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YOU SHALL NOT FORGET WHO PROTECTED YOU!
RUSSIA'S POLITICS OF DEFERENCE TOWARDS ARMENIA IN THE
NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT

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Russia's Politics of Deference towards Armenia in the Nagorno-
Karabakh Conflict

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

For more than thirty years, analyses of Russia's role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict focused on strategic interests and physical security, often overlooking how Moscow infused its (dis)engagement with existential meaningfulness. This omission is notable given the Caucasus's importance in Russian collective memory and the presence of an imperial imaginary within Russian discourse, often studied in relation to the war in Ukraine, but rarely in connection with conflicts in this region. Interestingly, the cessation of hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh happened alongside the breakdown of a long-held belief that Russia was Armenia's protector, a notion rooted in the Tsarist Empire's self-image as a defender of vulnerable Christians in the Caucasus and the Ottoman Empire. While scholars have examined how this image shaped Armenian political identity, its impact on Russia's self-perception remains insufficiently explored.

Bringing ontological security theory into conversation with memory politics and honor, the dissertation conceptualizes Russian discourse toward Armenia as a politics of deference, whereby the Kremlin mobilized the protector image and expected Armenia to recognize it, thereby sustaining its post-Soviet pursuit of a coherent Self. Following an abductive, two-stage design, the dissertation reconstructs the foundations of the protector image and applies Emotion Discourse Analysis to seventy-five purposively selected texts produced between 2015 and 2024 by official and semi-official actors chosen for their sustained engagement with the conflict and visibility in the Russian media ecosystem.

The findings show that compassion and pride were dominant when Armenian deference seemed secure. When Yerevan challenged Russia's protector role, feelings of anger emerged, and the Armenian government was depicted as ungrateful or cowardly. Instead of abandoning its protector identity, Russian actors relied on alternative Tsarist representations of Armenians, preserving their sense of security through flexible storytelling. The dissertation proposes the politics of deference as a useful framework for understanding neo-imperial discourse. It also shows that Russia's post-Soviet identity is shaped not only by recognition from the West as a great power but also by relationships with former imperial territories.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CNN	Cable News Network
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EDA	Emotion Discourse Analysis
EU	European Union
FSB	Federal Security Service
IR	International Relations
IRI	International Republican Institute
MGIMO	Moscow State Institute of International Relations
NKAO	Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co- operation in Europe
PS	Political Science
RFERL	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic
TASS	Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (Russian state news agency)
UAR/SAR	Union of Russian Armenians
US	United States

1. INTRODUCTION

Nagorno-Karabakh is a mountainous enclave that, while located within Azerbaijan's internationally recognized borders, was governed by its ethnic Armenian majority with support from Armenia from 1994 to September 2023.¹ That month, the Azerbaijani army launched a swift and decisive offensive that swept away their decades-long pursuit of independence in just 24 hours, triggering their mass exodus to neighboring Armenia and bringing to an end what had long been regarded as the longest-running conflict in post-Soviet Eurasia. On September 28, Samvel Shahramanyan, the elected president of the self-proclaimed Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh, signed a decree dissolving the entity, effective January 1, 2024.

In the wake of these events, observers have turned their attention to an actor involved in the dynamics of this dispute since the 18th century and, in certain respects, played a decisive role in its resolution: the Russian Federation. In particular, many have wondered why Russian peacekeepers, tasked with protecting the local Armenian population under the terms of the ceasefire agreement that ended the war between Yerevan and Baku in 2020, failed to prevent Azerbaijan's military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh.

1.1. Introducing the Research Puzzle

Throughout the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Russia's practices were complex, multifaceted, and at times seemingly contradictory. Moscow acted both unilaterally and as a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, playing a central role as a mediator and broker of the ceasefire agreements of 1994, 2016, and 2020. At the same time, it remained Armenia's ally through the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), serving as Yerevan's primary arms supplier and maintaining a substantial military presence on Armenian territory.^{2 3}

Meanwhile, it consistently supported Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and maintained a strategic partnership with Baku built on economic, energy, and

¹ 1994 is marked here as the year the First Nagorno-Karabakh War ended, with the Armenians in full control of the enclave and the surrounding Azerbaijani districts, and the Azerbaijani population expelled from these areas.

² Here I am referring to the First Karabakh War, which lasted from 1988 to 1994; the Four-Day War of April 2016; and the Second Karabakh War, which took place from September to November 2020.

³ The OSCE created the OSCE Minsk Group in 1992 to help find a peaceful solution to the dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. The United States, France, and Russia co-chaired it until 2025.

infrastructure cooperation (Eldem 2022; Broers 2023). This partnership was further strengthened in February 2022, just before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, when the two countries signed a "Declaration on Allied Interaction" that set a common agenda across a wide range of areas, including humanitarian and economic relations and security issues (President of Azerbaijan 2022).

For over thirty years, policy experts and academics debated the Kremlin's handling of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Russian analysts often contended that, despite sustained mediation efforts, Moscow lacked sufficient leverage over Armenia and Azerbaijan to initiate a truly effective peace process (Markedonov 2017; Suchkov 2018; Sushentsov and Neklyudov 2020). In contrast, both Western observers and regional experts, emphasizing the ambiguity of these practices, claimed that the Kremlin was never genuinely committed to resolving the conflict. Instead, it benefited from the prolonged "no war, no peace" status, retaining leverage over Baku and Yerevan while limiting the involvement of external actors, such as Turkey, the European Union (EU), and the United States (US), in a region it has long considered its exclusive sphere of influence (Cornell 2001; Minasyan 2013; Romashov and Rytövuori-Apunen 2017; De Waal 2019; Gafarli 2022; Çakmak and Özşahin 2023).

A smaller group of analysts went even further, contending that Moscow, driven by neo-imperial aspirations, deliberately instigated the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and similar disputes in Transnistria, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia (Blank 2008; Allison 2009; Coyle 2017; Kazantsev et al. 2020; Sieniawski 2024). Nonetheless, the events of September 2023 have challenged these long-standing assumptions. With no Armenians remaining in Nagorno-Karabakh, the presence of Russian peacekeepers became effectively useless. Moscow was left with little choice but to withdraw its forces ahead of the timeline set by the 2020 ceasefire agreement, thereby ending its physical presence in this disputed territory (De Waal 2024).

Existing research on Russia's involvement in Nagorno-Karabakh has primarily focused on its strategic interests and physical security practices. By comparison, comparatively little attention has been devoted to examining how the Kremlin constructed and sustained the meaning of its (dis)engagement in the conflict. This inquiry calls for an interpretivist approach to the study of international politics. The latter focuses on understanding what "a thing 'is' by learning what it does, how particular people use it, in particular contexts" (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012, 23) and draws on diverse

intellectual traditions, including hermeneutics⁴ and phenomenology⁵, symbolic interactionism⁶, and Max Weber's concept of "Verstehen."⁷

This neglect is particularly puzzling given the substantial body of literature on Russian foreign policy discourse, which has examined how the Kremlin articulates and communicates its self-identity in international politics and in relation to neighboring states (Laruelle 2009; Clunan 2014; Tsygankov 2014; Morozov 2015; Hansen 2016; Reshetnikov 2017; Curanović 2021; Kanet and Moulioukova 2022; Götz and Ekman 2024). These contributions have primarily examined developments in post-Soviet Eurasia, including the "color revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine (2003–2004), the Russo-Georgian war (2008), the annexation of Crimea (2014), and, more recently, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine (2022).

Overall, two interrelated reasons suggest this body of literature should begin to explore Russia's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The first concerns the Caucasus and its centrality in Russian imperial history and collective memory (Gammer and Kaplan 2014; Oskanian 2014; De Waal 2019). It took Russian rulers over two centuries to establish control over this region. Russia's expansion into the Caucasus began in the late sixteenth century, and it largely secured control over its southern territories by the early nineteenth century. Furthermore, more than thirty years of continuous military campaigns against the North Caucasian mountaineers were necessary to consolidate authority over the entire region (Henze 1996, 389).

Meanwhile, nineteenth-century writers, poets, ethnographers, military figures, and chroniclers helped establish the Caucasus's prominence in Russian popular consciousness (Gammer and Kaplan 2014). These accounts helped create an image of Russia as a civilization bridging Europe and Asia while reinforcing a sense of exceptionalism that has persisted through the Tsarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet periods (Layton 1995; Gammer and Kaplan 2014; Morozov 2015; Oskanian 2017; Curanović 2021). Consequently, any

⁴ Hermeneutics is a discipline based on the assumption that "the analyst of a text must seek to bring out the meanings of a text from the perspective of its author. This will entail attention to the social and historical context within which the text was produced" (Bryman 2012, 561).

⁵ Phenomenology is "a philosophy that is concerned with the question of how individuals make sense of the world around them and how in particular the philosopher should bracket out preconceptions in his or her grasp of that world" (Bryman 2012, 30).

⁶ Symbolic interactionism is "a theoretical perspective in sociology and social psychology that views social interaction as taking place in terms of the meanings actors attach to action and things" (Bryman 2012, 716).

⁷ "Verstehen" posits that facts and observations are not standalone elements that can be reduced to the universal laws typical of the natural sciences. Instead, making sense of what is being studied requires a comprehensive grasp of the underlying motivations behind actions (Steele 2008, 6).

assessment of Russia's policies in the region must recognize that Moscow's involvement extends beyond geopolitical positioning and strategic interests.

The second factor concerns Russia's historical relationship with Armenia. A significant yet often overlooked dynamic revealed by the events of September 2023 was the erosion of the long-held belief that the Kremlin would protect Armenians (Hess 2022; Atasuntsev 2023; Zolyan 2023; Shahverdyan 2024). Officially, the two countries still maintain "close allied relations marked by frequent bilateral visits at the high and highest levels" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia 2025). However, since the end of the 2020 war, Armenian-Russian security and political relations have steadily deteriorated. Moscow's inaction during Baku's subsequent military operation marked a critical turning point, fueling widespread disillusionment in Armenian society (International Republican Institute 2024) and prompting a significant reassessment of Yerevan's security policy orientation (Giragosian 2023).

While scholars have long recognized that Armenia's economic, energy, and security vulnerabilities have shaped its generally favorable orientation toward Russia since the Soviet Union's collapse (De Waal 2013; Minasyan 2013; De Waal 2019; Iskandaryan 2019; Broers 2023; Çakmak and Özşahin 2023), its relationship with Moscow is also firmly grounded in identity and historical memory, most notably in the enduring image of Russia as a protector.

The latter emerged between the 18th and early 20th centuries. During that period, the Russian Empire not only conquered the South Caucasus but also liberated part of the Armenian population from Persian and Ottoman control, bringing them under the influence of a European and Christian power (Hovannisian 1971, 31). Furthermore, as Russia became increasingly entangled in the geopolitical implications of the declining Ottoman Empire's future and territorial integrity, Tsarist authorities often positioned themselves as protectors of the Sublime Porte's Christian subjects (Badalyan Riegg 2020). Consequently, the Empire regarded Christian Armenians not only as allies on the southern frontier but also as defenseless victims whom it had a religious duty to protect from Muslim oppressors (Blauvelt and Berglund 2016, 70).

Historians have long acknowledged the crucial role of this distant memory in shaping contemporary Armenian political identity (Suny 1993; Shnirelman 2001; Libaridian 2007; Payaslian 2007; Badalyan Riegg 2020). However, International Relations (IR) scholars have rarely examined how the same historical image has shaped Russia's self-identity (Oskanian 2014; Abushov 2019). This gap marks the starting point of my

dissertation, which argues that Russia's interpretations of that distant past informed its (dis)engagement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

1.2. The Approach of the Dissertation

The central assumption of this dissertation is that Russia's practices in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict have been symptomatic of a quest for *ontological security* that has persisted since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Ontological security refers to the "security not of the body but of the self, the subjective sense of who one is, which enables and motivates action and choice" (Mitzen 2006, 344). It is a sense of coherence that social actors seek to preserve through biographical narratives and/or routinized relations with "significant Others" (Giddens 1991; Kinnvall 2004; Mitzen 2006; Steele 2008; Gustafsson and Krickel-Choi 2020). When this coherence is disrupted, "critical situations" arise, and existential anxiety may drive actors to restore continuity by reproducing familiar, even conflictual, practices, often at significant material cost (Rumelili 2015; Subotić 2016; Ejodus 2017; Figari Barberis and Zanatta 2023).

Therefore, this study posits that the collapse of the Soviet Union not only produced political, economic, and institutional upheavals across the post-Soviet space but also plunged the newly born republics into existential turmoil. For post-Soviet Russian leadership, confronting dilemmas of self-identity became as urgent as steering the transition from a planned to a market economy, defining the contours of a new political system, and tackling the corruption and organized crime that thrived in the power vacuum of those years (Mankoff 2009; Sakwa 2020; Curanović 2021). Because ontological security largely depends on the coherence of biographical narratives, this notion is closely tied to the *politics of memory*, which concerns "who wants whom to remember what, and why" (Confino 1997, 1393). Memory plays a central role in shaping social actors' self-identity, serving as a temporal anchor that makes the past meaningful by providing a sense of "where 'we' have come from and what 'we' have been through" (Berenskoetter 2012, 270). Consequently, as Maria Mälksoo (2015, 221) notes, "memory must be defended."

