discourse on terrorism.

There is a broader discussion within the academic field, whether the Discourse Analysis is a reliable methodological approach (and in even post-structuralist approach in general), whether it is able to produce stricter formulas for text analysis, consistent results with the same set of data given to another researcher, or an "objective" result. The method itself is an example of interpretivist research, which by default entails working within a space of historical and contextual biases. Moreover, based on the ontology of this method and the poststructuralist approach, when it comes to understanding the society, there is no objective or universal knowledge that can be extracted neither through formulas, nor other methods of calculation. While recognizing internal biases, researchers are not aiming to produce an "objective" knowledge about a phenomenon but rather to present an interpretation of one.

### 3.2 Data and Analysis

Within the Discourse Analysis framework and poststructuralist approaches in general, texts are the predominantly studied data that are also bound by intertextuality. Since this research is preoccupied with the issues of state security, production of identity, and *regimes of truth* on legitimacy of violence, it is critical to investigate the discourse of the governmental documents and primary actors in this process – as they hold an authority in production of knowledge about security.[65] Therefore, this Thesis is heavily reliant on primary sources like Russian federal laws, Presidential Executive

[64] Richard K. Ashley, "Untying the Sovereign State: A Double Reading of the Anarchy Problematique," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 17*,* no. 2 (1988): 235; Dunn and Neumann, *Undertaking Discourse Analysis for Social Research*, 109-10.
[65] Ditrych, *Tracing the Discourses of Terrorism, 22.*

Orders, National Strategies for State Policy, court decisions, press releases, public statements and interviews with policy makers, in other words, the official discourse. Popular culture and the media are also an important part of knowledge and identity production, that is why I complemented official documentation with films, TV-reports, journals, and newspaper articles to illustrate context in which the official discourse is embedded. In some instances, secondary data like human rights groups' reports, academic articles, and topical books are used to provide support for the main argument. Altogether – a few hundreds of primary and secondary sources were examined just in relation to the Russia's discourse on terrorism, while not all of them are cited in the Thesis, the most comprehensive or crucial ones are.

All the texts are available through either official governmental resources or through online media, their links are included into the footnotes and bibliography. For the analysis, I run a search through key words that can indicate construction or the Other and Self like "terrorism," "terrorists," "hostages," "Chechnya," "Chechens," "extremism," "Syria," "Libya," "ISIS," "White Helmets," "criminal," "danger," "bloodthirsty," and, on the other hand, "security," "threat," "monitoring," "protection," "defense," "justice," "humanitarian," and others. During the second reading, I carefully studied the broader ideological bases, context, in which these words were utilized, to understand what message these texts are attempting to convey, who is the target audience, which existing socio-political narratives they appeal to, and how do they fit into a general context of the specific period.

I have also conducted a number of interviews with some of the participants of the events described in this Thesis like hostage negotiators during both Chechen wars, State Duma deputies, a former Advisor to the Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office, and an expert on monitoring the application of counter-terrorism and counter-extremism legislation in Russia. I believe, accounts of these people can provide additional insights into the formation of discourse on terrorism and are thus a valuable addition to such type of research. The interviews were conducted either by telephone or video conference platform Skype. The interviews are fully transcribed and stored on my personal

digital devices together with the recordings, however, fragments of these interviews are published on the *Current Time's* website (part of the RFE/RL media corporation) and publicly available for reference.

To contextualize the collected data, I have organized them along a temporal dimension. I identified four most significant periods, through which it is possible to trace the evolution of Russia's discourse on terrorism:

1. Dissolution of the USSSR and The First Chechen War (1991-1996)
2. Interwar Period and The Second Chechen War (1997-2009)
3. Return of Vladimir Putin to presidency (2012 – ongoing)
4. Fight Against International Terrorism (2015 – ongoing).

Within Critical Terrorism Studies, "terrorism" itself is seen as highly securitized and depoliticized term, as the hegemonic knowledge attempts to obscure the origins of political violence, contests its ideology, and abuses power in the name of preserving life.[66] In order to avoid falling into narrative of either side of selected conflicts and to critically interrogate the events, for each period I provided a subchapter dedicated to explaining historical background or specific context critical for understanding hegemonic narratives and challenging the knowledge that is presented by the authorities as undisputed. This also helped with discourse mapping – searching for inconsistencies within a *regime of truth* about "terrorism" and exploring relations between the Self and the Other in a constitution of discourse in a specific period.[67]

Within the poststructuralist approach, policy and identity are seen as mutually constitutive and ontologically interconnected: an adoption of a certain law legitimizes state power and constitutes

[66] Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life,*3-9; Dillon and Reid, *The Liberal Way of War: Killing to Make Life Live*, 59, 138-9, 144.
[67] Dunn and Neumann, *Undertaking Discourse Analysis for Social Research*, 118.

identities, likewise identities can lead to adoption of new laws. Therefore, the evolution of Russia's discourse on terrorism will be illustrated with additional subchapters on "Identity" and "Policy." According to Hansen, methodologically, identities are formed by designating specific terms for the Other and for the Self that are consistent throughout broader narratives, through their differentiation, and their location within a larger system of meanings.[68] Even though the hegemonic discourse is attempting to present identities as stable, it is not always the case – an identity is subject to change. To trace, how in different circumstances identities have been adapting to new realities, I am dedicating a subchapter for each period to the "Identity of the Terrorist" and "Identity of Russia." These can provide a more nuanced look into period goals, track the transformation of discourse on terrorism across the years, and understand what role this discourse has played in legitimation of the Russian government both domestically and internationally. In these parts of the Thesis, I will use subject positioning and predication as tools to see how certain identities were formed through their differentiation and how they were attached to certain characteristics. [69]

Policy, especially, a foreign one, constitutes and rests upon spatial ("Russians"/"Chechens), temporal ("civilized"/"primitive"), and ethical ("humanitarian"/"violent") identities – thereby constructing boundaries, excluding the Other, and justifying specific actions like wars or interventions.[70] Adoption of certain laws and policies gives another level of legitimacy and constructs the state as more cohesive, especially in relation to identity of the Other. In the "Policy" subchapters for a specific period I analyze key laws and other official documents that reflected the events and signified the transition in power. The analysis of the evolution of Russian discourse on terrorism in conjunction with reinvention of state identity and power in the years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union until today will be presented in the following chapters.

[68] Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*, 37.
[69] Dunn and Neumann, *Undertaking Discourse Analysis for Social Research*, 112-4.
[70] Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*, 43-5.

## 4. Fighting Separatism – The First Chechen War

### 4.1 Context

Chechnya is a small Republic in the mountainous North Caucasus region that borders with Georgia and other regions of Russia: Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Dagestan, and Stavropol Krai. The First Chechen war has officially started in December 1994, however, the tensions between the republic and central government in Moscow have been present for decades. During the late period of the USSR then Checheno-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was dissatisfied with the structurally violent policies of the Kremlin: neo-colonialist policies, socio-economic underdevelopment of the region, high unemployment rates, concentration of biohazardous plants and oil wells inside the republic, suppression of indigenous languages, cultural practices, and religious freedoms.[71] When the Soviet Union was on its way to dissolution from 1991 to 1993, different Soviet republics gained either full independence or negotiated greater autonomy within the newly forming Russia. Chechens saw this as an opportunity to gain their independence, too, but it never worked out. Months before the official breakup of the Soviet Union, one of the Chechen nationalist leaders Dzhokhar Dudayev was elected as the head of All-National Congress of the Chechen People that tried through political means to negotiate independence with the crumbling communist government. However, after a number of failed attempts Dudayev unilaterally announced creation of Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (CRI) and its secession from the USSR in June 1991. A few months later the President of Russia Boris Yeltsin, who at first was reluctant to take responsibility for the Chechen independence, declared a state of emergency in the republic and dispatched troops to patrol the region.[72] This decision stoked anti-Russian sentiment and pushed Chechens to join guerilla groups, take over military warehouses, and later take part in small-scale military conflicts across the Caucasus and even inside Chechnya with the pro-Russian forces both military and political. The

[71] Anatol Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1998), 56-7.
[72] Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*, 63-4.

region has also plunged into lawlessness, there were a few major incidents with people being taken hostage for ransoms and continued political pressure on Moscow.

Up until late 1994, Russian military tried to regain its control over Chechnya with occasional targeted air strikes, while Dudayev tried to negotiate a peace deal with Moscow and stop the bombings. However, neither Yeltsin, nor high ranking officials wanted to negotiate with Dudayev or any other representative of CRI – they ether claimed that situation in the region got out of control or kept canceling the meetings last minute – says hostage and POW negotiator during both Chechen wars and former MP Yuly Rybakov.[73] Despite strong anti-war coalition in the Russian Parliament and human rights groups, it was decided to deploy troops permanently and initiate a large-scale series of air strikes, including on the Chechen capital Grozny, on December 11, 1994.[74]

Right before the New Year celebrations Russian forces bombarded and attacked around 50 cities and villages across Chechnya leaving up to 25 thousand of civilian casualties.[75] Active military operation continued till late April 1995. Human rights groups, including the Ombudsman and the author of the Declaration of Human Rights in Russia Sergei Kovalev and his group of the MPs that included Rybakov and Oleg Orlov, frequently reported gross violations of human rights on both sides of the conflict: indiscriminate bombings of civilian facilities, so-called carpet bombings, and inhumane treatment of the prisoners of war and hostages.[76] In the absence of dialogue between separatist leadership and Yeltsin's team, Kovalev, Orlov, Rybakov and other MPs attempted to backchannel possible solutions to the conflict.[77] A few times, the two sides managed to negotiate ceasefires;

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[73] Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*, 90; Yuly Rybakov, (Member of the State Duma in 1993-2003, head of Subcommittee on Human Rights in 2000-2003, negotiator with Chechen separatists during both wars), interview by the author, June 5, 2020. Prague.

[74] Baev, *From Chechnya to Syria: The Evolution of Russia's Counter-Terrorist Policy,* 11.

[75] Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*, 107-8.

[76] Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*, 131; Sergei Kovalev (Member of the State Duma in 1993-2003, former Ombudsman of Russia 1993-1995, author of the Declaration of Human and Civil Rights, negotiator with Chechen separatists during both wars), interview by the author, June 18, 2020. Prague.Emil Souleimanov and Daniel S. Siroky, "Random or Retributive? Indiscriminate Violence in the Chechen Wars," *World Politics* 68, no. 04 (2008): 13.

[77] Kovalev, (Member of the State Duma in 1993-2003, former Ombudsman of Russia 1993-1995, author of the Declaration of Human and Civil Rights, negotiator with Chechen separatists during both wars), interview by

however, they were all broken by the Russian military as well as by the separatist forces. A series of broken promises led to the critical event in Russian discourse on terrorism and subsequent policies – the Budyonnovsk hospital hostage siege.

On June 14, 1995, around 200 Chechen separatists led by the famous warlord Shamil Basayev crossed the border to the Russian-controlled territories and took around 2,000 people hostage in the southern city of Budyonnovsk and barricaded themselves in a local hospital, killing about a dozen of civilians. The separatists demanded withdrawal of Russian military from Chechnya and recognition of Ichkeria. At first, the Russian secret services that were handling the crisis refused to negotiate with the rebels and three days after the takeover decided to storm the building early morning with artillery shelling, however, it resulted in deaths of around 100 hostages. While Yeltsin, who during the siege was on the G7 summit in Canada, insisted on a full-scale military operation oriented towards full "neutralization" of separatist forces, Kovalev's team managed to fly to Budyonnovsk, enter the hospital and negotiate a preliminary peace deal with the Chechen rebels.[78] The deal was also mediated via phone and live TV-broadcast with the Russian Prime-Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin. Rebels agreed to release most of the hostages, though leaving 123 "volunteer hostages" including the MPs and journalists to serve as human shields – so rebels can safely return to separatist-controlled territories in Chechnya. Hostages were later set free. The crisis lasted for six days. The event has triggered a powerful discursive response on terrorism inside Russia[79] and the peace deal itself was later called a national disgrace and was heavily criticized by some part of the Russian population, especially by the hardline politicians, officers inside the security services and the military.

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the author, June 18, 2020; Rybakov, (Member of the State Duma in 1993-2003, head of Subcommittee on Human Rights in 2000-2003, negotiator with Chechen separatists during both wars), interview by the author, June 5, 2020.

[78] Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*, 124-5; Kovalev, (Member of the State Duma in 1993-2003, former Ombudsman of Russia 1993-1995, author of the Declaration of Human and Civil Rights), interview by the author, June 18, 2020; Rybakov, (Member of the State Duma in 1993-2003, head of Subcommittee on Human Rights in 2000-2003, negotiator with Chechen separatists during both wars), interview by the author, June 5, 2020.

[79] Souleimanov and Dytrich, "The Internationalisation of the Russian–Chechen Conflict: Myths and Reality," 1213.

Nonetheless, a few months later fights resumed, however, by the Russian federal forces. Chechen separatists attempted to set another hostage crisis in the city of Kizlyar in early 1996 with another 3,000 hostages, but this time Russian military refused to negotiate. The fight resulted in almost 150 dead members of the Chechen battalion. Soon after Russian federal forces killed the President of self-proclaimed Ichkeria Dudayev, it led to another escalation of violence that culminated in a major takeover of the territories by the Chechen separatists. In August 1996 the Kremlin decided to sign with the separatists a comprehensive Khasavyurt Accord that postponed the final decision on Chechen independence till late 1990's, however, until then it granted Chechnya major autonomy within the borders of the Russian Federation.[80]

### 4.2 Russian vs. Terrorist Identity

#### 4.2.1 Identity of the Terrorist

The official Russian discourse has constructed the identity of the Chechen separatists as an imminent threat to the stability, safety, and values of the Russian citizens and the government. Such discourse was rooted in dichotomies of order/lawlessness, safety/danger, peaceful/hateful, moderation/extremism and similar. In context of post USSR economic and political turmoil, issues of legitimacy and fight against extremism have become an integral part of the official Russian discourse towards Chechen separatists and constitution of their identity. Moscow started othering Chechen separatist forces as radical nationalists and terrorists and exploited this type of discourse to legitimize its own political authority and to justify violence against the Other. While not all Chechens were represented as terrorists in official discourse, they still were affected: civilian Chechens had become victims of hate crimes, discrimination, and carpet bombings led by the federal forces.

In the address to the nation on December 27, 1994, right after the military units were dispatched to Chechnya, Yeltsin claimed that the region has turned into the "biggest base of political extremism,"

[80] Baev, *From Chechnya to Syria: The Evolution of Russia's Counter-Terrorist Policy,* 11.

"Chechnya has become a center of attraction for radical extremist and nationalist forces," the Chechen leadership is "illegitimate," the separatists "forced a criminal lifestyle on the Chechen society," and that the leadership of Ichkeria is harboring "international terrorists and mercenaries.[81]"

In public discourse, Chechnya was also referred to as a lawless land where violence and crime prevailed. Yeltsin, the Secretary of the Security Council Alexandr Lebed, and other key political figures of the military operation often said that there are centers for counterfeit money printing, harbor of organized crime groups, and routes for drugs and arms smuggling in Chechnya.[82]

The Russian authorities have also helped securitize the discourse on the conflict in Chechnya; they insisted that existing regime in the region is a threat to Russia's peaceful existence and stability,[83] it is an internal threat to security and life of the citizens, that the threat is omnipresent and ubiquitous, so "anyone could [potentially] become its victim."[84] Some of these politicians insisted that there was an outbreak of hate crimes towards ethnic Russians inside Chechnya during that period and exploited this type of discourse to further legitimize federal government intervention. Sergey Stepashin, who during the First Chechen War served as director of the Federal Security Service (FSB) and director of the Federal Counterintelligence Service and was among the leaders of the military campaign, refers to the early 1990s events in Chechnya as a "genocide of the Russians" and to one of the military leaders Shamil Basayev as "a real murderer and a professional terrorist" until today.[85]

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[81] Boris Yeltsin, "Address of the President of the Russian Federation to the Nation of the Russian Federation Due to Events in the Chechen Republic" (Speech. Moscow. December 27, 1994).

[82] Alexandr Lebed, "Hero of the Day: Alexandr Lebed," interview by Yevgeny Kiselyov, February 23, 1996, video, 16:07, https://youtu.be/OGPWIuD3vZc; Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*, 74-5; Yeltsin, "Address of the President of the Russian Federation to the Nation of the Russian Federation Due to Events in the Chechen Republic."

[83] In accordance with the Securitization theory discussed in Chapter 2.6 of this Thesis.

[84] Yeltsin, "Address of the President of the Russian Federation to the Nation of the Russian Federation Due to Events in the Chechen Republic."

[85] Sergey Stepashin, "Sergey Stepashin: I Understand Why Putin Turns to God," interview by Valerii Beresnev, Business Online, June 12, 2018, https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/385242.

Yeltsin has also accused some of the media outlets in Russia of accepting money from Chechens to write critical publications about Moscow's decision, accused politicians and journalists, who were against military campaign in Chechnya of playing political games and lack of patriotism.

### 4.2.2 Identity of Russia

It is suggested in a wide range of academic literature that for Russia the question of a coherent identity was a complicated one, as it was previously constituted through an imperialistic and geopolitical discourse rather than through a unifying nationalist or ethnic discourse at the time.[86] After the Soviet Union collapsed, it was vital for the new government to show strong leadership – the war in Chechnya and terrorism discourse have become an effective tool for unifying the audience against the threatening Other and making first steps towards a re-constitution of the Russian postcommunist identity.

Throughout the years prior and during the war in Chechnya, President Yeltsin and his associates were repeatedly speaking about peace, security, and liberalization; the Russian authorities tried to create for themselves an identity of peacemakers and negotiators attempting to preserve the rule of law, as opposed to the separatist leadership that has actively tried to undermine it. In public, Yeltsin and his associates insisted that Moscow was the one that tried to initiate peace talks with Grozny to settle the territorial dispute within the legal and political frameworks and that the separatists were the ones to undermine it.[87] In the same address to the nation on December 27, 1994, Yeltsin said that it was "Moscow tried to persuade" Grozny to stay in Russia, that the federal forces are "preserving the

[86] Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*, viii; Malashenko, Alexei and Dmitri Trenin, *The Time of the South: Russia in Chechnya, Chechnya in Russia*, (Moscow: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002), 6-7; Snetkov, "When the Internal and External Collide: A Social Constructivist Reading of Russia's Security Policy", 521-3; Igor Torbakov, "A Parting of Ways? The Kremlin Leadership and Russia's New-Generation Nationalist Thinkers," *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 23, no. 4 (Fall 2015), 538; Andrei P. Tsygankov, "Finding a Civilisational Idea: "West," Eurasia," and "Euro-East" in Russia's Foreign Policy," *Geopolitics* 12, no. 3 (2007), 376. doi:10.1080/14650040701305617.

[87] Yeltsin, "Address of the President of the Russian Federation to the Nation of the Russian Federation Due to Events in the Chechen Republic."

integrity of Russia, which is granted by the Constitution" and restoring law and order.[88] However, a few people who attempted to facilitate the negotiations – in discussion with the author – claimed otherwise, that Yeltsin and his team in private did everything for the meeting not to happen.[89] Moreover, in that very address Yeltsin claimed that for three years prior to the intervention, the Russians blamed him for being indecisive and too soft on the issue of separatism, thus, he attempted to legitimize the ongoing military operation through the alleged will of the people. He also shrugged off concerns about legitimacy of federal forces' presence during the state of emergency: he claimed that the time has come to "save Chechnya from this disaster." According to the official discourse, there is no security outside Russia, only federal forces can preserve peace, the military operation was an attempt to protect not only Russians outside Chechnya but also the Chechens themselves.

In June 1996, Boris Yeltsin signed the National Strategy of the State Policy which raised an issue of collective Russian identity. He claimed that the totalitarian regime of the USSR has undermined cultural values of the multinational Russia, it attempted to universalize the identity but destroyed it instead.[90] Yeltsin added that after the Soviet Union broke up, it was hard for the Russian state to reform specifically in absence of a coherent strategy for development of a national identity.[91]

### 4.3 Policy

Dominance of a security-oriented discourse at the time framed a certain type of biopolitical order that ensured legitimacy of the state authority over both information and living spaces across its territory

[88] Yeltsin, "Address of the President of the Russian Federation to the Nation of the Russian Federation Due to Events in the Chechen Republic."

[89] Kovalev, (Member of the State Duma in 1993-2003, former Ombudsman of Russia 1993-1995, author of the Declaration of Human and Civil Rights), interview by the author, June 18, 2020; Rybakov, (Member of the State Duma in 1993-2003, head of Subcommittee on Human Rights in 2000-2003, negotiator with Chechen separatists during both wars), interview by the author, June 5, 2020.

[90] Presidential Executive Order N 909 of June 15, 1996, Enactment of the National Strategy of the State Policy of the Russian Federation. *Official Internet Portal of Legislative Information,* URL: http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=102041930&rdk=0&firstDoc=1&lastdoc=1.

[91] Presidential Executive Order N 909 of June 15, 1996, Enactment of the National Strategy of the State Policy of the Russian Federation.

and enhanced its power. Russia did not have any comprehensive law on terrorism and extremism and did not provide official definitions of such activity at the legislative level, except for internal regulations of security services, until 1998. Nonetheless, throughout years leading to the First Chechen War and up until the end of it the Russian authorities have passed several restrictive policies in the name of preservation of life, security, and the state.

In late December 1991, Yeltsin signed a special law N 2124-1 regulating the operations of mass media. Despite the fact that this law does not explicitly refer to terrorism or extremism, according to the Article 4, journalists are not allowed to publish or broadcast materials that could be seen as "calls to seizure of power, to violent overthrow of constitutional order or state integrity, [...] or as propagation of war."[92]

In March 1995, the President issued another special Executive Order N 310 addressing the rise of extremist threat, inefficiency of government agencies in fighting it, and ordered to develop a new legislative system for dealing with it. According to the Order, political situation at the time was characterized by growing "anti-constitutional activity of extremist groups," that are "threatening social order, undermining societal security, state integrity, […] and the institution of elections."[93] It also instituted a set of penalties for journalists for publication of such information.

Right after the Budyonnovsk hostage crisis of 1995, there was seen a major shift in knowledge within the bureaucracy. The state authorities further continued to lay discursive ground for suspected terrorists, their relatives, and associates to become biopolitical objects and targets of surveillance. Russian legislators passed a federal law N 144-FZ on intelligence gathering that allowed violation of certain constitutional rights of a suspect individual. Specifically, it was allowed to suspend rights to

[92] Federal Law N 2124-1 of December 27, 1991, On Mass Media, enacted, *Official Internet Portal of Legislative Information,* URL: http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=102013812&rdk=0.

[93] Presidential Executive Order N310 of March 23, 1995, On the Measures to Ensure Coordinated Action of Bodies of State Authority in the Fight Against Manifestations of Fascism and Other Forms of Political Extremism in the Russian Federation. *Official Internet Portal of Legislative Information,* URL: http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=102034801&rdk=0.

inviolability of home, secrecy of correspondence and phone calls.[94] According to this law, an operative could request suspension of those rights from court, if there is evidence of criminal activity, evidence of a specific person participating in such activity or a possible threat to the state, military, economic or ecological security of Russia.

In light of failing federal policy in Chechnya, in November 1995, Yeltsin issued another Presidential Executive Order N 1203 that classified any information on military operations, its equipment, number of troops and other military-related information.[95] Disclosure of a state secret at the time depending on the circumstances was punishable by up to seven years in prison or ban of professional activity for the same period of time. This gave the authorities additional leverage in silencing its opponents and journalists.

Already during the closing stages of war and amidst negotiations with the separatists, in June 1996, Boris Yeltsin signed the abovementioned National Strategy of the State Policy. Language of this document, surprisingly, is significantly softer as opposed to the dominant discourse at the time. Yeltsin talks about the necessity for "unity," "consolidation" of different ethnicities and nationalities, "peaceful and timely" manner of conflict resolution, "preservation of the Russian Federation's territorial integrity" while "respecting the right to self-determination."[96] The Strategy also addresses issues of economic, geopolitical and social inequality within certain regions and promises support for refugees or internally displaced people who fled conflict zones, however, not specifying the zones he refers to.

Within two months of adoption of the National Strategy, on August 31, Chechen separatists and the federal government signed the Khasavyurt Accord. While it was not the final document regulating

[94] Federal Law N 144-FZ of August 12, 1995, On Law Enforcement Intelligence-Gathering Activities, enacted, *Official Internet Portal of Legislative Information,* URL: http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=102037058&rdk=0.

[95] Presidential Executive Order N 1203 of November 30, 1995, Approval of the List of Information Declared a State Secret, *Official Internet Portal of Legislative Information,* URL: http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=102038480&rdk=0.

[96] Presidential Executive Order N 909 of June 15, 1996, Enactment of the National Strategy of the State Policy of the Russian Federation.

the relations between the breakaway region and Moscow, it recognized the authority of Ichkeria over Chechen territories, however, the region remained within the borders of Russia. The second and third articles of the Accord explicitly address the terrorist threat, ethnic hatred, and security, additionally, it ensures responsibility of federal government and Chechen separatists for handling these issues. This Accord seemed to separate a collective Chechen identity from the identity of a terrorist, it left the identity of a terrorist in abstraction – without a face. These people, of whom the federal authorities only recently spoke about as terrorists, were now official members of the political establishment and took upon a job of fighting against terrorism themselves.