The central argument of this study is that, in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Russia's pursuit of ontological security was shaped by mnemonic reflections on its Tsarist past in the Caucasus and expressed through what I define as a *politics of deference* toward Armenia. This notion partly resembles Hegel's master-slave dialectic, in which the master's identity depends on recognition from the servant, even as the servant simultaneously constitutes the master's identity (Hegel et al. 2013).

Accordingly, Russia sought ontological security by interpreting its asymmetrical alliance with Armenia, which emerged after the Soviet Union's collapse, through a self-image of a protector, shaped by a reconstructed memory of its Tsarist past, while seeking recognition of that role within the relationship. The concept of honor aptly captures this inherently hierarchical dynamic, understood as both a social actor's claim to worth and the public acknowledgment of that claim by significant Others (Pitt-Rivers 1965, 21). Honor has long been central to Russian state identity, with roots that predate the accession of the Romanov dynasty (Tsygankov 2014; Kollmann 2016).

When this claim to recognition was perceived as denied, Russia did not abandon its self-image as a protector. Instead, it drew on the same Tsarist mnemonic repertoire, which portrayed Armenians not only as vulnerable subjects requiring Russian protection but also, during periods of political alienation between the two sides, as unreliable or even "conspiratorial" (Suny 1993, 32). Thus, the Kremlin could reinterpret the perceived misrecognition while preserving continuity of the Russian Self, sustaining ontological security despite changing relational dynamics.

1.3. Methodology and Operationalization of the Research Question

Having placed meaning-making at the center of my analysis of the Kremlin's policies toward Armenia during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, I now turn to the dissertation's analytical and methodological structure. Before doing so, the research question that guides the entire project must be restated:

How did concerns over ontological security shape Russia's discourse toward Armenia during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (2015–2024)?

To operationalize the research question, this dissertation adopts a two-stage research process guided by an abductive logic of inquiry (Yanow 2014; Saunders et al. 2019) that aims to: (1) reconstruct Russia's autobiographical narrative through an iterative dialogue between historical scholarship on Tsarist Russian policies toward Armenians and the theoretical concepts of ontological security, collective memory, and honor; and (2) examine how this narrative was mobilized and adapted in Russian discourse on Armenia during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from 2015 to 2024.

Rather than treating this nine-year period as a single, uninterrupted sequence, the empirical part of this dissertation will be organized around three critical junctures, each marked by major transformations in the conflict and separated by periods of relative calm. This periodization enables an examination of how moments of crisis disrupted or

transformed the discursive construction of Russia's identity as Armenia's protector. The three critical junctures are:

1) 2015–2018, beginning with President Vladimir Putin's speech at the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial during the centenary of the Armenian Genocide and encompassing the 2016 Four-Day War and Armenia's 2018 Velvet Revolution⁸; 2) 2020–2022, involving the 2020 War and its immediate aftermath; and 3) 2023–2024, when Russia became increasingly isolated in the region after invading Ukraine and the Azerbaijani military offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh took place.

To support this process, the dissertation draws on scholarship examining the role of emotions in political discourse. Emotions are understood here as the “subjective experience of some diffuse physiological change” (Mercer 2014, 516) with “intersubjective and cultural components” (Crawford 2000, 125). They assign affective significance to social rules and norms, thereby sustaining the moral hierarchies of values and beliefs through which political action acquires meaning (Mercer 1996). From this perspective, the politics of deference can be examined as a relationship structured by emotional hierarchies, in which historical narratives establish whose emotions deserve “consideration, respect, and priority” (Gustafsson and Hall 2021, 976).

In the first stage, this literature informs the reconstruction of Russia's autobiographical narrative using the *hero-protector narrative* framework developed by Clément et al. (2017). Designed to explain how political leaders mobilize collective emotions to portray assertive policies as morally justified, the framework identifies four recurring narrative roles—the hero-protector, the innocent victim, the perverse aggressor, and the coward—along with their characteristic plot sequences and emotional configurations. More broadly, it reflects a gendered understanding of political agency by associating protection with ideals of masculinity, physical courage, and honor, and by reproducing hierarchical conceptions of power (Lindemann 2014, 269; Clément et al. 2017, 2). These roles provide an analytical vocabulary for reconstructing historical accounts of Tsarist policies toward Armenia as an autobiographical narrative and for tracing that narrative in contemporary Russian discourse.

In the second stage, this scholarship employs *Emotion Discourse Analysis* (EDA) to

⁸ The 2018 Velvet Revolution in Armenia was a series of peaceful protests against the political actions of then-President and Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan. The movement was spearheaded by journalist and opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan, who subsequently became Prime Minister. His critical stance towards Russia prior to taking office sparked significant discussions about the implications of the Velvet Revolution on Russian-Armenian relations.

examine how Russia's autobiographical narrative was articulated and transformed in contemporary Russian discourse. EDA examines how social actors express emotions and deploy emotional categories in relation to subjects, events, and social relationships (Koschut 2018, 277). EDA is structured around the four narrative roles identified by the hero-protector framework and applied to a corpus of seventy-five primary texts produced between 2015 and 2024. This approach will allow me to examine how Russia's autobiographical narrative was rearticulated in response to developments in Russian-Armenian relations during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Although references to “Russia” might suggest that the government is the sole agent in the country’s pursuit of ontological security, my analysis considers a broader population, purposefully selected based on three criteria: consistent commentary on Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, wide visibility across media channels, and institutional embeddedness. These actors play an important role in translating official discourse into emotionally charged narratives that reinforce Russia's hero-protector image. The first group comprises members of the Russian political elite, including official press releases and public statements issued by government officials and their representatives. The second group consists of political actors who, although not part of the government, publicly articulate positions on Russia's foreign policy, particularly regarding Armenia and the broader post-Soviet space. The third encompasses a broad range of actors operating within Russia's state-controlled information environment, including television broadcasters, state-affiliated media commentators, and influential figures active on Telegram, with particular attention to contributions from members of the Armenian diaspora in Russia. Throughout the dissertation, I refer to the latter two groups collectively as "semi-official" discourse.

1.4. Expected Contributions

This dissertation aims to contribute to the literature on Russia's role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by moving beyond analyses centered on strategic interests and policy outcomes. To this end, it adopts an interpretivist, socio-psychological perspective that examines the role of Armenia and the Caucasus in Russian collective memory and explores how Russia came to invest its (dis)engagement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with existential significance. In pursuing this objective, the dissertation advances the literature at the empirical, theoretical, and methodological levels. *Empirically*, it makes two principal contributions. First, it broadens existing

understandings of how post-Soviet Russia pursues ontological security by reorienting the analytical focus from horizontal relations with the West to vertical, hierarchical relationships with its former imperial subjects. Constructivist scholarship on Russian foreign policy has largely understood this dynamic as a quest for recognition as a great power (Hopf 2002; Zarakol 2011; Forsberg 2014; Tsygankov 2014a; Morozov 2015; Neumann 2015; Hansen 2016; Reshetnikov 2017; Curanović 2021; Kanet and Moulioukova 2022). This literature largely assumes that the West, primarily represented by the US and the EU, constitutes Moscow's principal significant Other, and that the Kremlin regards recognition of its self-ascribed great-power status by these actors as equally important as, and at times even more important than, its physical security practices. Accordingly, the Kremlin's security practices in the post-Soviet space are considered a response to the West's refusal to recognize that there are "regions in which Russia has privileged interests," as stated by President Dmitry Medvedev in 2008 (President of Russia 2008).

The second empirical contribution is an in-depth case study that advances debates on Russian *neo-imperialism* by showing that the imperial legacy should not be understood merely as an aspiration to restore either the Soviet Union or the Russian Empire as territorial entities. Rather, it serves as a mnemonic and interpretive framework through which the Kremlin understands its contemporary role in the post-Soviet space and structures its relationships with the rest of the world, including the former Soviet republics.

Theoretically, this dissertation advances the concept of the politics of deference by synthesizing insights from the literatures on ontological security, collective memory, and honor to show how the Tsarist legacy functions as a mnemonic framework that enables post-Soviet Russia to reproduce a stable sense of Self through the discursive constitution of hierarchical relationships with its former imperial subjects. *Methodologically*, the dissertation presents a comprehensive corpus of 75 Russian-language primary sources, compiled through a systematic search and careful selection of official and semi-official discourse.

1.5. Roadmap of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into seven chapters. The first five chapters lay the groundwork for the empirical analysis in the last two chapters by establishing the analytical, methodological, and mnemonic foundations. Following this introductory

section, *Chapter Two, "Theoretical Framework,"* introduces the concept of ontological security and explores its relationship to honor and collective memory, showing how these perspectives converge in the politics of deference and the hero-protector narrative.

Chapter Three, "Literature Review," is divided into two parts. The first, after briefly contextualizing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, examines how existing scholarship analyzed Russia's role, revealing that both before and after the events of September 2023, most scholarly and non-scholarly accounts relied primarily on outcome-based explanations to assess its practices in the conflict. The second part turns to constructivist approaches to Russian foreign policy and considers how the three theoretical concepts have been employed to date. In both cases, I aim to identify the research gaps this dissertation addresses.

Chapter Four, "Methodology," introduces the emotional turn in IR and positions the hero-protector narrative's core emotions, compassion and anger, as the analytical framework for the empirical analysis. It also details the research design, data collection, and sampling strategy, justifies the selection of the units of analysis, and explains the complementary use of EDA to investigate how Russia's biographical narrative was articulated across official and semi-official discourse.

Chapter Five, "The Mnemonic Foundations of the Hero-Protector Narrative," is divided into two parts. The first part examines post-Soviet Russian-Armenian relations in depth, highlighting the factors that have kept the two countries together and contributed to their foreign policy alignment throughout the conflict. The second part traces the historical roots of Russia's self-ascribed protector identity that underpins its politics of deference, showing how, despite its distant origins, this autobiographical narrative endured through the Soviet period and beyond, providing the interpretive framework through which the Kremlin pursues its quest for ontological security.

The dissertation's empirical core is in *Chapter Six, "Russia's Politics of Deference."* This chapter shows how experiences of ontological (in)security stemming from the (mis)recognition of the hero-protector narrative shaped Russian actors' discourse about their country's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict across the three critical junctures identified above.

Finally, *Chapter Seven, "Conclusion,"* synthesizes the dissertation's theoretical and empirical findings to answer the central research question. It then reflects on the study's broader theoretical, empirical, and methodological contributions and acknowledges its limitations.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

Although this dissertation focuses on Russia's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, its principal inspiration originates from a location thousands of kilometers away: Yekaterinburg, Russia's fourth-largest city, where I resided and studied Russian in 2018. Situated at the intersection of Europe and Asia, Yekaterinburg functions as a vital junction on the Trans-Siberian Railway and possesses historical significance as the site where Tsar Nicholas II and his family were executed in July 1918. During a visit to this city and a leisurely walk along the Iset River promenade, one cannot help but notice the inscription on the roof of the Instrument-Making Plant building, known as the "eternal question" (Vechny vopros/Вечный вопрос). Instigated by street artist Timofey Radya in 2017 as part of the Ural Industrial Biennale, the "eternal question" presents the following dilemma: "Who are we, where are we from, and where are we going?" (Kto my, otkuda, kuda idem?/Кто мы, откуда, куда идем?).⁹

Responding to the Eternal Question has unquestionably been a primary concern of the fifteen republics that emerged following the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The dissolution prompted a series of complex dilemmas regarding the very identity of post-Soviet Russia, which, in many respects, constituted the political nucleus of both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. For instance, from whom did the Russians truly gain independence? Should post-Soviet Russia revive the Tsarist-era sense of Self, which the 1917 Revolution dismantled? Should it restore the Soviet Self? Should it adopt a Western-oriented Self, thereby breaking free from its imperial and Soviet past? Or should it create an entirely new and distinct Self?

Overall, the Kremlin's efforts to reconstruct a coherent vision of the Russian Self constitute what I categorize throughout this dissertation as a pursuit of ontological security. These efforts form the basis of my attempt to analyze Russia's prolonged engagement and sudden disengagement from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict beyond merely outcome-based evaluations. Prior to examining in detail how Russia employed the distant image of Armenia as a protector—an essential means of addressing the Eternal Questions—and how anxieties concerning Yerevan's acknowledgment of this image

⁹ Terms and names in Russian, which I speak fluently, and Armenian, which I can read, are presented both in their original script and with Latin transliteration.

influenced the dynamics of its politics of deference within the Armenian-Azerbaijani dispute, I must first clarify the conceptual and analytical foundations of my research.