The events led to adoption of a comprehensive federal law N 130-FZ "On Combating Terrorism" in July 1998. The law went back to the tone of previously issued executive orders and laws, however, this time around the legislators also took events that happened during the war into account, especially the Budyonnovsk hostage crisis.[97] According to this law, members of the counter-terrorist operations (CTO) have the right to detain, request documents, and pat-search civilians, they have unrestricted access to private property and vehicles regardless of ownership status located within the territory of the operation. The law has also structured the hierarchy of counter-terrorist operations: it prohibited anyone but the head of the operation from leading negotiations with terrorists, outlawed to agree to their political demands, and introduced unavoidability of punishment for the offenders. The law also regulated the presence of press on the territories of such operations as well as the scope of information that journalists could publish: it banned publishing details of the military operations, information about servicemen participating in it and "propagation or apology of terrorism and extremism." It has also relieved the members of the operation from any responsibility for possible damage whether to health or property of terrorists, civilians, or others.

[97] Federal Law N 130-FZ of July 25, 1998, On Combating Terrorism, void, *Official Internet Portal of Legislative Information*, URL: http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=102054620&rdk=0.

Another important part of this federal law concerns compensations for victims and servicemen participating in counter-terrorist operations. Victims of terrorist activity are entitled to financial compensation for the damage of their property or health, it is paid by the local government, but the sum will be later collected from the perpetrators. However, financial capacity of each region differs widely. For years financial capacities of the local authorities, where the attacks and hostage crises took place, were extremely limited and many victims barely received any compensation. The law also grants additional governmental support to the members of the CTO: provides compensations for death or damage to health, allows for shorter service time, provides additional bonuses to the pension. Events in Budyonnovsk and Kizlyar, for instance, are often referred to as counter-terrorist operations, however, as they took place outside of Chechnya and demanded urgency, they CTO status was never legally introduced. Some of the members of the operations, who were dispatched to these cities in a hurry and were not official members of the operations, claimed that they are not entitled to compensations or additional benefits. Similarly, local policemen both in Budyonnovsk and Kizlyar, who de facto participated in these operations and were hit by the assailants first, never got the compensations, benefits to pension, or even CTO-veteran statuses.[98]

### 4.4 Summary

In the First Chechen War the Russian authorities engaged in intensive othering of the Chechen identity, especially of the Chechen separatists, while attempting to build an identity of their own. Even though the lines between the identity of an ordinary Chechen and a "Chechen terrorist" often blurred in public discourse, some of the adopted policies have eventually separated them. During this period the Russian government has also passed a number of restrictive legislations – in the name of preserving human life and security of the state. Through these policies they securitized and reinforced

[98] Eugenia Kotlyar, Kristina Zakurdaeva, and Angelina Kazakova, "To Release Hostages or to Kill the Rebels. How the Federal Forces Assaulted the Besieged Hospital in Budyonnovsk," *Current Time,* June 17, 2020, https://www.currenttime.tv/a/budyonnovsk-25-years-assault/30676056.html.

knowledge about Chechen separatism, attempted to silence alternative discourses, masked, and even promoted the violence that was committed on behalf of the Russian federal state in Chechnya. Additionally, the terrorism threat helped to legitimize the authority of the newly formed government and the existence of the state altogether as a guarantor of public security.

## 5. Fighting Separatism and War on Terror – The Second Chechen War

### 5.1 Context

Attempts of the newly formed semi-autonomous government of Ichkeria to reinstitute effective law enforcement during the interwar period kept failing: there were frequent reports of abductions of people for ransoms, high crime rates, and ongoing fighting in some of the Chechen territories led by the splintered separatist groups that were dissatisfied with the conditions of the Khasavyurt Accord. Even though Ichkeria was formally recognized after signing of the peace deal, the Russian authorities in Moscow were reluctant to proceed with comprehensive negotiations on official status of the territories. The agreement with Moscow also did not help to effectively solve issues of socioeconomic insecurity in the region.[99]

One of the leading Chechen warlords Shamil Basayev, who served as prime minister within Ichkeria's government in the interwar period, claimed that he got frustrated with the stalemating political process of the Chechen struggle for independence and quit his job to reinstitute his battalions in 1998. At the same time, he grew closer to the followers of Salafism, one of the most conservative branches within Sunni Islam, and developed ties with Osama bin Laden, a Saudi businessman and leader of al-Qaeda. The initial connection between them could be traced to the late 1980's, when Basayev and some of his fighters underwent military and guerilla tactics training in Mujahideen camps on the Afghan-Pakistani border. In these camps Basayev also met Ibn al-Khattab, a member of

[99] Souleimanov and Dytrich, "The Internationalisation of the Russian–Chechen Conflict: Myths and Reality," 1209.

the Afghan Mujahideen and participant of militarized Islamist rebel groups in Tajikistan and Bosnia in 1990's, later he joined Chechen fight against Russia, too. These events played a key role in shifting of the Chechen separatism narrative from nationalist to religious ideology.[100] Alongside this radicalization of the military leadership in Chechnya, there was a spike in religiousness across the region itself, in some territories there were even Sharia courts established.[101]

On August 7, 1999, Chechen regiments under the command of Basayev and al-Khattab intervened into the neighboring Dagestan to support a local militarized group, however, unsuccessfully. Two days after the Chechen fighters intervened, on August 9, President Yeltsin, who by that time had serious problems with his health, appointed new Prime Minister of Russia and his successor on the presidential post – then Director of the FSB – Vladimir Putin. The intervention in Dagestan was followed by a series of explosions of apartment buildings across Russia that left over 300 people dead in early September. Russian authorities blamed the Chechen separatists for the attacks, however, there is conflicting evidence on whether they were truly responsible for these explosions. According to the former senior FSB officer Alexander Litvinenko and historian Yuri Felshtinsky, it was a special operation run by the security services of Russia to justify a new war in Chechnya; separatist leadership also refused to claim responsibility for these attacks.[102] In September 1999, the Russian authorities retorted back to the previously established "Chechen terrorist" discourse and President Yeltsin sanctioned another intervention in Chechnya, however, this time round it was called a "counter-terrorist operation" – in line with the federal law N 130-FZ "On Combating Terrorism" of 1998 mentioned above.

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[100] James Hughes, *Chechnya: From Nationalism to Jihad*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 105; Souleimanov and Dytrich, "The Internationalisation of the Russian–Chechen Conflict: Myths and Reality," 1210.

[101] Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*, 364-5; Souleimanov and Dytrich, "The Internationalisation of the Russian–Chechen Conflict: Myths and Reality," 1209.

[102] Alexander Litvinenko and Yuri Felshtinsky, *Blowing Up Russia: Terror from Within,* (New York: S.P.I. Books, 2002), ISBN 978-1-56171-938-9; Souleimanov and Dytrich, "The Internationalisation of the Russian–Chechen Conflict: Myths and Reality," 1201; Tsygankov, "Finding a Civilisational Idea: "West," Eurasia," and "Euro-East" in Russia's Foreign Policy," 391.

In a matter of seven months, the Russian federal forces toppled the separatist government of Ichkeria, installed a pro-Russian Chief Mufti Akhmad-Haji Kadyrov as president of Chechnya, and pushed the rebels out into the mountainous area. The federal authorities have also engaged heavily in the discourse of internationalization of terrorism in Chechnya because of the rebels' connections with al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban. This type of discourse intensified further after the September 11 attacks in the U.S. in 2001.

Meanwhile, the separatists claimed that they adopted guerilla and terrorist tactics to fight against the federal government and to make Russians feel what is it like to live in Chechnya.[103] Among other isolated bombings and attacks, two most tragic events of the Second Chechen war were the Dubrovka theatre siege and the Beslan school hostage crises.

In October 2002, over 40 separatists including Basayev and a host of female suicide bombers entered a theatre in Moscow's Dubrovka during the performance of the "Nord-Ost" musical, they took the audience and the performers hostage – around 850 people altogether – for three days. The separatists demanded immediate cessation of military operations in Chechnya and granting the region independence. Russian security services refused to lead political negotiations and on direct orders form the President Vladimir Putin initiated an operation to rescue the hostages: they pumped an unknown toxic gas into the ventilation system (the information about the chemical is still classified, the victims claim they experience severe health problems till this day) and later proceeded with an assault. During the operation, over 130 civilians died either because of the gas or they were killed in a shoot-out. After the siege Basayev was added onto the lists of "International Terrorists" by the U.S. and the UN.

The second incident took place on September 1, 2004, when Basayev's regiment took over a thousand of school children, their relatives, and teachers hostage in southern city of Beslan during

[103] Shamil Basayev, "Chechen Guerrilla Leader Calls Russians 'Terrorists,'" interview by Andrei Babitsky, ABC News, January 6, 2006, https://abcnews.go.com/Nightline/International/story?id=990187&page=1.

traditional celebrations of the first day of school year. The demands were – again – withdrawal of federal forces from Chechnya, recognition of its independence, negotiations mediated by presidents of Russian Caucasus' republics, and release of some of the imprisoned fighters. The federal forces refused to negotiate – again – and stormed the besieged school on the third day of the crisis. As a result of the operation, over 330 people died, most of them – children.

The Beslan hostage crisis has contributed to fragmentation of the separatist forces: some saw this act as too radical, condemned the militarized leadership, and distanced themselves from Basayev and his associates.[104] In the following years, the separatist military leadership weakened significantly, the Russian security services reported "terrorist neutralizations" one after another, until in 2006 it was reported that Shamil Basayev was dead. Nonetheless, the "counter-terrorist operation" officially came to an end only in 2009.

During the Second Chechen War, the Russian federal authorities have significantly changed anti-terrorism and anti-extremism legislation, broadened the power of the security apparatus, and reduced the autonomy of the regions in political decision-making. Moreover, human rights groups inside the government and NGOs reported massive abuses by both sides. It was also reported that the Russian authorities and pro-Russian Chechens formed "death squads," which were responsible for unlawful detentions, torture, extrajudicial executions, and running secret penitentiary facilities across the region.[105] Human rights activists and lawyers frequently report on abuses of power and extrajudicial killings related to terrorism legislation until today.[106]

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[104] Hughes, *Chechnya: From Nationalism to Jihad*, 106; Souleimanov and Dytrich, "The Internationalisation of the Russian–Chechen Conflict: Myths and Reality," 1211-2; John Russell, *Chechnya – Russia's "War on Terror,"* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 114.

[105] Hughes, *Chechnya: From Nationalism to Jihad*, 120-1; Human Rights Watch, *Widespread Torture in The Chechen Republic,* November 13, 2006, https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/eca/chechnya1106/chechnya1106web.pdf; Malashenko and Trenin, *The Time of the South: Russia in Chechnya, Chechnya in Russia*, 240, 245; Russell, *Chechnya – Russia's "War on Terror,"14, 27, 66.*

[106] Elena Milashina, "I Served in the Chechen Police and Did Not Want to Kill People. Staff Sergeant of Kadyrov's Regiment Told About Extrajudicial Killings of People in Chechnya," *Novaya Gazeta,* March 15, 2021, URL: https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2021/03/15/ia-sluzhil-v-chechenskoi-politsii-i-ne-khotel-ubivat-liudei-18.

### 5.2 Russian vs. Terrorist Identity

#### 5.2.1 Identity of the Terrorist

In comparison with the First Chechen War, during the Second Chechen War, the identity of the separatists was securitized and othered in an aggressive, almost paranoid manner. Through heavily securitized discourse the Russian federal authorities have established a *regime of truth* about the Chechen separatists. In the official discourse, both wars are referred to as "operations to restore the constitutional order" or "counter-terrorism operations." This has delegitimized claims of the separatists to the Chechen independence in the public's eyes.

The identity of the separatists and their supporters was dehumanized, antagonized, presented to be sinister and animalistic in public discourse: they were often referred to as "monkeys," "werewolves" (when Chechen fighters pretended to be policemen), or "mujahideen." The conflict was reflected in popular culture, too; films like *Caucasian Roulette* (2002), *Alive* (2006), *Alexandra* (2007), *Hostage* (2008) narrate stories of ethnic Russians struggling in the gruesome war filled with violence and horrors, the Chechens are shown as villains without empathy. Even though the *Caucasian Roulette* is the only film that features a pro-Chechen main character, it is a woman of Slavic appearance that flees the region because she is tired from "constantly torturing [hostages]."[107] The President of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov, who took office after his father Akhmad-Haji Kadyrov died in one of the attacks led by the rebels, has on numerous occasions called the separatists "Shaitans" (i.e. evil spirits or demons in Islam) or "Wahhabis" (a derogatory term for followers of Salafism).[108] The very existence of the Chechen separatists was presented as an imminent threat to stability and values of the Russian society. Moreover, existence of both of these identities was presented in mutually exclusive terms. According to Putin, "inhabitants of cities are the targets of terrorist attacks, the war

[107] *Alexandra,* directed by Alexander Sokurov, (2007, Moscow: Karoprokat); *Alive*, directed by Alexander Veledinskyy, (2006, Moscow: Karo-Premiere); *Caucasian Roulette*, directed by Fyodor Popov, (2002, Moscow: Videogram); *Hostage*, directed by Alexey Uchitel, (2008, Moscow: Central Partnership).
[108] Ramzan Kadyrov, "The Chechen Upbringing," interview by Ashot Nasibov, Ekho Moskvy, January 13, 2006, https://echo.msk.ru/programs/scool/41120/.

front could be next to every house and on every street, […] there are no neutral zones in this war, the terrorists create their bases in places, where they aren't retaliated against."[109]

In contrast to the First Chechen War, the discourse during the Second War split between domestic and international audiences. Moscow insisted that their fight against separatism in the Caucasus is also a fight against international terrorism, it especially resonated with the foreign governments after the 9/11 attacks and emergence of the "global war on terror" discourse.[110] This has also created additional opportunity for Russia to legitimize itself as a fighter against international terrorism. Putin himself in numerous instances utilized discourse of external threat of terrorism and called separatists "aggressive international terrorists," he claimed there were "international terrorist centers" that seek to destabilize Russia,[111] that "extremist elements [in the Caucasus] are supported from foreign territories."[112] Such discourse created for Chechen separatists an identity of an evil outside force that is at odds with the Russian identity and even threatens its existence.

During the Second Chechen War, there was also a much sharper distinction between the identity of Chechen separatists and the identity of ordinary Chechens, at least on the level of official political discourse. Nonetheless, the war was correlated with a spike in discrimination against people from the North Caucasus region; they were commonly stopped by the police for ID-checks or were separated in crime statistics. At the time, people from that region were blamed for crime and also commonly referred to as "persons of a Caucasian nationality" or just "Caucasians" which have a negative

[109] Vladimir Putin, "Vladimir Putin's Address on the Closing Ceremony of the Third International Conference of the Mayors of the World 'Cities' Diplomacy,'" *The Kremlin,* September 17, 2004, http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/31757.

[110] Russell, *Chechnya – Russia's "War on Terror,"47-8, 67,91-4;* Souleimanov and Dytrich, "The Internationalisation of the Russian–Chechen Conflict: Myths and Reality," 1202-3; Tsygankov, "Finding a Civilisational Idea: "West," Eurasia," and "Euro-East" in Russia's Foreign Policy," 392.

[111] Vladimir Putin, "Direct Line with the President of Russia," The Kremlin, Moscow, October 18, 2007, http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24604.

[112] Vladimir Putin, "Briefing for Journalists in the International Press Centre," *The Kremlin*, July 16, 2006, http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23715.

connotation in Russian language.[113] In contrast to the Western discourse, where people with fair skin and brighter hair/eye color are called Caucasians, in Russian, the notion is strongly associated with appearance of people of the North Caucasus descent: darker skin tones, darker hair and darker eye color.

### 5.2.2 Identity of Russia

The shift in discourses between the first and the second wars was remarkable with the transfer of presidency from Boris Yeltsin to Vladimir Putin in August 1999. The discourses of power, zero tolerance, ultimata, and strength became hegemonic in relation to the Russian identity at the time. Former Chief Political Strategist of Putin and Advisor to the Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office in 1999-2011 Gleb Pavlovsky says, the discursive transformation was also part of a PR strategy, which he and his team had created for Putin.[114] "When Yeltsin visited places, where catastrophes had happened, he apologized to people – it was disgusting, it was seen as a quintessential weakness, […] we hoped that with Putin a new style [in politics] would come about: more pragmatic and technocratic," said Pavlovsky in an interview with the author. This strongly correlated with the professional background of the President, who spent most of his career in security services, and who viewed the peace deal with Chechens during the first war as humiliation to the country.

Through intense othering of the Chechens, Russia has created an identity for the Self as an uncompromising, tireless, and even vehement fighter against terrorism. Throughout the years of the Second Chechen War, Putin said that "we have no right for weakness, otherwise the

[113] Bruce Baum, "Where Caucasian Means Black": "Race," Nation and the Chechen Wars," in *The Rise and Fall of the Caucasian Race: A Political History of Identity,* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 219-233; Russell, *Chechnya – Russia's "War on Terror,"* 16-7, 64.

[114] Gleb Pavlovsky, (Political Strategist of the President and former Prime Minister of Russia Vladimir Putin in 1999-2011, Advisor to the Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office of Russia in 1998-2011, publicist), interview by the author, August 12, 2020, Prague.

deaths [of our people] were in vain;"[115] that "we will follow terrorists everywhere […], if we capture them in the toilet, [well,] then we'll waste them in the shithouse;"[116] soon after the Dubrovka hostage crisis he refused to negotiate with the separatists and declared that "there will be no second Khasavyurt [Accord];"[117] Putin also frequently said that "terrorists stand no chance."[118]

The identity that political establishment has constituted for itself was also projected onto the international level. Politicians claimed that Russia was among the first major victims of international terrorism and insisted that the Russian policy corresponded with the goals in counter-terrorism attempts internationally at the time.[119] Pavlovsky says, it was his primary responsibility to create a political strategy that "will bring Russia and its power back into international arena," that will be beneficial to the image of Russia and Putin, especially in the light of "global war on terror" discourse of the U.S. President George Bush Jr. after 9/11.[120]

### 5.3 Policy

The period of the Second Chechen War was marked by intensified securitization, militarization, and othering both on the level of public discourse and policy. The performative aspect of the official narratives was recast in a totalizing policy-oriented approach towards the separatists. In an attempt to identify and punish the Other, the authorities provided a new legal ground for mass detentions,

[115] First Channel, "Vladimir Putin Made That Toast For Deceased in Dagestan Together With the Inhabitants of the Botlikh Village 20 Years Later," September 12, 2019, https://www.1tv.ru/news/2019-09-12/372121-v_dagestane_spustya_20_let_vladimir_putin_podnyal_tu_samuyu_ryumku_za_pavshih_geroev_vmeste_s_zhitelyami_botliha.
[116] Vladimir Putin, "If We Capture Them in the Toilet, Then We'll Waste Them in the Outhouse," NTV, September 24, 1999, https://25.ntv.ru/day/9/24/.
[117] BBC, "Putin: 'There Will Be No Second Khasavyurt," November 10, 2002, http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/russian/news/newsid_2437000/2437423.stm.
[118] Putin, "Direct Line with the President of Russia," October 18, 2007.
[119] Souleimanov and Dytrich, "The Internationalisation of the Russian–Chechen Conflict: Myths and Reality," 1202; Tsygankov, "Finding a Civilisational Idea: "West," Eurasia," and "Euro-East" in Russia's Foreign Policy," 392.
[120] Pavlovsky, (Political Strategist of the President and former Prime Minister of Russia Vladimir Putin in 1999-2011, Advisor to the Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office of Russia in 1998-2011, publicist).

enhanced interrogations, extrajudicial executions, hate-crimes, and normalization of violence on behalf of the state.

On September 23, 1999, at the time still President Boris Yeltsin signed the Executive Order N1255c that has created a special inter-agency unit for "counter-terrorist operation" in Chechnya. According to the Order, the Minister of Defense is appointed as the head of the unit, heads of the Ministry of Interior, Armed Forces, and the FSB should serve as deputy heads of the unit, their primary responsibility is "to run a counter-terrorist operation aiming at destruction of illegal armed forces," moreover, local governments were obliged to help the unit with their needs.[121] In contrast to the First Chechen War, the decision-making was put solely in the hands of the security apparatus.

In early 2000s, President Putin signed in a number of federal laws that regulated biopolitical sphere of people involved or suspected to be involved in terrorist activity: on August 7, 2001, the law on "Countering the money laundering and the financing of terrorism" that obliged to check the ID and report to the authorities any financial transactions equal to or over $20 400 or any financial transaction performed by people participating in "extremist activity," people who were recognized as terrorists by the court, and even people who are currently under the criminal investigation related to terrorist or extremist activity,[122] which cold encompass virtually anyone. The law partially regulated the federal list of people, who are either under investigation for or have been found guilty of terrorist activity. In 2002 Putin has also signed a federal law that classified the place of burial of the suspected terrorists and suspects killed during the counter-terrorist operations, the site is not revealed even for the relatives of the deceased.[123]

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[121] Presidential Executive Order N 1255c of September 23, 1999, On Measures to Increase the Efficiency of the Counter-Terrorist Operations on the Territory of the North Caucasus Region of the Russian Federation, *Official Internet Portal of Legislative Information*, URL: http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=102061927&rdk=0&firstDoc=1&lastdoc=1.

[122] Federal Law N 115-FZ of August 7, 2001, On Countering the Legalization (Laundering) of Revenues Obtained by Criminal Means and the Financing of Terrorism, enacted, *Official Internet Portal of Legislative Information,* URL: http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=102072376&rdk=0.

[123] Federal Law N 144-FZ of November 21, 2002, On Additions to the Federal Law "On Combating Terrorism," void, *Official Internet Portal of Legislative Information,* URL: http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=102078948&rdk=0.

In February 2006, with the special Executive Order the President of Russia Vladimir Putin has further institutionalized the fight against terrorism and created the National Anti-Terrorist Committee (NAC) that is chaired by the head of the FSB.[124] The NAC has a branch in every region of Russia, it proposes counter-terrorism measures to the president and ensures "awareness of terrorism threats." In the following years, the Executive Order was amended – it outlined the priorities and chain of command for the CTO in Chechnya specifically. In NAC's promotional campaigns, a special place is dedicated to children's education: the NAC organizes educational talks in schools and co-publishes a monthly comic magazine about an adventurous dog called Spasaykin ("spasay" in Russian means "save" in imperative form, "kin" refers to a common ending of the Russian surnames, but it is also an acronym for "club of interesting and unexplored"). Each month the magazine has a special topic related to self-defense or personal security in different circumstances, covers of the magazine say: "forgotten toy or hidden danger,"[125] "peace to the Caucasus,"[126] or the issue dedicated to the third anniversary of the NAC portrays a person with a gun in balaclava and camouflage uniform that holds a woman dressed as a cat by her neck, he asks if she is scared, to which the woman answers: "No, I am protected by the National Anti-Terrorist Committee."[127]

After the Beslan hostage crisis in 2004, the Russian legislators were convinced that the law "On Combating Terrorism" N 130-FZ that was passed in 1998 was ineffective and did not provide enough authority to the government in the area of *prevention* of terrorism. The law was suspended in 2006 and substituted with a more detailed legislation N 35-FZ "On Counter-Terrorism." This legislation outlines not only measures for the counter-terrorist operations, but also provides a basis for

[124] Presidential Executive Order N 116 of February 15, 2006, On Counter-Terrorism Measures, *Official Internet Portal of Legislative Information,* URL: http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&link_id=0&nd=102104819&intelsearch=&firstDoc=1.
[125] *Spasaykin.* "Forgotten Toy or Hidden Danger." August 2005. URL: http://www.spasay-kin.ru/uploads/covers/20090409135315.jpg.
[126] *Spasaykin*, "People Are Different, But the Country Is the Same," October 2008, URL: http://www.spasay-kin.ru/uploads/covers/20090409143807.jpg.
[127] *Spasaykin.* "Third Anniversary of the NAC." March 2009. URL: http://www.spasay-kin.ru/uploads/covers/200910221338245785500.jpg.

*preemptive* measures like enhanced surveillance or interruption of the internet and telephone connection.[128] Additionally, the revamped law has concentrated power over counter-terrorist policy in the hands of the president – since then the head of the state is in charge of the general counter-terrorist strategy, appointment of the heads for the counter-terrorism units, the president also decides if the military will be involved in the CTO's.[129] Thus, the government has not only legitimized its authority and consolidated power in one set of hands, but also reinforced an image of the president as The One on whom the security of the statehood depends.

A unique addition to the counter-terrorist policy is a separate article on overseas counter-terrorist operations and international cooperation in this sphere. The law encompasses possibilities of military action against "terrorists and/or their bases" both from the inside of Russia or from overseas, the president decides on the strategy of the CTO and deployment of the military in other countries with the approval of the Federation Council, the upper chamber of the Russian parliament.[130]

This law is amended approximately every two years. An amendment from 2013 has significantly limited financial responsibility of the government and possibilities of victims of the terrorist activity or CTO's for compensation and rights of the relatives of possible offenders or suspects. According to the law, the compensation shall be paid at the expense of a "person that has committed a terrorist act or his closest relatives, relatives or close ones," if their property is suspected to be gained through illicit activity – though, the burden of proof was shifted to the relatives.[131] The government also has the right to confiscate the property of people related to the offender.