Guided by this mission, the present chapter has a threefold aim, each addressed in a dedicated section. First, it delineates the theoretical assumptions and key concepts—ontological security, memory politics, and honor—that underpin my study. Second, it introduces the concept of “politics of deference” as a means of linking these notions. Third, it presents the hero-protector narrative as the analytical framework for examining the politics of deference in the empirical data.

2.1. Theoretical Concepts

2.1.1. Ontological Security in IR.

Often described as “security as/of being” (Giddens 1991; Steele 2008; Kinnvall 2004) or “security not of the body but of the Self, the subjective sense of who one is” (Mitzen 2006, 344), ontological security is a concept rooted in philosophical and psychological existentialism. It generally refers to a social actor's need for a “sense of order and continuity in events” (Giddens 1991, 243), a “stable view of the Self” (Flockhart 2016, 803), or a “healthy sense of Self” (Ejdus 2020, 2). At its core, ontological security pertains to how actors perceive their existence, find meaning in life, and manage anxiety (Gustafsson and Krickel-Choi 2020). In contrast, ontological insecurity reflects “the deep, incapacitating state of not knowing which dangers to confront and which to ignore, i.e., how to get by in the world” (Mitzen 2006, 345).

It was Ronald David Laing, a Scottish psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, who gained prominence for his work in existential psychiatry and for treating individuals affected by schizophrenia, who first established the concept of ontological security in the late 1950s. In his book “The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness” (1960|2010), he wrote that a basically ontologically secure person is:

“A real, alive, whole, and, in a temporal sense, a continuous person. As such, he can live out into the world and meet Others: a world and Others experienced as equally real, alive, whole, and continuous. Such a basically ontologically secure person will encounter all the hazards of life, social, ethical, spiritual, and biological, from a centrally firm sense of his own and other people's reality and identity” (Laing 1960|2010, 39).

On the other hand, an ontologically insecure individual is:

“More unreal than real; in a literal sense, more dead than alive; precariously differentiated from the rest of the world, so that his identity and autonomy are always in question. He may lack the experience of his own temporal continuity. He may not possess an overriding sense of personal consistency or cohesiveness. He may feel more insubstantial rather than substantial, and unable to assume that the stuff he

is made of is genuine, good, valuable. And he may feel his Self as partially divorced from his body.” (Laing 2010, 42)

Based on these definitions, it can be argued that, in Laing’s view, a secure sense of Self depends on recognition and on the alignment between an individual’s internally perceived identity and the identity ascribed by Others (Laing 2010, 35–37). This alignment, in turn, affirms an individual's sense of Self and makes interactions with Others potentially fulfilling. By contrast, for ontologically insecure individuals, every facet of life and every interaction carries the risk of threatening their very existence, leading to overwhelming anxiety about being entirely consumed by Others, collapsing under the weight of an external reality, or being reduced to a mere object devoid of subjectivity (Laing 2010, 42- 47).

Ontological security entered the social sciences through Anthony Giddens’ 1991 work, “Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age.” Drawing on Laing’s work, Giddens illustrates how, in early childhood, a child develops trust in its caregivers and, in turn, learns to trust itself. According to him, ontological security refers to a “person's fundamental sense of safety in the world and includes a basic trust of other people,” with this trust being “necessary in order for a person to maintain a sense of psychological well-being and avoid existential anxiety” (Giddens 1991, 37). It entails having, at both the unconscious and practical levels of consciousness, “answers” to fundamental existential questions that all human beings inevitably confront (Giddens 1991, 47).

Giddens argues that ontological security relies on a stable sense of self-identity, developed through individuals' understanding of their actions and the purpose behind them. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that self-identity comprises two aspects. While identity is not merely “something that we simply have” but rather “a social construct, formed and sustained via practices and relations with Others,” the Self is “reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography” (Giddens 1991, 53). Consequently, Giddens underscores that, to achieve ontological security, individuals must uphold reflexively monitored routines and preserve their biographical narrative (Giddens 1991, 52–54). When this process is disrupted, individuals may experience “feelings of inadequacy or humiliation,” commonly referred to as shame (Giddens 1991, 65). Such feelings can ultimately precipitate an ontological crisis. In essence, shame compromises trust in both oneself and the external environment. It engenders doubt about one's understanding of identity and, by extension, one's perception of the surrounding

world (Giddens 1991, 66).

Shame can be understood as a manifestation of anxiety, the principal emotion associated with ontological security (Rumelili 2015; Karp 2018; Ejodus 2020; Krickel-Choi 2022a). Giddens (1991, 36) defines it as “the loss of a sense of the very reality of things and of other persons.” Rumelili (2015, 2021) argues that anxiety underlies all other affective experiences and serves as a “constitutive condition” for IR. A key premise in the ontological security literature is the distinction between anxiety and fear. The latter is a response to a specific, identifiable threat that can be recognized and addressed, whereas the former is a more generalized feeling with no identifiable cause (Krickel-Choi 2022a, 6). It can also be argued that fear is directed outward toward an external threat, while anxiety is felt internally (Rumelili 2015, 12).

As Ejodus (2017, 884) notes, ontological security gained traction in IR through two waves of scholarship. The first generation, represented by scholars such as Wendt (1994), Huysmans (1998), and McSweeney (1999), emerged in the 1990s and neither developed a formal theory nor tested its explanatory potential empirically. In contrast, the second generation, active a decade later, took more systematic steps toward theory building and empirical analysis (Ejodus 2017, 885). Key scholars such as Kinnvall (2004), Mitzen (2006), Steele (2008), Zarakol (2011), Lupovici (2012), Innes and Steele (2013), Gustafsson (2014), Rumelili (2015), Subotić (2016; 2018), and Krickel-Choi (2022; 2022a) have helped develop the concept into a broader theoretical framework linked to security studies and international politics.

As Von Essen and Danielson (2023, 5) aptly observe, the ontological security literature in IR has expanded substantially since its inception, creating a landscape that is both complex and ambiguous, with a variety of interpretations. This dissertation concentrates on four significant debates within this academic domain that merit particular attention.

The first concern is that most IR scholars who study ontological security have extended the Laing-Giddens framework beyond the individual level to encompass the state (Peoples and Vaughan-Williams 2021, 69). These scholars argue that states, like individuals, behave as though they can experience and respond to emotional stimuli (Solomon 2018, 938). According to Steele (2008, 19), integrating individual and state levels of analysis is justified because “state agents seek to satisfy the self-identity needs of the states which they lead.” Mitzen (2006, 344-45) concurs, asserting that these two levels are inherently interconnected and emotionally intertwined. Indeed, a state's

ontological security is instrumental in ensuring its citizens' ontological security.

Nevertheless, other scholars have contested this paradigm (Krolikowski 2008; Roe 2008; Croft 2012), contending that portraying the state as a monolithic entity not only reinforces its reification within ontological security scholarship in IR (Croft 2012) but also marginalizes a plurality of perspectives inherent to the discipline (Deleahanty and Steele 2009). For instance, Krolikowski (2008, 111) maintains that conceptualizing the state as an individual neglects crucial elements of its function as a dynamic institution in shaping individuals' ontological security. Similarly, Roe (2008, 785) questions the assumption that states, by providing ontological security to individuals, necessarily share a comparable need for it.

In my research, I also extend the individual's ontological needs to the state level. I recognize that this scaling up is not without challenges, given that the concept of ontological security was originally developed to understand individual psychology (Laing 2010). Nevertheless, I agree with McSweeney (1999, 151), who contends that although states are not individuals, it remains essential, for ontological and methodological reasons, to treat them as if they were. After all, while states themselves cannot experience anxiety, their leaders, policies, and official discourses can.

Furthermore, while states may remain the primary functional units in international politics, advances in media ecology and communication theory suggest that non-governmental entities may also be scrutinized to assess a state's ontological security (Hinck et al. 2021, 37). Russian media exemplifies this phenomenon, functioning not merely as a conduit of information but also as a tool through which the Kremlin constructs and disseminates national identity, galvanizes public support, and shapes societal perceptions of threat and stability (Hinck et al. 2021, 92). Hinck et al. (2021, 94) argue that Russian media outlets influence narratives at both domestic and global levels, thereby strengthening the state's ontological security practices and demonstrating how the information environment shapes anxieties and self-perceptions. In the methodological chapter, I outline the specific sources selected for analysis and explain the rationale for their inclusion.

The second debate concerns what Zarakol (2011, 6) characterizes as the field's "own version of the agent-structure problem." She commences this discussion by posing the following question: "Are interactions and the international environment the primary source of ontological anxiety for a state, or are the insecure interactions merely a consequence of the state's own uncertainty regarding its identity?" (Zarakol 2011, 6).

This dilemma helps explain why some scholars examine how states mitigate anxiety through established routines (Mitzen 2006), while others focus on autobiographical narratives (Steele 2008; Subotić 2016), external recognition (Zarakol 2011; Narozhna 2021), or a sense of belonging within a community (Bolton 2021). Overall, Zarakol identifies three distinct approaches to the agency/structure issue within the scholarship.

The first approach, predominantly linked with Mitzen's seminal work (2006), can be characterized as a 'social' perspective because it considers collective identity as formed externally through routine interactions between states and their significant Others (Mitzen 2006, 355–59). Building on the arguments of Huysmans (1998) and McSweeney (1999), who maintain that social actors pursue consistency and stability in their engagements with Others, Mitzen (2006) argues that anxiety emerges when there is a discrepancy between the roles a state ascribes to itself and the roles that other participants in the international system perceive it to possess. Consequently, she emphasizes routinized interactions among actors and the forms of recognition they generate, proposing that, by sustaining structured, recurring relationships with a significant Other, actors shape and articulate their identities. Overall, within Mitzen's ontology, routines afford actors confident expectations, even if probabilistic, regarding the means-ends relationships that regulate [the social actor's] social existence (Mitzen 2006, 345).

The second approach, which Zarakol describes as “individualistic,” was introduced by Steele, who analyzes how states uphold internal biographical continuity through the “dialectics of the Self” (Steele 2008, 32). Steele's conceptualization of ontological security presumes that actors have already established a sense of Self and an understanding of Others before engagement (Inayatullah and Blaney 1996, 73). In fact, Steele (2008) contends that states are chiefly motivated by the imperative to prevent situations that provoke shame, which occurs when they perceive a discrepancy between their actions on the international stage and their autobiographical narrative.

A third, intermediate approach, as identified by Zarakol, questions the assumption that relying exclusively on either a wholly intersubjective perspective or one that concentrates solely on the reflexive formation of self-identity offers a comprehensive understanding of how social actors address their concerns regarding self-identity. Therefore, scholars advocating this approach contend that a robust sense of ontological security derives from integrating both the monological and dialogical selves (Kinnvall 2004; Zarakol 2011; Narozhna 2022).

As Kinnvall (2004, 749) writes, “internalized self-notions can never be separated

from Self/Other representations and are always responsive to new interpersonal relationships.” Rumelili (2013, 66) argues that the pursuit of ontological security in relation to the Other operates alongside its internal counterpart, with both shaped by processes of securitization and de-securitization.¹⁰ While securitizing the Other reinforces internal stability by suppressing alternative identities, de-securitizing it risks exposing the inherent fragility and contradictions within self-narratives. Consequently, maintaining or restoring ontological security during securitization cannot rely solely on internal self-(re)definition; it requires reconfiguring the foundational Self/Other relationship (Rumelili 2013, 68).

Some scholars advocating a “social” and “middle-ground” approach to ontological security contend that although conflicts may threaten a state’s physical security, they can also reinforce its ontological security (Mitzen 2006; Rumelili 2015; Kinnvall and Mitzen 2018; Kim and Morrow 2024). These scholars argue that participation in conflict helps states manage existential anxieties by identifying specific threats, drawing clear distinctions between allies and adversaries, and reinforcing moral frameworks centered on survival (Rumelili 2015, 13). For example, Rumelili (2015) argues that, for states accustomed to prolonged conflict, such struggles may undermine physical security while enhancing ontological security by reaffirming familiar routines. As a consequence, the transition to peace can be destabilizing, as it disturbs these deeply ingrained patterns and challenges a state's self-perception, which has been developed in opposition to a perceived adversary.

In both “social” and “middle-ground” approaches, the notion of “recognition” plays a critical role. Ringmar (2002, 119) asserts that “the desire for recognition is a desire unlike all others.... The desire for recognition is the core human desire.” Recognition itself can take legal, political, or moral forms (Daase et al. 2015, 16). Hegel, who first introduced this notion into Western philosophy, viewed recognition as a struggle between two self-conscious beings, each seeking to impose its subjectivity on the Other (Burns and Thompson 2013, 3). This confrontation takes the form of a life-or-death battle, in which each party seeks to objectify the Other while preserving its own subjectivity. Unlike legal recognition, which typically involves equality between states based on the

¹⁰ Securitization theory was developed by the Copenhagen School, which includes scholars such as Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, Jaap de Wilde, and others. Securitization involves identifying certain issues as existential threats that require immediate action. This process partly relies on the shared beliefs and assumptions within a society about what needs protection. It also involves determining the specific referent objects that a society considers crucial for its security (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 36–40).

principle of sovereignty, Hegel's notion of recognition is more conflictual. Here, equality emerges only momentarily when both parties acknowledge their mutual recognition as adversaries.

Within this process, recognizing the Other becomes the means by which the Self is also recognized (Hegel et al. 2013). Drawing on Hegel's philosophy, scholars including Fukuyama (1992), Wendt (2003), Haacke (2005), Ringmar (2011), Wolf (2011; 2016), and Honneth (2003) have conceptualized struggles for recognition as a core element of International Relations (IR). For example, Haacke (2005) argues that struggles for recognition are fundamental to social relations. He asserts that social structures typically maintain stability when recognition demands are satisfied (Haacke 2005, 187). Curanović (2021, 86-87) contends that a country seeks alignment among its actual capabilities, self-image, and external recognition. It finds stability when its material power secures the level of recognition it expects from Others. This coherence reinforces its ontological security and helps maintain stability in the international order.

On the other hand, as Wolf (2011) highlights, misrecognition can undermine a state's self-perception, potentially prompting adjustments to aspects of its identity that hinder recognition by Others. Gustafsson (2014) applies the concept of "perceived misrecognition" to Sino-Japanese relations, arguing that China refuses to acknowledge Japan's identity as a peaceful state, while Japan fails to recognize China's identity as a victim of past Japanese aggression. This mutual denial of recognition, shaped by each state's self-perception, not only deepens tensions between Tokyo and Beijing but also reinforces their respective self-identities. Wolf (2011, 127) also argues that, in response to misrecognition, states may begin to question the criteria that define status within the group they seek to join.

For example, Zarakol (2011, 7) examines how European powers' denial of recognition and stigmatization undermined the ontological security of the Ottoman Empire and Japan. Ringmar (2002) suggests that when faced with misrecognition, states tend to respond in one of three ways. They may adopt external narratives and redefine their identity, often after major setbacks such as war. They may preserve their self-perception while pursuing gradual reforms to reshape external perceptions. Alternatively, they may uphold their original narrative and attempt to persuade Others or impose it through various means.

Similarly, Narozhna (2021) argues that because the state is responsible for negotiating external recognition of its biographically narrated collective self-image and

for fostering ontological security for individuals, groups, and society as a whole, misrecognition can lead to ontological insecurity. As a result, she contends (Narozhna 2021, 82) that persistent misrecognition forces local elites to make three interrelated decisions. The first concerns the extent of state compliance with demands for international recognition; the second concerns the state's autonomy in shaping its collective self-image; and the third concerns the foreign policy strategies used to address misrecognition and mitigate collective ontological insecurity.

By approaching the “agent–structure” problem within Russia’s politics of deference, the centrality of Armenia allows me to set aside the individualistic approach, even as I recognize its value in illustrating how a social actor seeks to maintain a coherent biographical narrative. Similarly, the social approach overlooks how an actor may be driven by the need to validate its self-identity in the eyes of a significant Other, rather than by a focus on sustaining routinized and predictable relations. This chapter will elaborate on this point when introducing the concept of honor. For now, it is important to note that Russia’s ontological security depends neither on preserving coherence within its biographical narrative in isolation nor on maintaining routinized and predictable relations with its significant Other. Rather, it depends on how Russia interprets the significant Other's recognition or misrecognition of its autobiographical narrative, which plays a crucial role in the actor’s biographical narrative as a referent object (Kinnvall 2004). Accordingly, my understanding of Russia’s ontological security aligns with what Zarakol describes as a middle-ground perspective.

The third debate critiques ontological security scholarship in IR for its excessive focus on continuity, highlighting how existing research often prioritizes how states and other agents seek to preserve their identity while neglecting the dimension of change (Flockhart 2016; Browning and Joenniemi 2017; Gustafsson and Krickel-Choi 2020). Building on Giddens’s assumption that ontological security refers to the “confidence most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action” (Giddens 1991, 53), these scholars argue that, to maintain their sense of ontological security, states seek predictability and stability (Wendt 1994; Huysmans 1998; McSweeney 1999).

Nevertheless, as Subotić (2018, 298) notes, “while this stability is desirable, it is, however, fleeting.” Prioritizing continuity over change diminishes appreciation of how states act in critical situations. Giddens (1991, 61) defines critical situations as “circumstances of a radical disjuncture of an unpredictable kind which affect substantial

numbers of individuals.” Steele (2008, 12) contends that critical situations are unpredictable events that affect many individuals, surprise state agents, and disrupt their self-identities. They are not objective realities but social constructions that arise through policymakers’ interpretation. Ejodus (2017, 893) characterizes them as “questions about the unreliability of the international order, the finitude of politics, the impermanence of relationships, and the inconsistency of collective autobiographies.”

According to Rumelili (2015, 11), critical situations are “faithful moments” when “anxieties can no longer be controlled” and “ontological security comes under immediate strain.” Subotić (2018, 298) argues that critical situations “produce questioning of one’s self-identity, one’s view of self, and most importantly, one’s autobiography and biographical narrative.” Darwich (2016, 473) suggests that when self-identity is constructed in relation to a significant Other, external disruptions that alter the representation of the Other can give rise to critical situations, resulting in instability and insecurity for the Self.

A few scholars have highlighted how social agents work to alleviate the ontological insecurity arising from critical situations (Lupovici 2012; Darwich 2016; Subotić 2016; Browning 2018; Ejodus 2020). For instance, Subotić (2016, 610) notes that narratives of ontological security encompass multiple threads or storylines in her examination of Serbia’s foreign policy stance on Kosovo’s contested status. Narratives can be employed during crises or key moments to preserve a sense of “autobiographical continuity” when substantial policy changes might undermine the state’s identity. Darwich (2016) posits that, when facing shame and misrecognition, social actors often seek to restore a stable sense of self-identity through two main mechanisms: counter-framing to demonize the Other and redefining the Self-Other boundary.

This debate is essential for understanding how Russia responded to moments of crisis tied to Armenia’s (mis)recognition of the hero-protector narrative throughout the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. If the events of September 2023 marked a critical moment in which Moscow’s actions no longer aligned with its self-ascribed role as protector, this dissertation argues that ontological insecurity had already emerged earlier, though less visibly. I will demonstrate that Russian actors can accommodate change by drawing on their interpretation of their country’s historical experience, even when contemporary security practices diverge from the protector narrative. This process involves reworking the storylines that underpin its involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The fourth and final debate focuses on the interplay between ontological and physical

security. It is often argued that ontological security, defined as "security as being" rather than "security as survival," derives its explanatory power from its contrast with the traditional IR emphasis on physical security (Gustafsson and Krickel-Choi 2020, 877). The central assumption of the realist mainstream of IR is that the primary goal of states is to achieve physical security, often defined as "security as survival." As Waltz (1979, 91-92) puts it, "survival is a prerequisite to achieving any goals that states may have."

Krickel-Choi (2021, 162-63) notes that when ontological security was first introduced in IR, scholars initially focused on demonstrating its relevance in a field where physical security was deeply prioritized. This is largely why ontological security emerged as a conceptually distinct form of security, and this dualism has remained a core foundation of many articles and scholarly works. Reconciling material and ontological security needs has been the subject of only a few contributions. For instance, some scholars have developed a version of ontological (in)security based on the concept of home, described as both a social and material environment that fosters ontological security by providing a stable setting for daily routines and a place where individuals feel in control of their lives, free from external scrutiny (Kinnvall 2004; Mitzen 2006; Ejodus 2017).

In Russia's case, as the following chapter will show, physical security cannot be analyzed independently of ontological security, nor vice versa. Historically, the absence of natural borders across its vast territory exposed Russia to repeated invasions and incursions. These experiences gradually transformed both internal and external threats into enduring patterns of collective anxiety. One consequence of this has been a widely shared conviction that only a strong state, led by a strong leader, can ensure security (Tsygankov 2014; 2014a).

To delineate the relationship between physical and ontological security within this dissertation, I posit that Russia's security practices are motivated not solely by the aim of safety but also by the imperative to maintain a sense of correctness. In essence, preserving a coherent narrative that affirms its moral agency is crucial to understanding the Kremlin's security strategies. However, I do not contend that physical and ontological security form a singular, inseparable entity within Russia's sense of identity. While physical insecurity may manifest intermittently, ontological insecurity remains persistent and is continually negotiated. At times, these two aspects coincide and mutually reinforce; at other times, they diverge, compelling Russia to interpret either or both as they develop concurrently.

2.1.2. Memory Politics

The literature on ontological security in IR has addressed a diverse range of theoretical and empirical issues, including conflicts (Mitzen 2006; Rumelili 2014; Kinnvall and Mitzen 2018), foreign policy (Subotić 2016; Narozhna 2022), diaspora and migration (Huysmans 1998; Gellwitski and Houde 2023), populism and ideology (Marlow 2002; Browning 2018), nationalism (Kinnvall 2004; Krolikowski 2008; Lupovici 2012), de facto states (Jakša 2017; Pacher 2019), and post-colonialism (Morozov 2015; Untalan 2019).

Of particular relevance to this dissertation is the body of scholarship highlighting how social actors, especially states, seek to preserve memories that sustain their sense of ontological security (Zarakol 2010; Gustafsson 2014; Innes and Steele 2014; Mälksoo 2015; Subotić 2016; Bachleitner 2021). Nevertheless, before engaging with this literature, it is necessary to clarify what memory means and why it has become a significant focus for scholars in IR and political science (PS).

Memory is understood in various ways within both academic and non-academic contexts, illuminating how individuals, groups, and societies recollect past events. For instance, the Enlightenment philosopher Locke (1979, II.xxvii.9) defined memory as “the awareness of self-sameness through time.” Although Locke examined memory primarily as the process by which individuals recall their life experiences, this dissertation focuses on how states, understood as governments together with the broader constellation of actors who articulate and amplify pro-government narratives, invest historical remembrance with existential significance. Since my analysis scales up the ontological needs of individuals to those of states, it necessarily focuses on the memory of collective agents, that is, collective memory. In doing so, I remain mindful of the same theoretical limitations and cautions previously discussed regarding translating concepts from the individual to the collective level within the study of ontological security.

Wertsch (2009, 117) argues that collective memory frequently appears in the media and in everyday conversation, particularly when discussing the causes of ethnic violence and geopolitical miscalculations. For instance, political leaders often use historical parallels to contextualize and deliberate on critical issues (Khong 1992) or to drive significant investments in museums and in the commemoration of events through holidays (Wertsch 2009, 117). Nonetheless, this notion resists a single, definitive interpretation. Huyssen (2003) describes collective memory as an elusive topic that we all believe we understand. However, once we attempt to define it, the concept “starts

slipping and sliding, eluding attempts to grasp it either culturally, sociologically, or scientifically” (Huyssen 2003, 3).

French sociologist Émile Durkheim did not explicitly use the term "collective memory." However, he emphasized its essential role in shaping social life, contending that every society requires a connection to its past for identity and cohesion (Misztal 2003). Maurice Halbwachs, who built on Durkheim's ideas, is widely regarded as the founding father of this concept. In his work on collective memory, Halbwachs presents his main argument, stating, "Our conceptions of the past are affected by the mental images we employ to solve present problems, so that collective memory is essentially a reconstruction of the past in the light of the present" (Coser 1992, 34).

Building on Halbwachs' conceptualization of collective memory and the work of scholars who expanded upon it, we can identify three key characteristics of this notion. First, collective memory is a social process. In contrast to Henri Bergson and Sigmund Freud, Halbwachs posited that “it is in society that people acquire their memories” (Coser 1992, 38). Thus, memory is intersubjectively shared by a collective and (re)constructed through intricate social processes (Klein 2000; Langenbacher and Shain 2010; French 2012; Verovšek 2016). The social dimension of memory is relevant to my inquiry into the Russian Self, as it shows that Russia’s image as a protector is not simply a self-contained or unilateral claim but is continuously constructed and validated through social interactions with historically significant Others.

The second characteristic is that collective memory is a dynamic process. As Halbwachs states, “the past is not preserved but is reconstructed based on the present” (Coser 1992, 40). Scholars have further developed this idea, emphasizing that collective memory is continually (re)negotiated through intellectual and political discourse within the collective (Langenbacher and Shain 2010; French 2012; Hovhannisyan 2012). Hence, memory “is not linear or uniform in progression. It is dynamic and can be imagined as a succession of waves and cycles, whereby events can fade into ‘distant memory’ or be awakened by younger generations who wish to remember what their parents wanted” (Langenbacher and Shain 2010, 223). This aspect is crucial for my dissertation, as it shows that Russia’s self-perception as a protector is not static but continually reconstructed in response to changing circumstances. This dynamic process of collective memory allows Russia to reinterpret the past while maintaining a coherent sense of Self in the present and thus to cope with situations that threaten its ontological security.