In 2009, then-president Dmitry Medvedev signed the National Strategy for Counter-Terrorism that outlined new priorities in this area. The discourse of the document appeals to international and

[128] Federal Law N 35-FZ of March 6, 2006, On Counter-Terrorism, enacted, *Official Internet Portal of Legislative Information,* URL: http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=102105192&rdk=0.
[129] Federal Law N 35-FZ, On Counter-Terrorism.
[130] Federal Law N 35-FZ, On Counter-Terrorism.
[131] Federal Law N 35-FZ of March 6, 2006, edited on November 2, 2013, On Counter-Terrorism.

national audiences, its strong wording implies that the terrorism threat is omnipresent, and it only increases over time:

> "Contemporary terrorism is characterized by increasing number of terrorist acts, international nature of terrorist organizations, exploitation of ethno-religious factor, […] increased organizational capabilities of the terrorist groups that create sophisticated infrastructure, increased financial capabilities and more elaborate technical equipment, aspirations to gain access to the weapons of mass destruction, creation of new and perfection of existing methods of terrorist activity that aim at increasing the damage and number of victims."[132]

The Strategy also suggests that terrorism in Russia exists because the international terrorist organizations are "attempting to infiltrate" into certain regions of the country, because of "existence of foreign training camps of international terrorist organizations and theological schools that spread the ideology of religious extremism," it is also argued that terrorist groups are sponsored from the outside, and certain countries want to undermine Russia's position in the international arena.[133] The Strategy also stresses the role of online platforms and telecommunication in spreading of terrorist and extremist views.[134]

### 5.4 Summary

During the Second Chechen War, securitization of terrorism through discourse has significantly intensified. The Russian authorities have constituted their and Russian identity as vehement and uncompromising vis-à-vis the identity of a terrorist who was constituted as barbaric and inhumane. This was vividly reflected in the matters of public opinion and policy. Shifts in knowledge led to ripple effects in public sphere, it has also created a *ban-opticon dispositif* that triggered the discourse of exclusion, exception, and pushed the identity of a terrorist way beyond regular politics. Rooted in

[132] Presidential Executive Order N 683 of October 5, 2009, Strategy for Counter-Terrorism in the Russian Federation, *National Anti-Terrorism Committee,* URL: http://nac.gov.ru/zakonodatelstvo/ukazy-prezidenta/koncepciya-protivodeystviya-terrorizmu-v.html.
[133] Presidential Executive Order N 683, Strategy for Counter-Terrorism in the Russian Federation.
[134] More detailed discussion on the role of information technologies, the Strategy, and new anti-terrorism legislation in prosecuting people in Russia will follow in the Chapter 6.1 and Chapter 6.3 of this thesis.

this narrative, the federal authorities introduced biopolitical regulation of the people suspected of terrorist activity as listing in special registries that limit person's access to financial services, regulated burial of the bodies and introduced legal liability of suspects' relatives for their activity. It also concentrated power in president's hands. The analysis of policy documents additionally shows that Russia has expanded the terrorism discourse to a larger socio-political scale of audiences – ranging from the elementary school children inside Russia to the international level. The discourse on terrorism in this period has also provided a solid basis for later interventions in MENA region and bringing Russia back as an important player in international politics.[135]

## 6 Fighting Critics – Turn to Authoritarianism

### 6.1 Context

When the presidential term of Dmitry Medvedev ended in 2012, Vladimir Putin came back to power. Independent researchers and NGOs that oversaw the electoral process suggested that the election results were fraudulent and that the voting involved serious electoral violations.[136] The mass protests that sparked all over Russia and lasted for almost two years ended only with repressions: thousands of people were detained and received fines, a few dozen of protesters received prison sentences for alleged "mass rioting" and "use of force against the authority representatives." Both of these offences are part and parcel of the anti-extremism and anti-terrorism legislations. Lawyers insisted that the vast majority of charges were fabricated, some international human rights groups like Amnesty International or "Memorial" recognized these people as political prisoners.[137]

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[135] For more detailed discussion on the internationalization of Russian anti-terrorism narrative see Chapter 7 of this Thesis.

[136] Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe, "Russia's Presidential Election Marked by Unequal Campaign Conditions, Active Citizens' Engagement, International Observers Say," *OSCE*, March 5, 2012, https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/88661.

[137] Amnesty International, *Freedom Under Threat. The Clampdown on Freedoms of Expression, Assembly and Association in Russia*, April 2013, https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/12000/eur460112013en.pdf; Human Rights Center "Memorial," "Case about the Events on Bolotnaya Square on May 6, 2012," https://memohrc.org/ru/special-projects/delo-o-sobytiyah-na-bolotnoy-ploshchadi-6-maya-2012-goda.

In the following years, terrorism legislation in force has become instrumental in prosecuting critics of the Russian authorities, including for their comments online. The geographic location of the cases also expanded from the North Caucasus to entire Russia. Over the years, the regime in Russia turned more and more to authoritarianism – Putin and politicians close to him have been gradually consolidating power through frequent amendments of the Constitution and other legislation, including the one on terrorism and extremism.

According to the Supreme Court official data, on overage, there were 177 guilty verdicts related to propaganda of terrorism and extremism annually for the period from 2013 to 2015, in the upcoming years their amount almost quadrupled: there were 662 verdicts in 2016, 785 – in 2017, 731 – in 2018, 432 – in 2019, 548 – in 2020.[138] Ministry of Interior's official statistics on extremism or terrorism related crimes, on average, shows numbers two or even three times higher. The extremism and terrorism charges in this data include "condoning of terrorism/fascism," "incitement to extremist/terrorist activity," "incitement to hatred," "preparation for or execution of terrorist acts," and "infringement of life of the representative of authority." Part of the statistics is comprised of cases related to memes or joke reposts on social media or comments on internet forums. Independent lawyers and NGOs that are dealing with the victims of state power abuse in Russia claim that many of these verdicts were either wrongful, politically motivated, or even fabricated.[139] A case of the "New Glory" (*Novoye Velichiye*), that has begun in 2017, was widely covered by international and national media is illustrative of these practices. An undercover FSB operative infiltrated a group of teenagers that were critical of the government and proposed to them to form an organization for discussions and broadening their activity. It is known that the operative himself had written a manifesto of the group and took teenagers out for a paintball game, a few months later the

[138] "Basic Statistical Data on Criminal Records in Russia in 2008-2019," Judicial Department at the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, http://www.cdep.ru/index.php?id=79&item=2074.
[139] Natalia Yudina, (Expert on extremism of the Information-Analytic Center "Sova" that monitors application of counter-extremism legislation in Russia, author of the Center's annual report *Anti-Extremism in Cyber Russia*), interview by the author, July 10, 2016, Prague.

group was arrested and accused of terrorism. In 2020, the suspects were sentenced from 4 up to 7 years in prison for "organizing an extremist organization intending to carry out extremist crimes," one of the members of the group was also sentenced to a compulsory treatment in psychiatric facility. Another famous case of the "terrorist organization 'Network'" (*Syet'*) also took off in 2017. Three separate groups of anti-fascists in Omsk, Penza, and Saint-Petersburg were detained and accused of conspiring and plotting of a terrorist attack in Russia to destabilize the existing regime. During the searches in the suspects' houses, the investigators found non-lethal guns for airsoft sports, explosives, recreational drugs, and anti-fascist literature. The suspects claimed that the weapons and explosives were planted by the police. In 2020, the suspects were sentenced from 4 up to 18 years in prison, the "Network" was also included in the Federal List of Terrorist Organizations in Russia.[140] Convicts in both cases claimed the investigators tortured or subjected them to inhumane treatment in order to make them plead guilty. These two cases are among the most prominent terrorism cases since the end of the Second Chechen War.

Terrorism and extremism legislation played a significant role in persecution of the Crimean Tatars following the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Every year there are dozens of reports coming from Crimea about detentions, searches, or severe sentences for the Muslim minority that still lives on the peninsula and strongly opposes the Russian government. They are accused of being members of Hizb ut-Tahrir, an Islamic religious movement that Russian authorities recognized as a terrorist organization; experts argue that this decision was also political. According to the Human Rights Center "Memorial," at least 322 (at least 84 of them are Crimean Tatars) people are currently being persecuted as "members of Hizb ut-Tahir," 211 of them were already sentenced from 10 up to 24 years in prison.[141] According to the prosecutors, evidence of terrorist activity in these cases is

[140] "Federal List of Organizations, Including Foreign and International Ones, That Were Recognized as Terrorist in Accordance with the Law of the Russian Federation," Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation, http://www.fsb.ru/fsb/npd/terror.htm.

[141] "List of People Persecuted for Connections to Hizb ut-Tahrir," HRC "Memorial," (last update March 26, 2021), https://memohrc.org/ru/specials/spisok-presleduemyh-v-svyazi-s-prichastnostyu-k-hizb-ut-tahrir-obnovlyaetsya.

following: discussions of current political situation on the peninsula and possession of Islamic literature, in rare cases – additional possession of a firearm. After the annexation, many Crimean Tatars refused to accept Russian citizenship, however, according to the revised Russian laws, foreigners cannot own land in Crimea, thus the local population either had to get new passports to reregister or be forced out of the land that belonged to them. Additionally, in 2016, the Supreme Court of Russia upheld the decision to recognize the Mejlis of Crimean Tatars, a representative organ for the interests of the Crimean Tatars, as an extremist organization and banned its activity in Russia.[142] Leaders of the Mejlis were also arrested in absentia and added onto the wanted list by the Russian authorities.

Months before general parliamentary elections of 2021 the Russian authorities decided to use terrorism and extremism legislation again to fight the existing political opposition. In April 2021, the General Prosecutors Office of Russia filed a request to the Moscow City Court to recognize as extremist a number of organizations affiliated with the leading political opponent and critic of Vladimir Putin – Alexey Navalny.[143] The Prosecutors Office wanted the following organizations to cease their activity: "FBK" (Fund to Fight Corruption) that investigates corruption among high-profile politicians and functions as an online media, too; "FZPG" (Fund to Protect Citizen Rights) through which the FBK is financed; and Navalny's Regional Campaign Offices – a network of offices in 37 regions that were established as part of Navalny's presidential campaign in 2018 and now function as educational spots for the locals, who want to become independent politicians or human rights activists. If a candidate for a political position was involved in any activity that was recognized by the court as extremist or terrorist, the person will be denied the right to run for public office. Additionally, the State Duma passed a law to deny this right for people who donated to similar

[142] Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Crimea v. Mejlis of the Crimean Tatars, 2016 Supreme Court App., Case N127-APG16-4. https://vsrf.ru/lk/practice/cases/10979085#10979085.

[143] "Prosecutors Office of Moscow Filed a Request to Recognize "FBK," "FZPG," and "Navalny's Command Centers" as Extremist Organizations," Moscow Prosecutors Office, April 16, 2021, https://epp.genproc.gov.ru/web/proc_77/mass-media/news?item=61066829.

organizations – as the Navalny's activity was primarily financed through public donations. On April 19, the court has granted the request, and ordered these organizations to disband, prohibited any further activity, and also classified the details of the case. On April 30, the regional offices were added to the Rosfinmonitoring's "List of Extremists and Terrorists."

### 6.2 Russian vs. Terrorist Identity

#### 6.2.1 Identity of the Terrorist

In contrast to the period of both Chechen Wars, Russia does not have a coherent identity of a terrorist to revert to any longer, instead it is fragmented and scattered all over the political spectrum. The previous *regime of truth* about terrorist identity that had been carefully constituted in the years of war had become almost irrelevant. While the identity of a terrorist is less securitized, it still serves its purpose of legitimizing the government and its  Based on the terrorism and extremism related cases of recent years, a terrorist in the eyes of the state in today's Russia could be virtually anyone (opposing the regime): an apolitical person that jokes on the internet, a neo-liberal politician, a journalist, a follower of Islam, or a person of Christian faith, an anti-fascist, a member of football fan club, or even a teenager talking about politics. This type of discourse is targeted at domestic audiences exclusively and it is still ongoing.

The identity of a present-day terrorist in public discourse is noticeably less securitized, it is still presented as a threat, but a threat to the system of values or the political system (that was built by significantly relying on the discourse of terrorism threat), not anymore as an imminent threat to its existence. The authorities are also less outspoken and less confident, when talking about specific cases related to terrorism or extremism. In December 2018, Vladimir Putin commented on the biggest terrorism cases of his new presidency – cases of the "New Glory" and the "Network." He claimed that he "did not hear anything about it whatsoever," he stressed that the report prepared by the security officials mentions that the investigators have found explosives and guns at suspects'

homes, and he also added: "Did we not have enough of terrorist acts, did we?"[144] According to Putin's press-secretary Dmitry Peskov, the president ordered to initiate an additional investigation into reports about alleged torture, but it was in vain because the responsible authority ignored the request.[145] In further inquiries, Putin or other high-ranking politicians show reluctance to comment on similar cases and tend to recommend to leave this matter to the security services.

A new wave of repressions against opposition leader Alexey Navalny, his associates and supporters that challenge existing knowledge about the current regime shows how the authorities are trying to reengage in securitization of critics utilizing the identity of an extremist Other, perhaps not a terrorist yet. Nonetheless, the Prosecutor's Office language bears strong associations with the terrorism discourse of the previous decades: it accuses "them" of "destabilization of the socio-political order," "attempts to change the constitutional order," "use of color-revolution scenarios," "extremist activity."[146] In January 2021, Putin himself equated the organizers of anti-corruption protests (i.e. Navalny and his associates) to "terrorists, who put women and children as a human shield, the focus here shifts slightly, but in essence it is all the same thing."[147]

Even though there is a spike in political cases against the critics of the regime, the identity of a "radical Islamist terrorist" is still present in the official discourse. Compared to the cases mentioned above, its degree of othering is significantly higher, which could be compared to the identity of a terrorist from the Chechen wars period. The Crimean Tatars and other groups accused of being members of Hizb ut-Tahrir are portrayed as radical Islamists: Putin claimed that the followers of this

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[144] Vladimir Putin, "Meeting of the Civil Society and Human Rights Committee," *The Kremlin,* December 11, 2018, http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/59374.

[145] "Peskov: Putin Already Ordered an Investigation into the 'Network' Case," Kommersant, February 10, 2020, https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4250623.

[146] "Prosecutors Office of Moscow Filed a Request to Recognize "FBK," "FZPG," and "Navalny's Command Centers" as Extremist Organizations," Moscow Prosecutors Office, https://epp.genproc.gov.ru/web/proc_77/mass-media/news?item=61066829.

[147] "Putin Condemned Illegal Protests as a Mean to Achieve Political Ambitions," Interfax, January 25, 2021, https://www.interfax.ru/russia/746747.

"sect" want to "reinstitute a world caliphate through seizure of power."[148] The pro-Russian Chief Mufti of Crimea claimed that the organization "mimics to new realms" but still presents a "threat of extremism, radicalism, terrorism, and manipulations of the West."[149] The Supreme Court's decision regarding the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatars in 2016, helped to other the group and its struggle against the annexation. The court claimed that the Mejlis activity is "extremist and possesses a real threat to the constitutional order of Russia, its territorial integrity and security of the state and society."[150]

### 6.2.1 Identity of Russia

The identity of Russia has become less unconditional compared to the Second Chechen War. While in the previous decades, the President and other high-ranking officials insisted that they are personally either in charge of the CTOs or are overseeing them directly, now, politicians distance themselves from the issue of domestic terrorism[151] almost entirely. It is vividly seen on the example of political cases against the critics of the government. Even though, the image of a terrorist is still othered and securitized, Russia's image has altered. Instead of an uncompromising and almost ruthless fighter against terrorism that was willing to kill terrorists even in toilets, Russia attempted to re-constitute its identity as a regime that follows the rule of law to the letter. As the Spokesperson of the President Peskov commented on the torture reports in the "Network" case – involvement in the investigations is "impossible, especially on behalf of the head of the state."[152] In the matter of the "New Glory" case Putin said: "God willing, the court will figure it out."[153]

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[148] Vladimir Putin, "Meeting of the Civil Society and Human Rights Committee," *The Kremlin,* December 10, 2019, http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62285.
[149] "Mufti of Crimea Talked to Journalists from Islamic Countries," Centralized Religious Organization Muslim Spiritual Directorate of the Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol, April 24, 2018, https://qmdi.org/muftiy-kryima-vstretilsya-s-zhurnalistami-iz-islamskih-stran-foto/.
[150] Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Crimea v. Mejlis of the Crimean Tatars, 2016 Supreme Court App., Case N127-APG16-4. https://vsrf.ru/lk/practice/cases/10979085#10979085.
[151] There is a significant difference in levels of securitization of the identity of a terrorist inside Russia and outside. For detailed discussion about the discourse on international terrorism see Chapter 7 of this Thesis.
[152] "Peskov: Putin Already Ordered an Investigation into the 'Network' Case," Kommersant.
[153] Putin, "Meeting of the Civil Society and Human Rights Committee," December 10, 2019.

While antagonizing the media of communication, the Russian authorities have also insisted that they are preventing terrorist attacks and providing information security through restrictive legislation. The Director of the FSB Alexandr Bortnikov frequently talks to the press about numerous prevented terrorist attacks, however, without any details presented to the public. According to Bortnikov, the FSB and NAC prevented around 96% of terrorist attacks in 2020, opposed to 10% in 2010, additionally, over the last 10 years there were prevented at least 200 attacks – "we are talking about thousands of saved lives."[154] The Chairman of the Parliamentary Commission on Security Vasily Piskarev also regularly stresses the decreased number of terrorist attacks, "however, it is not the reason to keep calm, […] it is only possible to counter terrorism if we concur to follow the law, take safety measures, and help the law enforcement."[155]

In the end of 2018, the President adopted a new National Strategy of the State Policy. The document emphasizes the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural composition of Russia, however, insists that the Russian identity needs to be strengthened. It describes the Russian identity as "patriotic, socially responsible, proud of the history of Russia, multinational, rooted in pride, dignity, and traditional spiritual and moral values;" but it is an identity threatened by international terrorism, extremist and separatist propaganda.[156]

### 6.3 Policy

The terrorism policy at the time also manifested through biopolitical methods of control, which faced not only people who were convicted of a crime, but also just suspected of terrorist or extremist activity – ad absurdum it does not matter whether the person took civilians hostage at gunpoint or

[154] Alexandr Bortnikov, "15 Years Against Terror," interview by Vladislav Fronin, Rossiiskaya Gazeta, March 10, 2021, https://rg.ru/2021/03/10/direktor-fsb-za-10-let-v-rossii-udalos-predotvratit-okolo-200-teraktov.html.
[155] "Vasily Piskarev: You Can Never Let the Guard Down During the Fight Against Terrorism," State Duma of the Russian Federation, February 15, 2021, http://duma.gov.ru/news/50759/.
[156] Presidential Executive Order N 703 of December 8, 2018, "On Amending the National Strategy of the State Policy of the Russian Federation Until 2025, Which Was Approved by the Presidential Executive Order N 1666 of December 19, 2012," *Official Internet Portal of Legislative Information,* URL: http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&firstDoc=1&lastDoc=1&nd=102488842.

published a meme on social media, the presumption of innocence does not apply in the context of counter-terrorism legislation. In 2012, Vladimir Putin signed an Executive Order that made him the supervisor of the Federal Financial Monitoring Service or Rosfinmonitoring, its main goals – to propose anti-terrorism and anti-corruption policies and oversee their implementation in the area of financial transactions and financial intelligence. In 2015, with a separate decree the president created a special "Acting Terrorists and Extremists List" within the Rosfinmonitoring. People that are included on this list are not able to use their banking accounts fully: the funds and transactions are partially blocked for them. Additionally, a person on the list cannot spend more than 10,000 rubles ($130) per month. A minimum wage in Russia is set to the amount of 12,792 rubles ($169). If needed, the person has to submit to the Rosfinmonitoring a list of documents and a statement of request to prove that he or she needs to exceed an approved monthly amount, the procedure has to be repeated every month.[157] Moreover, it does not matter if the person has already been convicted of a crime or if a case has just been filed, the person is still added to the list, hence, in discourse of bureaucracy the person is already either a "terrorist" or an "extremist." As of May 2021, the list counts 108 foreign and 511 domestic organizations, 416 foreign and 10 844 Russian nationals.[158] In summer 2016, Putin signed an anti-terrorism and anti-extremism reform known as "Yarovaya's Package," named after the co-author of the bill State Duma Deputy Irina Yarovaya. The "Package" has signified a major transition of Russia's fight on terrorism to the internet and social media space. The legislation required telecommunication companies to store all the data of their users (text messages, records of telephone calls, search history etc.) for at least six months on their servers, it introduced stricter regulations on the religious activity, criminalized incites to overthrow of the government, it also almost doubled sentences for terrorist and extremist activities, moreover,

[157] Government Resolution of August 6, 2015, "Approval of Rules for Determining Organizations and Individuals, About Which There Is an Information on Involvement in Extremist Activities or Terrorism, and Distribution of This List among Organizations Performing Financial and Other Transactions and Private Entrepreneurs," URL: http://www.fedsfm.ru/documents/government/1714.
[158] Rosfinmonitoring, "Acting Terrorist and Extremist List," http://www.fedsfm.ru/documents/terrorists-catalog-portal-act.

propagation of such activity through the internet has become an aggravating factor.[159] Yarovaya claimed that the law serves as basis for "terrorism prevention" and "new front of defense against the terrorism threat."[160] The policy almost instantly reflected on the official terrorist and extremist crime statistics.[161]

In late 2016, Vladimir Putin approved the Doctrine on the Information Security of Russian that outlines how various threats spread through the internet and other means of communication. The document shifted official discourse on terrorism into the cyberspace and legitimized infringement of freedom of speech in the future. Among top threats to the security of Russia are listed terrorist and extremist organizations that are using technology to "influence individual or collective consciousness in order to stir up enmity and ethnic, religious or other hatred, and to propagate extremist ideology."[162] The Doctrine also stresses the role of "special services of certain countries" and "foreign media" that there are attempting to "erode traditional and spiritual values," "destabilize political situation, undermine sovereignty and territorial integrity" of Russia.[163]

### 6.4. Summary

A change in the discursive practices of the Russian authorities towards terrorism is quite notable after the end of the Second Chechen War. The identity of a domestic terrorist no longer has one collective

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[159] Federal Law N 374-FZ of July 6, 2016, On Amendments to the Federal Law "On Counter-Terrorism" and Specific Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation to Install Additional Measures to Counter Terrorism and Maintenance of Public Security, *Official Internet Portal of Legislative Information,* URL: http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&link_id=11&nd=102404066; Federal Law N 375-FZ of July 6, 2016, On Amending the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation and Code of Criminal Procedure of the Russian Federation in the Area of Establishing Additional Measures on Countering Terrorism and Maintenance of Public Security, enacted, *Official Internet Portal of Legislative Information,* URL: http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&firstDoc=1&lastDoc=1&nd=102404067.

[160] Irina Yarovaya, "Yarovaya Does Not Plan to Draft New Laws Yet," 360 TV, July 15, 2016, https://360tv.ru/news/obschestvo/my-predlagaem-miru-obedinyatsya-v-borbe-s-terrorizmom-yarovaya-64440/.

[161] See Chapter 6.1 of this Thesis.

[162] Presidential Executive Order N 646 of December 5, 2016, Approval of the Doctrine of the Information Security of the Russian Federation, *Official Internet Portal of Legislative Information,* URL: http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&link_id=0&nd=102417017.

[163] Presidential Executive Order N 646 of December 5, 2016, Approval of the Doctrine of the Information Security of the Russian Federation.

enemy image, instead, it is fragmented and multidimensional. It is still securitized and othered, however, less so compared to the periods analyzed in Chapters 4 and 5. Russia attempts to constitute for itself an identity of a fair and democratic state with a rule of law and beliefs in institutional independence, whilst actually transforming into an authoritarian regime. This shift has also reflected on policies through restrictive legislations that manifest through large scale surveillance, persecution for criticism, and biopolitical control over private spheres of people convicted or even suspected of terrorism related crimes. Such discourse has legitimized the concentration of power and justified elimination of political opponents.

# 7 Fighting International Terrorism

## 7.1 Context

Russia's fight against "terrorists" internationally is parallel to the temporal dimension discussed in the previous chapter, however, it seems to be more prioritized on the level of the official discourse. The issue of international terrorism is much more securitized in of both domestic and foreign policy discourses. It helps to reconstitute Russian identity as a great international power – even a patron of the weaker states – and simultaneously to legitimize its power. This process is becoming more complex as the identity constitution happens in relation to two Others: the identity of the terrorists and the identity of the West, which in the last decade had become widely antagonized in the official Russian discourse.

### *"Color Revolution" Narratives*

An important and very sensitive position in the Kremlin's discourse is occupied by the "color revolution" narrative. While in the West, it is seen as a non-violent civil movement action that leads to changes of political regimes, the Kremlin sees it as an ultimate evil and illegitimate force instigated by external powers (usually Western), which aim to destabilize countries for profit or

geopolitical gains.[164] As these revolutions were happening in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and in Ukraine in 2000s, Russia's criticism intensified. The Arab Spring that led to changes of government in several countries in the Middle East and North Africa also touched Syria, however, it resulted in a civil war that continues to this day. Vladimir Putin took a hardline position against the support of the West of pro-democratic movements and NGOs supporting the cause. Putin also utilizes national interest discourse to justify Russian involvement in regional affairs across MENA – he claims that because of the "color revolutions" the Russian companies have lost "big contracts" and "leading positions" in countries affected by the events, while the Western companies took their place instead.[165] Moreover, he stresses the role of social media in the Arab Spring and says that there is a "risk of terrorists and criminals using it."[166] Hence, Moscow's involvement in Syria to some extent is also seen in Russia as a fight against "color revolutions" and their agents, terrorism, and neo-imperial market-driven policies of the West. Simultaneously such messianic discourse legitimizes Russia's great power status on the level of international politics.