The third characteristic is that collective memory is considered ahistorical.

Halbwachs distinguished between various types of memory, including autobiographical memory, historical memory, history, and collective memory. Autobiographical memory pertains to an individual's personal experiences, whereas historical memory encompasses the recollection of events as documented in historical records. Autobiographical memory relates to individuals' personal experiences, while historical memory involves recalling events as conveyed through historical records. History refers to the past to which we have no direct connection, and that is an insignificant part of our lives. Finally, collective memory encompasses the active past that influences our identities. Furthermore, Halbwachs observed that each social group's traits shape its collective memory over time.

The distinction between history and memory was further reinforced by French historian Nora (1989, 8-9), who wrote that "memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it; it nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic" (Nora 1989, 8-9). Building on this dichotomy, Olick (2003, 15) describes collective memory as an "active past," or "the central faculty of our being in time [that is] the negotiation of the past and present through which we define our individual and collective selves."

The ahistorical nature of collective memory is a fundamental premise of this dissertation. In analyzing the protector role, I recognize that it does not encompass the full historical reality of Russian-Armenian relations over the centuries and that, by emphasizing its protective function, Russian actors have manipulated certain historical events rather than reporting them with absolute accuracy. This premise matters because, without it, much of the subsequent analysis could be misconstrued as corroboration of the protector narrative's historical veracity, rather than as an exploration of how a selective and inherently distorted representation of the past was constructed and perpetuated as part of Russian collective memory. The very moments that gave rise to the image of Russia as protector were often accompanied by darker episodes (Minasyan 2013), which I discuss in the following chapters. As Vékony (2017, 3) argues, while historians seek to uncover the past with precision and scientific rigor, collective remembrance requires neither objectivity nor exactitude. Not being a historian myself, I aim to show how, by selectively emphasizing moments of assistance or protection, Russia constructed a self-image from which it derives a moral and legitimizing sense of purpose in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Since the 1980s, scholarly examination of memory in the social sciences has evolved remarkably. This phenomenon is often referred to as the "memory boom" (Olick 2003; Langenbacher and Shain 2010), the "generation of memory" (Winter 2001), or even the "memory industry" (Klein 2000; Wertsch 2009). This is also evident in the wide range of terms emerging in scholarly work, such as "public memory" (Bodnar 1992), "social memory" (Connerton 1989), "cultural memory" (Assmann 1995), "mnemonic battles" (Zerubavel 2003), and many more.

The growing interest in memory has not only led to the creation of commemorative sites such as museums and monuments and the initiation of ceremonial remembrance activities, but has also heightened focus on the concept of "memory politics" (Gustafsson 2014, 76). According to Langenbacher and Shain (2010), this surge gained further momentum following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which "created a poignant new traumatic memory, whose contours are still taking shape and whose cultural and policy implications are still being negotiated" (Langenbacher and Shain 2010, 18). Memory politics, as defined by Confino (1997, 1393), pertains to the "subjective experience of a social group that essentially sustains a relationship of power" and examines questions such as "who wants whom to remember what, and why?"

Despite a substantial body of scholarly work on this concept, academic debates persist regarding the determinants of memory politics. Instrumentalist perspectives posit that political elites shape collective memory to serve their interests (Zerubavel 2003; He 2009). Conversely, historical determinists argue that attempts to manipulate history are invariably met with resistance from historical realities (Barkan 2001; Suny 2009). Additionally, culturalist approaches assert that collective memory is fundamentally rooted in cultural and religious traditions, ideas, and values, and does not aim to accurately reflect objective historical events (Berger 2012). This dissertation adopts a culturalist framework, asserting that the legacy of the Russian Empire is not strategically exploited by the Kremlin; rather, it functions as a *modus vivendi* from which post-Soviet Russia has derived inspiration to confront the ontological void following the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

While early sociological and political studies of memory focused primarily on the domestic sphere, scholars in IR and PS have introduced a fresh perspective on memory politics. For example, some authors have examined how memory politics affects foreign policy (Subotić 2018; Bachleitner 2021). Others have examined the role of trauma in shaping decision-making (Resende and Budryte 2014; Klymenko and Siddi 2022), the

effects of historical legacies on interstate reconciliation (Gustafsson 2014), or the securitization of collective memory (Mälksoo 2015).

Over the years, various approaches, often interconnected, to studying memory politics in international affairs have emerged, and it is useful to review some of them. One methodology examines memory through historical analogies (Levy 1982; Khong 1992; Mouritzen 2020). For instance, Mouritzen (2020) investigates how "lessons learned" from past conflicts, such as the 2003 Iraq War, influenced decisions regarding military intervention in Syria in 2013. Mouritzen (2020) employs learning theory to demonstrate that historical analogies, particularly the comparison of the adverse consequences of the Iraq War with the Syrian context, significantly impacted the decision-making processes of countries including the US, the UK, Poland, and Denmark.

A secondary approach emphasizes how actors construct and reinterpret their historical narratives (Olick and Robbins 1998). Indeed, memory politics may be regarded as integral to state identity (Olick and Robbins 1998), with national biographical narratives delineating the boundaries of a nation-state's community (Berenskoetter 2012). Collective agents can use collective memory to strengthen and reaffirm their identity, enabling them to respond appropriately to contemporary challenges (Vékony 2017, 4).

Historical narratives significantly influence states' foreign policy (Berenskoetter 2012; Subotić 2016; Klymenko and Siddi 2022). Berenskoetter (2012) argues that biographical narratives confer on social actors "a sense of being in the world by situating them in an experienced space and an envisioned space, ordered from a particular place and delineated through horizons of experience and of possibility, respectively." In this context, the experienced space gives the past significance, whereas the envisioned space offers guidance for understanding how a community perceives and interprets the world and its position within it in the present.

A third approach focuses on memory sites, drawing on Pierre Nora's seven-volume work, "Les lieux de mémoire," published between 1984 and 1992. Nora (1989, xvii) defines a "lieu de mémoire" (memory site) as "any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community." These sites are not naturally occurring but are intentionally constructed to convey specific memorial meanings (Nora 1989; Gillis 1994). Memory sites are strong symbols of national identity and collective memory (Savage 1994). Official memorials further shape collective memory by encouraging visitors to engage with the national narrative and to actively

contribute to the construction of a particular version of the past (Yanik and Hisarlioğlu 2019).

A fourth approach in the literature on memory politics involves marginalizing and erasing aspects of the past. This is particularly evident when memories shared by some groups are contested by others, leading to their constant framing and reframing within hierarchical social structures, where they can be subject to both deliberate and organic forgetting (French 2012). Klymenko and Siddi (2022) emphasize the significant role of forgetting in memory politics and foreign policy, illustrating how certain historical events are selectively marginalized or erased. They argue that influential actors can suppress specific narratives, often with society's tacit approval, as society prefers to avoid confronting uncomfortable truths.

Building on these approaches, scholarship on ontological security has highlighted the role of historical memory in sustaining a coherent sense of Self. Historical memory plays a central role in actors' self-identity, serving as a temporal reference point that makes the "past meaningful by providing a sense of where 'we' have come from and what 'we' have been through" (Berenskoetter 2012, 270). As a result, "memory must be defended," as Mälksoo (2015) observes, drawing on Michel Foucault's concept that "society must be defended" (Foucault 1972).

States maintain cohesion within the international system by assigning meaning to their past actions, thereby minimizing unpredictability and vulnerability relative to other political actors (Innes and Steele 2014; Mälksoo 2015). To accomplish this, they may deny or minimize past atrocities, criminalize alternative historical interpretations, or reshape public representations of history by removing monuments, revising school curricula, or altering museum exhibits (Zarakol 2010; Gustafsson 2014; Mälksoo 2015). According to Innes and Steele (2014), historical traumas pose a profound ontological insecurity dilemma. Such trauma challenges the state's sense of Self, compelling it to reassess its biographical narrative (Innes and Steele 2014).

In accordance with this scholarship, I interpret the dissolution of the Soviet Union as an event that not only ruptured the lived experience of many Russians, who abruptly became citizens of a new political entity, but also compelled Russian leadership to reevaluate and revise its historical narrative to define what it had been and what it was destined to become. At the same time, Moscow became deeply entangled in the emerging ethno-territorial conflicts of the South Caucasus, including the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as well as those in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, all consequences of the Soviet

state's increasing weakness (De Waal 2019). I believe that, given the region's longstanding significance in Russia's imperial history, Russia was able to invoke familiar historical analogies and reaffirm meanings that shaped its evolving sense of identity and role in the post-Soviet space, ultimately making its engagement necessary to preserve this sense of ontological stability.

2.1.3. Honor

Another important concept for the dissertation is honor, which can be understood as “a multi-phenomenal category of concepts that, as a system, hierarchically structures society when an ‘Other’ inscribes value onto an individual” (Oprisko 2014, 3). Pitt-Rivers (1965, 21) defines it as “the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society. It is his estimation of his worth, his claim to pride, but it is also the acknowledgment of that claim, his excellence recognized by society, and his right to pride.”

Scholars have traced the origins of honor to ancient Greece, where the term “timé” referred to both an individual's perceived worth and the recognition granted by Others (Cairns 2011, 29). Cairns (2011, 29), through an analysis of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, claims that, in Homeric society, a person's value was determined by various factors, including military prowess, social rank, wealth, noble lineage, age, specialized skills, kinship, and loyalty, servant, or friend.

In “Cultural Theory of International Relations,” Lebow (2008), drawing not only on Homer but also on other Greek thinkers, including Thucydides, Aristotle, and Plato, illustrates how, in Ancient Greece (and not only), honor emerged as a fundamental psychological driver alongside material interests. He identifies three key elements of the human psyche: the spirit, also known as “thumós,” which prioritizes honor and status; the appetite, which seeks wealth and comfort; and reason, which, according to Plato, should govern the first two to maintain balance and order. Lebow warns that an unrestrained quest for honor and material wealth can be harmful unless reason directs it. Ultimately, reason is essential for maintaining equilibrium between the two. Disruption of this balance leads to a destructive struggle for security and survival (Lebow 2008; Friedrichs 2016). and survival (Lebow 2008; Friedrichs 2016).

The literature has frequently framed honor in relation to gender, delineating differences between female and male manifestations of honor (Spierenburg 1998; Vandello and Cohen 2003; Barnes et al. 2012; Travaglino et al. 2016). Female honor is generally connected to concepts of sexual purity and chastity. In contrast, male honor is

predominantly associated with defending and providing for one's family, protecting reputation, and responding to insults (Travaglino et al. 2016, 184). Another crucial aspect is the importance placed on insults and acts of disrespect. In honor cultures, failing to respond to an insult may be seen as a sign of weakness and an inability to defend oneself and one's possessions (Nisbett and Cohen 1996). This is why men of honor become enraged when they sense that significant Others may question the very source of pride that society has instilled in them (Friedrichs 2016, 69).

The upper classes of militaristic societies, such as feudal Europe and Japan, particularly emphasized these conceptions of honor (Stearns 2022, 105). Other historical examples include the Old South in the US (Wyatt-Brown 1982; Nisbett and Cohen 1996; Vandello and Cohen 2003) and traditionalist communities in Mediterranean Europe (Péristiany 1974). Uskul et al. (2022, 13) note that in these societies, honor was (and still is) socially fragile because it is hard to regain once lost. As a result, those who adhere to an honor-based cultural framework are motivated to protect their honor by responding to both positive and negative actions in kind (Uskul et al. 2022, 13). Historically, dueling was a particularly explicit practice for restoring threatened honor (Reyffman 1995; Friedrichs 2016; Koschut 2020). Reyffman (1995, 26) writes that in early nineteenth-century Russia, duels became widespread among the upper classes as a way to respond to perceived affronts to honor, ranging from serious disputes over status to seemingly minor personal slights. This period was marked by the emergence of the “bretteur,” whom she defines as “a type of reckless duellist, ready to fight at the slightest provocation,” among both the military and intellectuals (Reyffman 1995, 26).

The existing literature (Pitt-Rivers 1965; Stewart 1994; Nisbett and Cohen 1996; Mosquera 1999; Friedrichs 2016) asserts that a prominent feature of honor cultures is the extent to which personal value is shaped by interpersonal recognition. Bourdieu (Péristiany 1974, 211) wrote that the “point of honor is the basis of a moral code of an individual who sees himself always through the eyes of Others, who needs Others for his existence, because the image he has of himself is indistinguishable from that presented to him by other people.”