***From Annexation of Crimea to Intervention in Syria***

Russia started rapidly losing its image of a reliable partner of the West in international politics after it annexed Crimea, supported the separatists in Eastern Ukraine, and played a role in downing of the Malaysian Airlines plane that left almost 300 people dead in 2014. These events have triggered rounds of international economic sanctions and political isolation that the Kremlin does not intend to put up with.[167] While the war in Ukraine is a significant part of the Kremlin's narrative, the discourse

[164] Averre and Davies, "Russia, Humanitarian Intervention and the Responsibility to Protect: The Case of Syria," 826; Baev, *From Chechnya to Syria: The Evolution of Russia's Counter-Terrorist Policy,* 20; Yulia Nikitina "The "Color Revolutions" and "Arab Spring" in Russian Official Discourse," *Connections. The Quarterly Journal* 14, no. 1 (2014), 87; Snetkov, "When the Internal and External Collide: A Social Constructivist Reading of Russia's Security Policy," 535.
[165] Putin, "Russia and the Changing World."
[166] Putin, "Russia and the Changing World."
[167] Wilhelmsen and Haugevik, *Strategic Partners against Terrorism 2.0?: Russia's Initial Positions on Syria*, 1.

on terrorism in relation to Ukraine is very marginal and mostly criticizes Kyiv's policies towards the rebels in the East. However, the terrorism discourse is the one that Russia actively utilizes to legitimize its comeback to international politics.

The civil war in Syria, which has been going on since 2011, has provided a perfect opportunity for Russia. As the so-called "Islamic State" group spread across Syrian and Iraqi territories, the international coalition of mostly the Western countries did not want to join forces with the regime of Bashar al-Assad. In light of the Arab Spring, the West sees his presidency as illegitimate and accuses him of war crimes, including chemical attacks against his own population.[168] Regardless, in 2015, Russia decided to intervene in the conflict on the side of al-Assad's regime. The Kremlin has been able to enforce a terrorist identity upon the anti-Assad civilian and militarized opposition too, which justified its hardline policy and created a hardly contestable knowledge about situation in Syria.[169] Such discourse also legitimized Russia's involvement in other conflicts across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East and further accumulation of power.

***Ambiguous Position of Russia in Relation to the West***

Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries Russia's position vis-à-vis Europe and the collective West has changed radically quite a few times – from strategic partners to ideological enemies, which was reflected in the official discourse.[170] As Vladimir Putin transitioned into his first presidential term in 2000, his office took a pro-Western approach and insisted that Russia embraced a European/Western identity and its values. Throughout 2000's Russia entered liberal international organizations and treaties or symbolically reset relations with the U.S. in 2009. It made Moscow seem like a stable

[168] United Nations, "In Emergency Meeting, Security Council Speakers Voice Grave Concern over Alleged Chemical Weapons Use in Syria, as Versions of Recent Attacks Sharply Differ," SC/13284, April 9, 2018, https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13284.doc.htm.
[169] Murat Yeşiltaş and Tunkay Kardaş, *Non-State Armed Actors in the Middle East: Geopolitics, Ideology, and Strategy*, ( Springer, 2017), 14, 69, 250.
[170] Tsygankov, "Finding a Civilisational Idea: "West," Eurasia," and "Euro-East" in Russia's Foreign Policy," 380-1.

partner and ally of the West. Additionally, in early 2000's, after the 9/11 attacks, the discourse on international terrorism was a unifying factor for Russia and the West, especially the U.S., but later it has become a polarizing one.[171]

A lot in the official discourse has changed with Vladimir Putin's comeback to presidency in 2012. Several events triggered a retreat from partnership with the West, part of which Moscow desired to be of in the late 1990s – early 2000s, into diplomatic isolation of today.[172] Unsurprisingly, the founding of the BRICS-alliance,[173] which identifies itself as an institution that counters Western hegemony over global politics and economy, and intensifying criticism were not welcomed in the West. Even though Putin claimed that "Russia is part of a "European civilization," it was followed later by accusations of the West as threatening Russia's security by expanding EU and NATO association agreements with the former member countries of the USSR, destabilizing Russia's neighborhood through "color revolutions" as well as Russia itself by sponsoring protests and opposition politicians and activists.[174] Simultaneously, Moscow would blame the Western countries of "double standards" pointing to cases of selective application of principles of humanitarian intervention, inefficient strategy of handling terrorism threat coming from the Middle East (Syria specifically) and stating, on the contrary, that Russia is the one abiding by international law and effectively eliminating "terrorism" globally.[175]

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[171] Baev, *From Chechnya to Syria: The Evolution of Russia's Counter-Terrorist Policy* 23; Snetkov, "When the Internal and External Collide: A Social Constructivist Reading of Russia's Security Policy," 526; Tsygankov, "Finding a Civilisational Idea: "West," Eurasia," and "Euro-East" in Russia's Foreign Policy," 392.

[172] Wilhelmsen and Haugevik, *Strategic Partners against Terrorism 2.0?: Russia's Initial Positions on Syria*, 1.

[173] Even though officially BRIC (and later BRICS) as an organization was established in 2010, Vladimir Putin is widely regarded to be among the main ideologues of the alliance, and he was working closely with other states representatives during his term as a Prime-Minister of Russia.

[174] Vladimir Putin, "Russia and the Changing World," *Moscow News*, February 27, 2012, https://www.mn.ru/politics/78738.

[175] Derek Averre and Lance Davies, "Russia, Humanitarian Intervention and the Responsibility to Protect: The Case of Syria," *International Affairs* 91, no. 4 (2015), 819-20, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12343.

### 7.2 Russian vs. Terrorist Identity

#### 7.2.1 Identity of the Terrorist

The level of securitization and othering of terrorist identity across the MENA region and Asia is significantly higher as opposed to the terrorist identity inside Russia described in Chapter 6. It echoes the terrorist identity of the Second Chechen War, specifically: it is coherent, it is revolving around "religious extremism," and it is in a mutually exclusive relationship with the Russian identity.

When Putin announced official start of the Russian intervention in Syria in the UN General Assembly session in September 2015, his speech was filled with a sense of urgency and highly securitized vocabulary. Putin claimed that "thugs have tasted blood," insisted that "radical groups are joined by members of the so-called "moderate" Syrian opposition backed by the West," "the situation is extremely dangerous," he claimed that the government of Bashar al-Assad and the Kurdish regiments are the only forces fighting terrorism in Syria, that the identity of a terrorist is "deceitful" and is "making a mockery of Islam."[176] In his speech he did not only discuss events in Syria, but also mentioned situations in Libya and Iraq. In the following years, Russia's terrorism discourse expanded to include Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Sudan, and Yemen.

Another important dimension of the terrorist identity throughout this period is that it not only targets the militarized groups that resort to political violence as a primary means of their activity, but also political opposition to the Bashar al-Assad's regime and some of the NGOs that are working in the rebel-held areas. For many years Russian media and authorities produced an image of the White Helmets NGO as "pseudo-humanitarian organization," an "undercover charity for the Islamic terrorists," "provocateurs" of artillery shelling in rebel-held areas, a group that "harvests organs," and even stages scenes of civilian suffering from bombings, chemical attacks, or else.[177] It has created a

[176] Vladimir Putin, "70th Session of the U.N. General Assembly," (speech. United Nations General Assembly, New York. September 28, 2015), The Kremlin, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50385.
[177] "'Organ Traders, Terrorists & Looters': Evidence Against Syrian White Helmets Presented at UN," RT, December 21, 2018, https://www.rt.com/news/447091-white-helmets-terrorists-russia/; Sergey Lavrov, "Speech of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia Sergey Lavrov," (speech, Moscow, September 14, 2018), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation,

very rigid system of knowledge about the identity of the terrorist which is almost impossible to contest, as any attempts to criticize such approach are followed by accusations in the apology of terrorism or its support, which is legally prosecuted in Russia.

Othering of the West plays a significant role in the Russian terrorism discourse. As a result, it is also frequently claimed that Russia fights international terrorism almost single handedly, ignoring the role of international coalition in the region. In 2017 Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov claimed that, while Russia calls the world to unite against international terrorism and "prioritizes security", a "certain group of countries" refuses to join forces because "they are clinging onto obsolescent concept of a unipolar world" and instead of fighting terrorism they are "obsessed with a missionary activity" of "implanting Western values."[178] President Putin also accused the West of being hypocritical about the situation in Syria during the 2015 UN GA Assembly: "[the West] makes declarations about the threat of terrorism and at the same time turns a blind eye to the channels used to finance and support terrorists."[179] Almost implying that these countries are siding with terrorist groups.

Even though at a certain point the Russian authorities claimed that they have defeated the spread of international terrorism, the discourse insists that the terrorist identity still possesses a significant threat to Russia and humanity.[180]

### 7.2.2 Identity of Russia

Similar to the period of the Second Chechen War, identity of Russia is constructed as an unconditional fighter against terrorism, but now as an international one. However, this time the

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https://www.mid.ru/web/guest/meropriyatiya_s_uchastiem_ministra//asset_publisher/xK1BhB2bUjd3/content/id/3344050.

[178] Sergey Lavrov, "Speech of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia Sergey Lavrov on The Results of The Russian Diplomatic Activity in 2016," (speech, Moscow, January 17, 2017), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, https://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/news//asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2599609.

[179] Vladimir Putin, "70th Session of the U.N. General Assembly."

[180] See Chapter 7.2.2 of this Thesis.

ethical dimension of Russian identity was emphasized – Russian officials attempted to present themselves as the only strong nation that provides humanitarian aid to troubled regions and is a peace watchdog and a counterforce to Western neo-imperialism. In almost all public speeches, the authorities stress their principal and unconditional anti-terrorism position.

Russian authorities are regularly claiming their victory over international terrorism and thus attempting to project strength both domestically and internationally. In September 2020, the Minister of Defense of Russia Sergei Shoigu wrote a column called "Determination on the Front Lines of War against the Global Evil" for the Ministry's newspaper *Red Star,* where he in detail describes the operation in Syria and how the "international terrorism was significantly damaged, financial support and resources' provisions for [terrorist] organizations were interrupted," additionally, he claimed that Russia is a "key guarantor of regional security" in the Middle East and that it put in place a "reliable shield against the spread of terrorist activity."[181] In November 2020, during a conference call with the President Bashar al-Assad, Putin also claimed that they "annihilated a cluster of international terrorism" in Syria.[182] Even the President of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov regularly praises Vladimir Putin for "winning in the fight against international terrorism" (including in Chechnya), "reviving Russia, increasing defensive capabilities of the Russian Army, and rebuking the foreign powers that wish to isolate [Russia]."[183]

In 2016, the Russian and Syrian troops liberated Palmyra from the "Islamic State." Immediately after, the Kremlin arranged a concert of the Russian state symphony orchestra among the ruins of the ancient city – it was broadcasted live on state TV. The broadcast of the Russian musicians in Palmyra was accompanied by the footage of Russian soldiers in action. These images have become iconic and

[181] Sergei Shoigu, "Determination on the Front Lines of War against the Global Evil," *Red Star,* September 30, 2020, http://redstar.ru/sergej-shojgu-ministr-oborony-rossijskoj-federatsii-reshimost-na-peredovoj-borby-s-mirovym-zlom.

[182] "Meeting with the President of Syria Bashar al-Assad," The Kremlin, November 9, 2020, http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64358.

[183] "Kadyrov: Over the Last 18 Years, Terrorism Was Combatted and Economy Restored in Chechnya," TASS, May 7, 2018, https://tass.ru/politika/5180896.

instrumental in reinforcing the identity of Russia as a peaceful, effective, and cultivated force and are frequently referred to in state-owned media.[184]

### 7.3 Policy

Policy discourse throughout this period is correlated to the period of the Second Chechen War and the later stages of the First Chechen War, as it appeals to international audiences and the terrorist identity is highly securitized. Internationalization of the anti-terrorism discourse was also reflected both in domestic and foreign policy of Russia. It has further legitimized concentration of power and authority over the domain of knowledge about political violence in government hands. While operating within the legal counter-terrorism framework that was adopted during previous periods, the authorities have issued a number of policy documents that signified that the Kremlin has shifted its priorities from domestic to foreign affairs. Additionally, intensification of the discourse focus on international terrorism went hand in hand with the increasing criticism of the role of the West in regional conflicts and more active involvement in conflicts in the MENA region and Asia. Throughout the years, the Russian authorities have been attempting to keep as much information on military operations as possible from public scrutiny through amendments of the Executive Order N 1203 – the one that regulates what information should be classified. These amendments also served as additional basis for persecution of critics of the government. In 2011, any information about CTOs inside Russia and in other countries was added to the List of classified information.[185] Right before the intervention in Syria was approved in 2015, Vladimir Putin issued an Executive Order that

[184] "With The Prayers For Palmyra. A Concert of Valerii Gergiyev," Rossiya 1, May 5, 2016, https://russia.tv/brand/show/brand_id/60500/.
[185] Presidential Executive Order N 787 of June 11, 2011, "On Amending the List of Information Declared a State Secret, Which Was Approved by the Presidential Executive Order on November 30, 1995, N 1203," *Official Internet Portal of Legislative Information,* URL: http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=102038480&rdk=17.

classified information on military losses during "peaceful times or special operations," including overseas; military operations in Eastern Ukraine, Syria, and other places fall into this category.[186]

In 2016, Vladimir Putin signed the Doctrine on Information Security of Russia. Among other strategies it states that Russia has to "participate in creation of the international information security system" that can combat technologies used in "terrorist and extremist activities" and activities "going against international law."[187] The same narrative was later reinforced by yet another update of the National Strategy of the State Policy in late 2018. The Strategy outlines "new challenges and threats to the national security of Russia," among those are listed: "expansion of international terrorism and extremism," "propagation of extremist ideology that causes conflicts in other countries," "hyperbolization of regional interests and separatism that flourishes due to intentional foreign interventions and threatens the state integrity."[188] This strongly correlates with the broader narrative of the Russian establishment in their unconditional fight against the "instigators of color-revolutions" and "terrorists."