Hence, (dis)honor stems not only from personal and social evaluations but also from the actions and attributes of Others (Mosquera 1999, 65). Mosquera (1999, 65) differentiates between individualistic and honor cultures, noting that, while both value personal worth and respect, social esteem plays a significantly greater role in shaping an individual's sense of Self in honor cultures than in individualistic ones. This is why a part

of the literature (Stewart 1994; Steele 2008; Oprisko 2014) distinguishes between external honor, which pertains to social interactions between individuals and groups, and internal honor, which refers to psychological processes within an individual (Oprisko 2014, 6).

Several authors tend to treat honor as synonymous with prestige and glory (Joshi 2008). For instance, Morgenthau described a “policy of prestige” aimed at demonstrating power (Donnelly 2000, 46). Aron (1966, 73) viewed glory as “inseparable from the human dialogue” yet ultimately “consecrated by victory and the enemy’s submission.” Similarly, Max Weber framed honor in terms of power when asserting that “a nation forgives injury to its interests, but not injury to its honor” (Donelan 2007, 117).

Others have placed considerable emphasis on status. The latter is generally understood as an actor’s “position in a social hierarchy” (Sauder et al. 2012, 268). For example, Stewart (1994, 59) posits that “vertical honor” is the right to be respected by those who are superior in certain respects (such as rank, family, or achievements), while “horizontal honor” refers to the right to be respected.

As Koschut (2020) argues, honor can be measured across various dimensions, including emotions. Emotions can be described as the conscious awareness of physical sensations (Hutchison and Bleiker 2017). Honor itself is not an emotion (Stearns 2022). However, existing literature shows that honor is closely connected to both positive and negative emotions (Mosquera 1999; Koschut 2018). Within the context of status, higher status tends to evoke positive emotions such as pride and compassion, whereas lower status is more commonly linked to negative feelings such as anger or shame (Koschut 2018). Moreover, when an actor perceives a loss of the status it believes it deserves, that actor can feel anxious (Gurr 1970). Nonetheless, the methodological chapter will discuss emotions in more detail.

While much of the literature on honor has focused on its implications for dynamics within societies, other scholars have also examined national honor (O’Neill 2001; Donelan 2007; Lebow 2008; Steele 2008; Tsygankov 2014). The notions of “group face” and “national face” have received similar attention in the East Asian context (Gries 1999). In his 2001 seminal book “Honor, Symbols and War,” O’Neill (2001, 87-88) identifies three essential aspects of national honor: keeping one’s word, protecting one’s homeland or allies, and displaying social grace. This is also why, according to Friedrichs (2016, 69), honor depends on “role fulfillment” (Friedrichs 2016, 69).

Crucially, honor should not be regarded as a universally consistent concept across

different cultures. As Friedrichs (2016) contends, culturally specific interpretations of self-worth, which also influence this dissertation's understanding of collective memory, fundamentally shape perceptions of recognition, status, and humiliation, resulting in significant variation even among societies traditionally associated with honor cultures. Consequently, insights derived from Mediterranean, Asian, or American understandings of honor cannot be straightforwardly applied to the Russian context. Instead, Russian expressions of honor must be contextualized within the nation's unique historical and cultural framework (Friedrichs 2016).

In Russian, the word honor is usually translated as *честь* (*chest'*). According to Tolstaya (2013, 10–11), this word encompasses two interconnected dimensions. The first is a historically primary “external” meaning, referring to the respect and recognition others bestow. The second represents an “internal” meaning, denoting the moral qualities that make a person worthy of such respect. The former appears in expressions such as *оказать честь/okazat' chest'* (to show honor), *быть в чести/byt' v chesti* (to be held in esteem), and *честь и слава героям/chest' i slava geroiam* (honor and glory to the heroes), while the latter is expressed through formulations such as *человек чести/chelovek chesti* (a person of honor) and *честное слово/chestnoe slovo* (word of honor). From its predominantly external meaning in Old Church Slavonic, *честь* gradually acquired an internal and ethical sense, already visible in Old Russian and firmly established by the nineteenth century (Tolstaya 2013, 12–16). Today, the word *честный/chestnyi* (honest) generally describes someone who does not lie, steal, deceive, or act against their conscience, reflecting the importance of truth and justice (Tolstaya 2013, 13–15). *Честь* may also refer to the written or unwritten behavioral code of a social group, as in *дворянская честь/dvorianskaia chest'* (noble honor) and *офицерская честь/ofiterskaia chest'* (officers' honor). This collective form of honor combines adherence to shared moral principles with concern for the group's public reputation and must therefore be protected from humiliation (Tolstaya 2013, 15–16). Unlike the concept of *достоинство/dostoinstvo* (dignity), which primarily concerns an individual's consciousness of their own worth, *честь* remains more closely connected to social relations, collective expectations, and the judgment of others (Tolstaya 2013, 18–19).

Kollmann (2016) identifies *честь* as a vital concept in seventeenth-century Russian mentality, situating Muscovy within a broader “pan-European culture” where reputation and status were rooted in personal honor and served as foundational elements of social identity. Tikhonova (2021) further captures this specificity through the notion of a

“syncretism of honor” (синкретизм чести/sinkretizm chesti), whereby ancestral honor (родовая/отеческая честь/rodovaya/otcheskaya chest’), rank-based honor (чиновная честь/chinovnaya chest’), corporate honor (корпоративная честь/korporativnaya chest’), personal honor, and spiritual honor coexisted. Particularly distinctive was the close intertwining of honor (честь/chest’) with rank (чин/chin), service to the state, and Orthodox piety (благочестие/blagochestie), which preserved a spiritual understanding of honor alongside its social and hierarchical dimensions.

By the middle of the sixteenth century, Muscovites could seek legal redress for injuries to their honor through litigation for dishonor (бесчестье/beschest’e), while the system of precedence (местничество/mestnichestvo) regulated appointments and military rank according to honor and inherited status (Kolmann 2016, 156). By providing structured mechanisms for defending standing and resolving disputes, these institutions managed social tensions and reinforced the tsar's authority (Kollmann 2016, 158).

Honor became even more deeply embedded in the state’s national identity through the principle of autocracy (Tsygankov 2014a). This principle was established not merely to maintain control over political and economic resources but also to provide ordinary Russians with stability, improve their living conditions, and protect them from potential abuses by local authorities and the nobility (Platonov 1996, 204). As Tsygankov (2014a, 320) explains, the Church and self-governing institutions were not intended to constrain the monarch’s authority but rather to reinforce it by enabling locally tailored responses, while the autocrat remained the ultimate protector of citizens’ rights. Autocracy's importance to Russia’s political and moral order was further consolidated in the nineteenth century by Count Sergei Uvarov (1786–1855), Minister of Education under Nicholas I and the architect of the influential formula “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality” (Православие, самодержавие, народность/Pravoslavie, samoderzhavie, narodnost’). Uvarov portrayed autocratic rule as an organic product of Russian historical development and the tsar as its natural guide, defining autocracy as the sine qua non of Russia’s political existence (Whittaker 1978, 164). This became evident in foreign policy. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for example, Russian military actions abroad could be justified by the duty to defend “the faith, the Tsar, and the fatherland” (за веру, царя и отечество/za veru, tsarya i otechestvo) (Tsygankov 2014, 264).

2.2. The Politics of Deference

Having now clarified the three theoretical concepts that underpin my meaning-making analysis of Russia's role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, I can proceed to introduce the central argument of this dissertation. In the context of the Armenian-Azerbaijani dispute, Russia's quest for ontological security was shaped by mnemonic reflections of its Tsarist past in the Caucasus and manifested in a politics of deference toward Armenia. While the following chapters will examine the dynamics through which Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia came to hold such importance for Russia's ontological security, it is essential to exemplify what I mean by a politics of deference and to explain how this concept connects to those discussed thus far.

Deference is commonly understood as an act of showing respect and maintaining social distance toward individuals assumed to occupy a higher social status, where such status precedes the interaction itself (Fraser and Nolen 1981; Hwang 1990; Wolf 2019). Wolf (2019) argues that this practice is mutually constitutive with honor. In fact, deference plays a crucial role in reproducing hierarchical rankings in societies (Fraser and Nolen 1981). While honor endows actors with a sense of moral authority, individuals in various positions within the hierarchy use deference to show respect for and endorse that authority (Wolf 2019, 1193).

In the case of Russia, I argue that its moral standing draws on its self-perception as a benevolent protector, while deference functions as the relational mechanism through which Russia has historically sought recognition of this role both within its borders and beyond to pursue ontological security. This conception will be explored further in the next chapter, where I discuss the significance of the concept of "cultural allies," as introduced by Tsygankov (2014a) in the context of Russian foreign policy.

The role of protector can be understood as indicative of gender-specific roles in honor-based societies, where masculine honor is defined by the ability to defend the homeland. While I recognize this aspect, I also contend that, consistent with my culturalist perspective on collective memory, Russia's role as protector reflects its interpretation of the Tsarist legacy.

Aside from honor, the notion of deference can be directly linked to an actor's pursuit of ontological security. Pratt (2017, 19) defines "performative deference" as a means by which actors uphold the social structures that render their environment intelligible. Ontological security concerns not only the coherence of the Self but also the stability of the relational field in which the Self is embedded (Pratt 2017, 21). By enacting deference,

actors publicly affirm Others' social roles and standing, thereby reducing uncertainty and reinforcing the broader social order that underpins the ontological security of all parties involved (Pratt 2017, 22). Importantly, occupying a lower-ranked position in such a hierarchy is not inherently a source of shame or ontological insecurity. Rather, shame and ontological insecurity arise when the code governing rightful conduct is breached (Gilmore 1987). In such situations, conflict may emerge, particularly when an actor feels its integrity is at stake or when Others do not adequately recognize claims to honor (Wolf 2019, 1198).

In the case of Russia's role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, this dissertation argues that Armenia's acts of deference served as a crucial source of ontological security for Moscow, enabling Russian actors to render their country's security practices in the South Caucasus intelligible and morally justified. The politics of deference should thus be understood as the set of discursive operations Russian actors enacted to secure Armenia's recognition of its self-image as a hero-protector, with the Nagorno-Karabakh question serving as the symbolic arena through which Russia repeatedly sought it.

While advancing the idea of a politics of deference, I recognize that this notion reflects, to some extent, the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, in which the master's identity depends on the recognition granted by the subordinate, even as the subordinate ultimately shapes the master's self-understanding (Hegel et al. 2013). In the "Phenomenology of Spirit" (1807/2013), Hegel describes how both actors in the struggle for recognition seek to assert themselves as autonomous subjects. Each self-consciousness exists "in and for itself," yet also for an "Other," meaning that identity can only be constituted intersubjectively (Hegel 2013, 111–18). In this dynamic, the master (Herr) appears to prevail by subordinating the slave (Knecht). However, the master's identity is ultimately dependent on the slave's acknowledgment, which renders the seemingly dominant position inherently unstable and relational. Similarly, Russia's self-perception as a heroic protector in the South Caucasus required affirmation from a vulnerable counterpart. By presenting itself as existentially threatened and acknowledging Moscow's historical role in its survival, Armenia enabled Russian actors to sustain the image of Russia as a morally responsible and historically indispensable force in the region.

2.3. The Hero-Protector Narrative

A key question about Russia's politics of deference is how it was expressed and contested during the war and how far it can be traced analytically. Wolf (2019, 1195)

notes that deference may take the form of yielding to Others, expressing gratitude, or publicly affirming a hierarchical relationship. However, these practices are not limited to concrete gestures alone. In particular, Gustafsson and Hall (2021) introduce the concept of the “politics of emotional deference,” referring to “whose emotions deserve consideration, respect, and priority” (Gustafsson and Hall 2021, 976).

The social actors involved in the politics of deference “often seek to elevate the potential emotional impact of a given decision, practice, or outcome on a certain set of actors as a socially, morally, and politically salient concern” (Gustafsson and Hall 2021, 976). Gustafsson and Hall (2021, 976) assert that when successfully employed, the “politics of emotional deference” not only achieves specific policy outcomes but also more broadly establishes norms for discourse and behavior that respect and honor the emotions of the referent group. Conversely, when conflicts over emotional deference emerge, they can become central to political struggles.

To trace Russia’s politics of deference, I employ an existing framework coined by Clément et al. in 2017: the “hero-protector narrative.” On one hand, narratives serve as the means through which collective memory transmits the past into both the present and the future (Bachleitner 2021, 26). Wang (2008) further argues that narratives form the core of collective memory, as community members actively interpret and solidify shared past experiences into memory representations. This process directly corresponds to my dissertation’s focus: understanding the Tsarist past in relation to its role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Narrative study also forms a central part of ontological security scholarship. As we already know, ontological security is often referred to as a sense of “biographical continuity” (Giddens 1991, 53). Hagström (2021, 333) claims that most of the ontological security scholarship adopts a “narrative understanding of the Self” and a “narrative ontology.” According to Flockhart (2016), narratives help explain how social actors maximize their sense of ontological security. First, through the “strategy of being,” social actors establish a stable and esteem-boosting identity (Flockhart 2016, 799). Second, through the “strategy of doing,” they maintain cognitive consistency through routine practice while also taking actions that promote integrity and pride (Flockhart 2016, 799).

Overall, narratives are both constitutive elements of social actors’ self-identity and sources of stability and continuity, allowing individuals and states to make sense of their experiences through biographical storytelling (Kleres 2010). At the same time, they offer useful insights into how actors navigate and mitigate ontological insecurity. Gellwitzki

and Houde (2023) contend that reassessing established narratives or creating new ones functions as a coping strategy for navigating the uncertainty induced by critical circumstances. In times of profound crisis and threats to multiple aspects of state security, specific narratives are deliberately activated to establish a cognitive bridge. They enable policy shifts that respond to immediate physical security challenges while simultaneously preserving the state's ontological security by maintaining a sense of continuity, routine, familiarity, and stability (Subotić 2016).

Returning to the “hero-protector narrative,” the latter was coined to illustrate how political leaders construct emotionally resonant narratives to justify the use of force. Such narratives often emerge in societies where gender hierarchies are deeply embedded, and ideals of dominant masculinity are strongly upheld (Clément et al. 2017, 8). While Clément et al. (2017) focus explicitly on the justification of force, I argue that their framework can be applied more broadly to understand assertiveness in conflict. Russia's assertiveness in Nagorno-Karabakh is clear in several ways, such as diplomatic engagement, a military presence in Armenia, and the temporary deployment of troops to Nagorno-Karabakh. In this dissertation, I treat the hero-protector narrative as the main script guiding Russia's politics of deference and its quest for ontological security.

Within the hero-protector narrative, political leaders use language that activates the audience's emotional need to defend moral dignity and preserve collective self-worth. This is achieved by evoking powerful feelings such as compassion for innocent victims and moral anger toward perceived aggressors or cowards (Clément et al. 2017, 2). Chapter 4 provides a more detailed discussion of these emotions and their specific manifestation within the Russian socio-cultural context. For now, the key point is that the hero-protector narrative is structured around specific narrative roles and sequences. The following schema, originally developed by the authors and reproduced here for reference, briefly illustrates these roles and sequences.

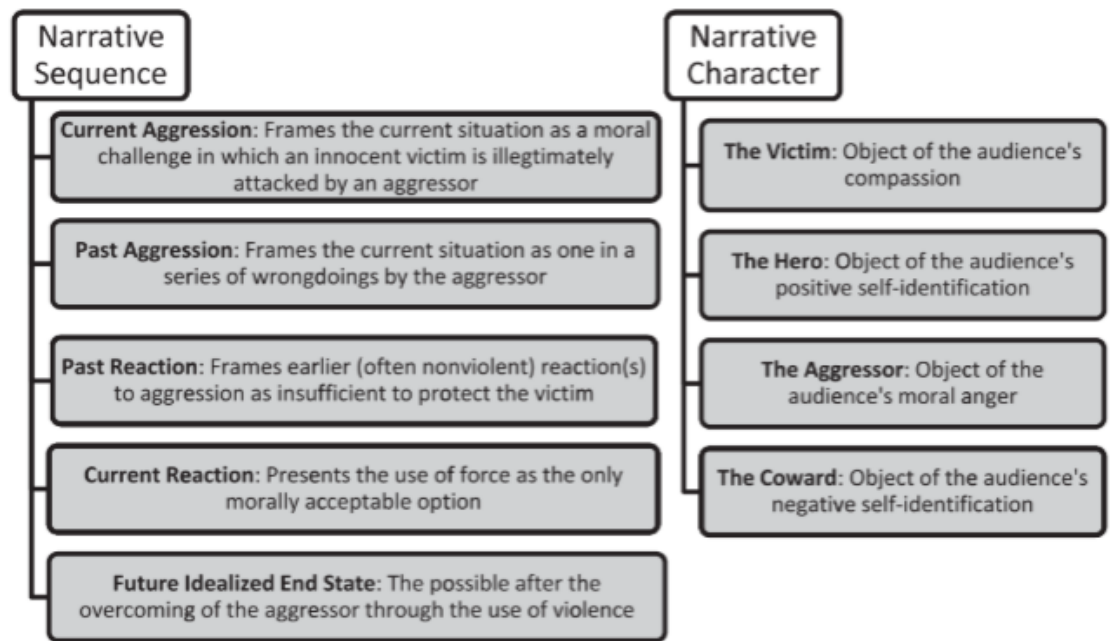


Figure 1: *The Hero-Protector Narrative Structure* (Source: Sangar et al. 2018, 190).

The hero-protector narrative structure centers on four key narrative roles. The “hero-protector” is an “actor who reacts to the illegitimate aggression out of a sense of moral obligation and not in the pursuit of egoistic interests” (Sangar et al. 2018, 190). The hero takes action to confront and eliminate the source of aggression, even if this means violating moral norms that would typically apply in a just and lawful context. In doing so, the hero risks personal safety or material well-being and demonstrates a willingness to make sacrifices for the sake of protecting the “victim.” This readiness to act and accept personal cost highlights the contrast between the hero and the “coward,” who remains passive.

The “victim” refers to “any actor who remains passive during the narrative and is the target of the unprovoked, illegitimate aggression by the perverse aggressor” (Sangar et al. 2018, 190). The latter is described by Sangar et al. (2018, 190) as “a perpetrator who pursues his/her advantage without any respect for the life and rights of Others.” This actor typically “initiates violence without justification or provocation and is frequently depicted as “perverse.” Finally, the “coward” is “an actor who, despite having a moral responsibility toward the victim, does not do what is morally right out of fear for his/her life and material interest” (Sangar et al. 2018, 192). Instead of intervening, the coward either stays passive while the victim is harmed or even aligns with the aggressor. By failing to uphold what is considered morally right, the coward risks becoming a legitimate target for the hero.

Furthermore, the “hero-protector narrative” is structured around distinct action sequences, each representing a defined episode that contributes to the narrative’s central turning point or climax (Sangar et al. 2018, 192). The first sequence typically begins with "a current act of aggression against an innocent victim, shown allegedly from the victim’s perspective" (Sangar et al. 2018, 192). This moment prompts an immediate emotional response from the audience, marked by "a combination of moral anger and compassion because the aggression happens without prior provocation by the victim or any other legitimate reason" (Sangar et al. 2018, 192). The victim is portrayed as defenseless, which introduces a strong moral imperative for someone capable of stepping in.

The second sequence shifts the focus to "a former act of aggression, which can be considered a precedent to the extent that it happened in the more or less distant past" (Sangar et al. 2018, 192). This stage serves to reinforce the aggressor’s consistency in behavior, underscoring his or her inherently violent and malicious character. The third sequence usually involves "a first (failed) attempt to protect the victim, which happened in the more or less distant past as a reaction to the chronologically first aggression" (Sangar et al. 2018, 192). This part often illustrates a non-military or restrained reaction that ultimately proves ineffective in stopping the aggressor.

The fourth sequence features "the anticipated intervention of the hero-protector, who finally confronts the aggressor" (Sangar et al. 2018, 192). Here, force is shown as the only viable option for the hero to decisively alter the situation and permanently remove the threat to the victim. Finally, the narrative ends with "normalization and de-dramatization" (Sangar et al. 2018, 192). The dramatic tension is resolved, and a better end state provides additional legitimacy to the use of force as a necessary and morally appropriate means to restore the victim’s dignity and return to “normal life” (Sangar et al. 2018, 192). This resolution underscores the hero’s actions as both just and necessary, bringing closure and moral clarity to the story.

I chose the hero-protector narrative as the framework for my analysis because it offers a powerful lens for tracing the links in roles and sequences between Russia’s self-perception in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and how the Russian Empire shaped its relationship with Armenia in emotional and moral terms. From the eighteenth to the early twentieth century, Tsarist authorities cast themselves as heroic guardians of Armenians, regarding the latter not simply as allies on the southern frontier but also as defenseless victims they had a religious duty to protect from Muslim oppressors, such as the Persian and the Ottoman Empires (Blauvelt and Berglund 2016, 70)

The preservation of the protector image was central to Tsarist policy; for this reason, it sought to keep Armenians under constant threat from their traditional adversaries (Somakian 1993, 80). Nevertheless, later chapters on Russian-Armenian relations will examine more thoroughly how this relationship was consistently marked by underlying tensions (Hovannisian 1971; Suny 1993; Badalyan Riegg 2020). This shift led to Armenians' misrecognition of Russia's protector role and the Tsarist authorities' portrayal of Armenians as "conspiratorial" (Suny 1993, 32). Moreover, the strategic interests of the Russian Empire did not consistently align with Armenian needs, thereby constraining the Tsars' ability to provide sustained support, with the Armenian Genocide serving as its most tragic illustration (Holquist 2011).

Overall, the hero-protector narrative offers significant analytical insight into Russian-Armenian relations, as it not only delineates historical perceptions but also encapsulates key elements of post-Soviet Russia's self-identity and traces them in its contemporary security policies. In fact, it establishes the moral and emotional foundation through which Russian actors pursued ontological security by using the significant Other as a mirror. By analyzing how this narrative is disseminated and substantiated through discursive means during periods of calm and in critical moments such as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, this dissertation addresses the research question.

Conclusion

This chapter has laid the theoretical foundations needed to understand the research question. It has done so by showing how the notions of ontological security, memory politics, and honor converge in what I call Russia's politics of deference. Each concept offers a distinct yet complementary way to understand how Russia seeks meaning, continuity, and moral validation in its conduct toward Armenia and the South Caucasus more broadly.

The Kremlin's security practices reflect a deeper need to preserve a coherent sense of Self in a world that has repeatedly unsettled its self-identity since the end of the Soviet Union. Within this logic, Armenia appears not only as a strategic partner but also as a significant Other whose recognition helps sustain Russia's belief in its own moral consistency. The debates within ontological security theory have made it possible to adopt an approach that treats identity as both internally narrated and externally affirmed, recognizing that the search for stability often involves moments of transformation.

The discussion on memory politics has shown how Russia draws emotional and

symbolic strength from the selective remembrance of its imperial past. By treating memory as a social, dynamic, and ahistorical process guided by a culturalist framework, this dissertation views Russia's image of itself as Armenia's protector as a *modus vivendi* rather than a historical truth. Through this perspective, memory politics becomes a way for Russia to sustain its ontological security by drawing moral purpose from a reconstructed past. The invocation of imperial legacies is not a mechanical reproduction of history, but a continuous act of remembering that keeps the past emotionally present and politically meaningful.

The concept of honor has added a moral dimension to this picture. Honor defines not only how Russia perceives its own worth but also how it expects Others to recognize it. Armenia's recognition of the Kremlin's protector role during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict reaffirmed a moral and hierarchical order that allows Moscow to understand its identity as just and coherent with its self-identity. When this recognition is withheld or questioned, ontological insecurity emerges. In this sense, honor provides both the emotional charge and the relational framework through which Russia's identity in the region becomes intelligible.

The chapter has presented the politics of deference and has claimed that the hero-protector narrative captures how Russia presents itself as a morally responsible actor, a guarantor of stability, and a heroic defender of the innocent, while expecting Others to validate this image through deference.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Before introducing this chapter, I present two illustrative quotes that resonate with distinct moments in Russia's history. The first comes from one of Russia's and humanity's greatest writers, Fyodor Dostoevsky, who reflected on the Russian Empire's involvement in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878:

“Why should Russia assume such a task? What for? In order to pursue a superior, great life; in order to shine to the world with a great, disinterested, and pure idea; in order to create, at length, a great and mighty organism of a brotherly union of nations; to create this organism not by means of political violence, not by the sword, but by persuasion, example, love, disinterestedness, and by light; to elevate those little ones to our level, so that they shall perceive in Russia her motherly mission” (Sandoz 1978, 651).

The second was articulated by then-Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in August 2008, during a televised address to the Russian population in which he explained the rationale behind the Kremlin's military intervention in Georgia.

“Our key task is to maintain peace. Russia historically was and will be a guarantor of security of the Caucasian people” (Medvedev in CivilGe 2008).

I chose to include these quotations at the beginning of this chapter because, despite being separated by more than a century, expressed by two entirely different figures, and delivered in markedly different tones, both passages articulate a sense of moral purpose and responsibility toward Russia's neighbors. According to my study, this sense lies at the heart of the Kremlin's quest for ontological security.