In December 2017, as a part of expanding Russia's presence in the region, Vladimir Putin ratified an agreement between Russia and Syria that allowed the Russians to rent a military base in Tartus for 49 years. The explanatory clause of the document stated that "the agreement corresponds with the interests of the Russian Federation, as it will ensure long-term Russian military presence and maintenance of security in the region."[189] This document was later followed by another agreement

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[186] Presidential Executive Order N 237 of May 28, 2015, "On Amending the List of Information Declared a State Secret, Which Was Approved by the Presidential Executive Order on November 30, 1995, N 1203," *Official Internet Portal of Legislative Information,* URL: http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&prevDoc=102038480&backlink=1&&nd=102372639.

[187] Presidential Executive Order N 646 of December 5, 2016, Approval of the Doctrine of the Information Security of the Russian Federation.

[188] Presidential Executive Order N 703 of December 8, 2018, "On Amending the National Strategy of the State Policy of the Russian Federation Until 2025, Which Was Approved by the Presidential Executive Order N 1666 of December 6, 2012."

[189] "A Law Was Signed on the Ratification of an Agreement Between Russia and Syria on the Expansion of the Territory of the Logistics Center of the Russian Navy in the Area of the Port of Tartus," The Kremlin, December 29, 2017, http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/news/56562.

giving the Russian military access to the Khmeimim air base and its expansion over the coastal line – at no cost.[190]

As a policy of establishing stronger presence of Russia in the MENA region, the authorities have been lobbying for the creation of new military bases or temporary places of dislocation of the Russian Army. Since 2016, sources inside the Russian Ministry of Defense claim that Russia is trying to negotiate a deal with the government of Egypt on a possibility to locate some of its military equipment and troops to "solve some of the geopolitical tasks in the region," however, the deal was never reached.[191] In December 2020, Russia signed a 25-year agreement with the authorities of Sudan on establishing a naval base in Khartoum. There are also numerous reports on Russian mercenaries and some of the troops being present in Libya to support the forces that are fighting for power against the internationally recognized government in Tripoli, however, Moscow calls these claims unfounded.[192]

Another significant aspect of the Russian anti-terrorism discourse are the diplomatic attempts to arrange peace talks between the conflicting sides of military conflicts across MENA and Asia. The most important part of the Russian foreign policy agenda is "peace in Syria." Despite media reports, numerous statements, Russia's own legislation, and narratives that Russia will not negotiate with terrorist groups and will only be "ruthlessly fighting them and finishing them off,"[193] the Kremlin has been organizing and inviting delegates of these exact terrorist groups to either Russia or Kazakhstan for so-called peace-talks.

Referring to situation in Libya, the Russian authorities are claiming that the conflict between the sides competing for power enables "presence of terrorism threat from radical Islamists," especially in

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[190] "Syria Agrees to Let Russia Expand Hmeimim Air Base," Reuters, August 19, 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-syria-airbase-idUSKCN25F2BP.
[191] Anna Halitova, Tatyana Baikova and Andrey Ontikov, "Egypt Will Provide Russia with a Military Base," *Izvestiya,* October 10, 2016, https://iz.ru/news/636932.
[192] "U.S. Says Russia Sent Jets to Libya 'mercenaries,'" BBC, May 26, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52811093.
[193] Lavrov, "Speech of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia Sergey Lavrov on The Results of The Russian Diplomatic Activity in 2016."

light of the Western-backed government in Tripoli that does not want to negotiate with the General Khalifa Haftar.[194] Meanwhile Haftar frequently visits Russia for talks with the Russian military and diplomats.

For a few years now, the Russian diplomats and military officials have been trying to facilitate talks between the government of Afghanistan and the Taliban. The Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov claimed that "Afghanistan is incapable of preforming [efficient] anti-terrorism strategy without outside help."[195] Russia has also been conducting talks with the representatives of the group in Moscow on several occasions, even though Russia recognized the Taliban as a terrorist organization and thus in accordance with the valid laws they must prosecute its members on Russian soil. Nonetheless, it was the U.S. who reached a peace deal with the Taliban and Afghan officials in 2020.

The Russian diplomats are also often claiming to facilitate peace talks between the Houthi rebels and government in Yemen behind the scenes to solve the conflict and issues of terrorism, too.[196] Even though Russia is not on the front lines of the negotiations on Yemen, this issue is vividly present in Russia's foreign policy discourse and informs discourse on terrorism.

### 7.4 Summary

Since Russia's involvement in Syria, the authorities have been actively exploiting the international terrorism discourse. It has also been highly securitized and prioritized, opposed to the "domestic terrorism" discourse discussed in Chapter 6. The Kremlin's engagement in terrorism discourse

[194] "Russia's Position on Developments in Libya," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, undated, https://www.mid.ru/pozicia-rossii-po-situacii-v-livii.
[195] "Answers of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation S.V. Lavrov During a Special Session of International Discussion Club 'Valdai' on the Middle East," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, March 31, 2021, https://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/4660109.
[196] "Answers of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation S.V. Lavrov During a Special Session of International Discussion Club 'Valdai' on the Middle East."

throughout this period has also signified a shift in priorities from domestic to foreign policy and attempts to regain its great power status through conflict mediation and direct involvement. While the identity of the terrorist is significantly othered, it is still blurred and does not have a specific face, as it was during the Chechen wars. Anti-Assad opposition, the "Islamic State", the Taliban, and even humanitarian NGOs – all of them are identified as terrorists by Russia. There are also significant discontinuities within the discourse on terrorism: while the legislation prohibits negotiations with "terrorists" and demands their prosecution on Russia's soil, the Russian officials have been openly meeting with leaders of the groups labeled as "terrorist" inside Russia for negotiations throughout years. Often the international terrorism discourse goes hand in hand with criticism of the West and challenging its policies in the MENA and Asia regions. Through othering of both the West and the terrorist identity, Russia has constituted an identity for itself as a just, vehement, and unconditional fighter against terrorism and a patron of the weaker states that have been wrecked by Western involvement. This identity justifies the Kremlin's military interventions, expansion of military bases, and its *regime of truth* about international terrorism.

## 8. Conclusion

### 8.1 Findings

In this research I analyzed the evolution of Russian discourse on terrorism in conjunction with reinvention of state identity and power in the years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union until today. After studying the official terrorism discourse of past three decades in the form of hundreds of policy documents, legislations, interviews, and public statements, I identified four distinctive periods and modi operandi of the Russian terrorism discourse.

The first period covers years after the fall of the Soviet Union through the First Chechen War (1991-1996). After the dissolution of the USSR, former republics constructed their identities around ethnic or nationalist discourses, for Russia, creation of a coherent identity was challenging because of its

multi-ethnic and multi-national composition. But the discourse on terrorism was able to unite the domestic audiences against the Other and lay foundations for the identity of Russia as a peace negotiator and a protector. The Russian authorities othered the Chechens as a group for attempts to gain independence as well as people supporting their cause. The terrorism threat served as a justification for intervention in the region, for biopolitical control over people and violence against them on this territory, for legitimization of the new government's power, for creation of an insecure space, in which the authority of the state is perceived as existential.

The second period covers the interwar years and the Second Chechen War (1997-2009). This period was characterized by an extreme othering of the Chechen separatists, especially in light of two major hostage crises that left hundreds of people dead. The identity of the terrorist was constructed as barbaric, religiously fanatic, inhumane, and even demonic, while Russia has been constituted as a vehement, strong, and uncompromising fighter against (international) terrorism. It has triggered a discourse of exclusion and implementation of biopolitical mechanisms of control over the suspects of terrorist activity like listings in special public registries that significantly limited access to financial services, regulation of burials and legal liabilities of suspects' relatives. The terrorism discourse of the time justified a substantial concentration of power (not only over the counter-terrorism) in the president's hands, allowed for expansion of surveillance authority of the state, and made the state an exclusive producer of knowledge about political violence. Even though it was primarily a domestic issue, the Russian authorities also attempted to engage with international audiences, especially in light of the 9/11 and global "war on terror" discourse, to show that they are rightfully fighting international terrorism, too.

The third period concurred with Vladimir Putin's come back to the presidential office (2012 – ongoing). In absence of active military campaigns, the discursive practices and identity of the terrorist have significantly changed on the official level. While the political regime itself transitioned into authoritarianism, the counter-terrorist legislation has become a tool for biopolitical control over

private spheres of population, justification of highly restrictive legislation, and persecution of the opposition and the critics of the government. The identity of the terrorist fragmented a lot, and now it ranges from teenagers to the leaders of political opposition and journalists. Political actors also seem to be less engaged in domestic counter-terrorism policy, as opposed to previous periods, and shift responsibility to the law enforcement. In this context, Russia attempts to constitute for itself an identity of a fair and democratic state with a functional rule of law and beliefs in institutional independence, whereas, in practice this image differs significantly.

The last period covers Russia's ongoing fight against "international terrorism" overseas that is marked by intervention in Syria on the side of Bashar al-Assad (2015 – ongoing). These years are characterized by high levels of securitization of international terrorism discourse as well as by othering of the West. As opposed to the "domestic terrorism" discourse of the previous period, fight against terrorism outside Russia is more prioritized as it legitimizes Russia's identity as great power in international politics. Even though the identity of the terrorist is highly securitized, it does not have a coherent identity either – it rather encompasses a mix of non-state militarized actors, opposition of Russa's allies, and even civil activists and NGOs. The Kremlin through active othering of both the terrorist identity and the West – similarly to the Second Chechen War period – constitutes for itself an identity of an uncompromising fighter against international terrorism and a patron of the states, whose stability was undermined by the West. The international terrorism discourse serves as a basis for Russia's expansion of military bases across the MENA region, military interventions in conflicts, attempts to become a mediator for the conflicting sides, even if it contradicts the very legislation against terrorism adopted by Russia itself, and ultimately regaining the great power status in international political sphere.

### 8.2 Limitations and Further Research

There are also several crucial limitations to this research that need to be addressed. Firstly, the terrorism discourse is *not the only one* that helped to constitute the identity of the Russian Federation throughout the years of its existence; however, it had a significantly impact as it helped constitute state authority after the dissolution of USSR, legitimized its power and *regimes of truth* about terrorism. It is impossible to cover all the factors shaping the identity and policy within the frames of a Master's Thesis without being shallow, I therefore focused solely on terrorism discourse. Secondly, since Russia's intervention in Syria, the officials are actively utilizing anti-Western discourse, which is intertwined with the discourse on terrorism, to the point it is almost impossible to separate the two on a level of analysis. Therefore, it was important to show other narratives in the foreign policy of Russia discussed in Chapter 7. Thirdly, Chapter 6 discusses how the legislation on both terrorism and extremism is used today – in the absence of actual domestic political violence – for persecution of domestic political opposition and critics of the regime. While a significant portion of charges pressed against the critics are under the "extremist" articles of the Criminal Code of Russia, the official discourse (whether it is legislation, official statistics, speeches) usually treats terrorism and extremism as inseparable categories. Therefore, for the purposes of this Thesis, it was important to reference the "extremist" cases, too.

Lastly, critical and poststructuralist approaches insist on studying power both inside and outside hegemonic discourses to find inconsistencies, marginalized voices, and mechanisms of oppression. However, while I attempted to introduce some of the marginalized voices, the primary object of my analysis is the official discourse, which – at times – draws a very grim picture. I believe, other academics can study policy and public criticism in relation to the discourse on terrorism, and thus fill in the gaps of this study and complement my research. However, my choice was conditioned by the specificities of the discourse on terrorism and lack of comprehensive research on the evolution of this discourse in conjunction with legitimation of government authority in present-day Russia. Political

violence is a phenomenon that suspends "politics as usual," it is presented as an existential threat that justifies exceptional practices and the very existence of a state. As the state holds an exclusive authority on production of knowledge about security and holds a monopoly on the use of violence, it is critical to study the hegemonic knowledge and power practices of the state first.

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