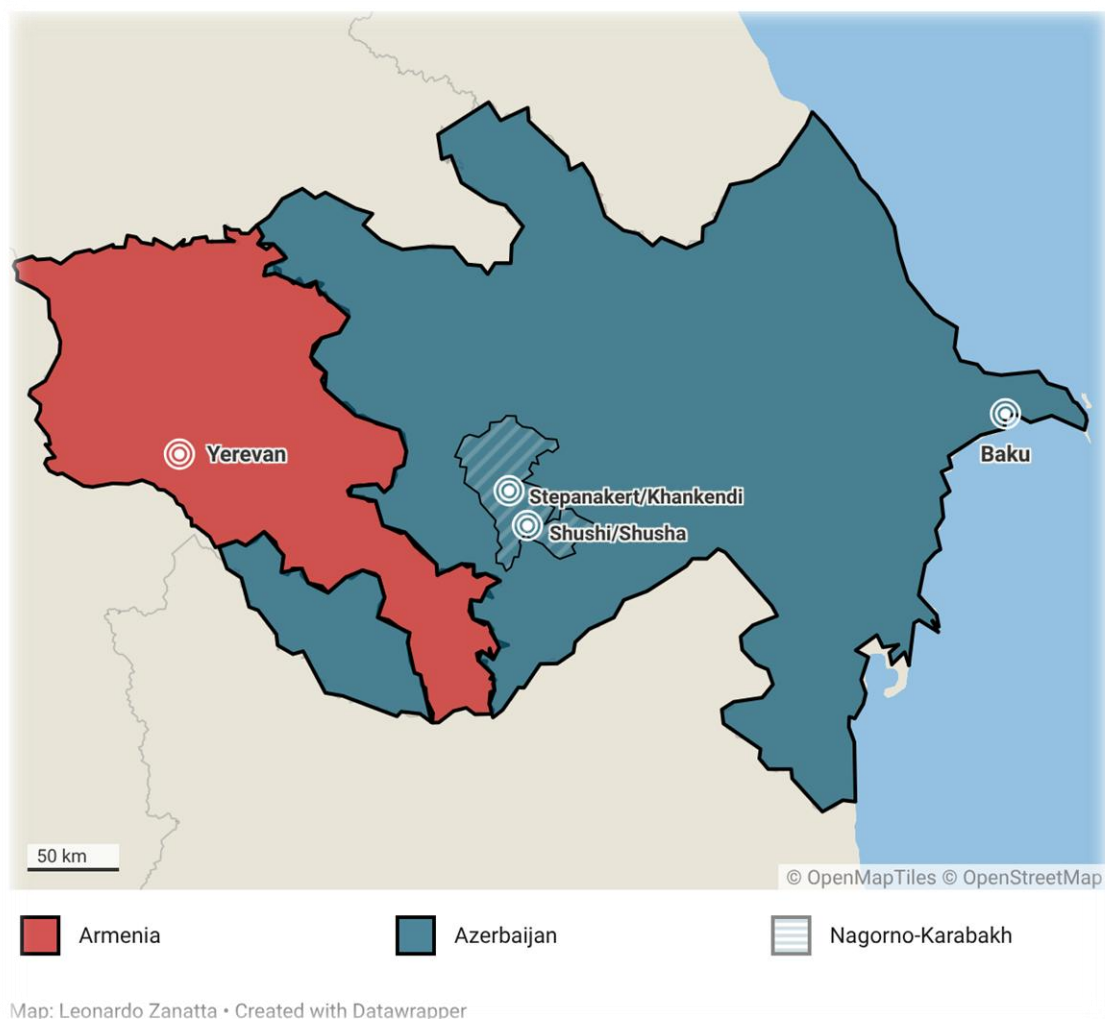
As mentioned before, this dissertation rests on two fundamental assumptions. First, Russian actors have been engaged in an ongoing effort to restore the existential meaningfulness of their country, i.e., a quest for ontological security, that was disrupted by the collapse of the Soviet Union. Second, within the realm of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, this endeavor was shaped by their interpretation of the Tsarist past in the Caucasus and manifested in a politics of deference toward Armenia.

Nonetheless, before showing how Russia's ontological concerns manifested in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, it is crucial to develop a comprehensive understanding of the Armenian-Azerbaijani dispute itself, as well as the scholarly literature on Russian foreign policy that has examined its pursuit of ontological security. Without this essential background, it is difficult to situate my research within the constructivist paradigm of Russian foreign policy and fully appreciate this dissertation's contributions.

To achieve this goal, the present chapter is divided into two parts. The first part, after

briefly contextualizing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, examines how existing scholarship has analyzed Russia's role, showing that before and after the events of September 2023, most scholarly and non-scholarly accounts have relied primarily on outcome-based explanations to assess its practices in the conflict. The second part turns to the so-called "constructivist turn to Russian foreign policy" and considers how the three concepts underlying my theoretical framework have been used to date to assess the Kremlin's security practices.

3.1. The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict



Map 1: Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Nagorno-Karabakh. (Source: the Author through Datawrapper).

Nagorno-Karabakh is a highland territory in the southeastern Lesser Caucasus, nestled between Azerbaijan's Lower Karabakh and Armenia's Syunik region. While the term "Nagorno" stems from the Russian adjective "nagorny" (нагорный), which translates to "mountainous," "Karabakh" is believed to derive from a combination of the Turkic word "kara," meaning "black," and the Persian word "bagh," meaning "garden"

(De Waal 2019, 102).

Azerbaijanis refer to both Nagorno-Karabakh and Lower Karabakh as “Karabakh” (Qarabağ in Azerbaijani), viewing them as a single, indivisible entity (Broers 2019, 85). In contrast, Armenians identify this territory either by the Russian designation or by the name "Artsakh" (Արցախ). This term derives from a province of the ancient Kingdom of Greater Armenia, dating to the fourth century BC (Libaridian 2007).

Despite its small size, Nagorno-Karabakh holds profound cultural and symbolic significance for both Armenians and Azerbaijanis. De Waal (2013, 3) notes that Armenians have viewed the region as the heart of their Christian civilization, emphasizing that medieval monasteries such as Gandzasar, Amaras, Dadivank, Tsitsernavank, and Gtichvank historically served as refuges for Armenian dignitaries and religious figures. Azerbaijanis, by contrast, regard it as the beginning of their cultural heritage. They celebrate it as the birthplace of renowned musicians such as composer Uzeyir Hajibeyov (1885–1948) and operatic tenor Bulbul (1897–1961), as well as poets such as Vagif (1717–1797) and Natavan (1832–1897).

Historical assertions may suggest that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has deeper roots. However, the ethnic strife between Armenians and Azerbaijanis is a twentieth-century phenomenon (Saparov 2014, 89). The first outbreak of violence occurred between 1905 and 1907, driven by the Tsarist Empire's waning power and the rise of new national movements in the late 1800s (De Waal 2019, 105). The second wave of conflict arose after the Russian Empire's collapse in 1917, when independent Armenian and Azerbaijani republics emerged for the first time. Following a brief period of cooperation under the Transcaucasian Federation, tensions escalated from 1918 to 1920 as the two states clashed over control of mixed-population areas, including Nakhichevan, Zangezur/Syunik, and Karabakh (Saparov 2014, 90).¹¹

In 1920, the Bolsheviks took control of the South Caucasus. Faced with the challenge

¹¹ Azerbaijanis refer to this region as Zangezur, while Armenians call it Syunik. The term Zangezur holds significant relevance today, as it is frequently mentioned in the media in connection with the envisioned link between Azerbaijan and its exclave Nakhchivan through Armenian territory, as outlined in the 2020 ceasefire agreement. Additionally, it is associated with the so-called "Western Azerbaijan" theory. According to Broers (2019, 119), this theory posits that the present-day Armenian territory was ruled by various Turkic tribes, empires, and khanates from the Late Middle Ages, and that Armenians settled there only after the signing of the Treaty of Turkmenchay in 1828, which followed the Russo-Persian War of 1826–1828. This concept has garnered official endorsement from the Azerbaijani government and has been frequently referenced by its current president, Ilham Aliyev, who regularly describes "Irevan" (Yerevan), "Göyçə" (Lake Sevan), and "Zangazur" (Syunik) as lands that were once and will be future "Azerbaijani territories."

of defining the administrative status of these territories, the Soviet leadership ultimately placed Nagorno-Karabakh under Azerbaijani jurisdiction. By 1923, this region, where 89% of the population was Armenian, was designated as an autonomous region (NKAO) within the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) (Pokalova 2015, 72). Furthermore, Moscow established borders to prevent direct contact between the NKAO and Soviet Armenia, with the 5 km-long Lachin corridor serving as a buffer zone between the two (De Waal 2019, 106). The administrative capital of this autonomous region was Stepanakert, named in honor of the Armenian Bolshevik Stepan Shaumyan.

In 1945, 1965, and 1977, Karabakh Armenians submitted petitions to Moscow, complaining about social discrimination and economic neglect (Shnirelman 2001, 183). These grievances included the disproportionate allocation of financial resources to villages with Azeri majorities, the closure of Armenian churches, the limited availability of Armenian-language books and media, the absence of Armenian history in schools, and linguistic marginalization (De Waal 2019, 106). They also lamented an unfavorable demographic shift during the Soviet era, which had significantly altered the population balance between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, favoring the latter (Shnirelman 2001, 184). Nonetheless, Soviet authorities managed to control tensions between the two communities. Only after the democratization policies launched in 1987 by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev did the First Karabakh War begin (Saparov 2014, 94).

3.1.1. The First War (1988-1994)

In 1988, the NKAO parliament called for the region's transfer from Soviet Azerbaijan to Soviet Armenia. As soon as the Soviet Union collapsed, Karabakh Armenians declared independence. The ensuing full-scale war between Azerbaijan and the defense forces of the breakaway republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, supported by Armenia, persisted until 1994, when Russia brokered a ceasefire agreement commonly known as the “Bishkek Protocol.”

By that time, Armenian forces had captured nearly the entire former NKAO, along with seven adjacent Azerbaijani regions, including Lachin, Kelbajar, Jabrayil, Gubadly, Zangilan, and significant portions of Agdam and Fizuli. The First Karabakh War was marked by severe violence on both sides, including the 1988 pogroms against Armenians in Sumgait and Baku, Operation Ring (Koltso/Кольцо) in 1991, which led to the forced expulsion of Armenians from villages in Nagorno-Karabakh, and the 1992 Khojaly massacre of Azerbaijanis. In total, there were approximately 20,000 casualties, and over a million people were displaced as a result of the conflict (De Waal 2019, 99). Those

affected included Armenians who had to leave Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis fleeing Nagorno-Karabakh and its surrounding areas.

At the same time, the United Nations (UN) passed resolutions 822, 853, 874, and 884, which condemned the occupation of Azerbaijani land and called for its return. However, these resolutions stopped short of explicitly designating the conflict as an interstate war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, nor did they formally recognize Armenia as an aggressor state (Cornell 2001). De Waal (2013, 210-12) observes that, in addition to the economic and logistical support Yerevan provided to Stepanakert during the conflict, units from the regular Armenian army were actively engaged in hostilities, despite their involvement being unofficial and not requiring government approval.

From that time until September 2023, Nagorno-Karabakh operated as a *de facto* independent republic, functioning outside Azerbaijani governance, even though no UN member, including Armenia, officially acknowledged its independence. Furthermore, until 2020, the Nagorno-Karabakh defense forces continued to control, either fully or partially, the seven Azerbaijani districts surrounding the enclave. The Nagorno-Karabakh authorities justified the occupation of these areas, marked by devastated towns and abandoned villages, as a necessary measure to establish a "buffer zone" or "security belt" (Broers 2019; De Waal 2019).

3.1.2. The Interwar Period (1995-2019)

During this phase, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was often described as being in a state of "no war, no peace" (Pokalova 2015; Broers 2019). Although the 1994 ceasefire created a military stalemate, it failed to produce a political resolution between Armenia and Azerbaijan (Cornell 2017, 3). Various initiatives were proposed to address this issue. The OSCE Minsk Group, established in 1992 and led by a permanent troika of France, Russia, and the United States since 1997, put forward several initial principles for resolving the conflict at the OSCE Lisbon Summit in December 1996.

These principles included recognizing the territorial integrity of Armenia and Azerbaijan, affirming Nagorno-Karabakh's legal status based on self-determination, and ensuring security for the region and its inhabitants (Pokalova 2015, 74). Although all parties accepted the resolution based on these principles, Armenia did not.

One year later, the Minsk Group presented two proposals for a peaceful resolution. The first was a "package" proposal, divided into two parts. Agreement I addressed the cessation of hostilities, and Agreement II addressed the status of the territory, proposing that Nagorno-Karabakh be recognized as a state-territorial entity within Azerbaijan, with

self-determination rights guaranteed by both entities' constitutions. It also called for establishing a buffer zone and deploying OSCE peacekeeping forces.

The second proposal outlined a "step-by-step" approach that called for withdrawing armed troops from the line of contact, followed by negotiations among the three parties to determine Nagorno-Karabakh's future status (Broers 2019, 43). Under the agreement, the second phase would be implemented only after the first phase was successfully completed, which included Azerbaijan regaining control of the occupied districts. Ultimately, the Nagorno-Karabakh authorities rejected both the package and the step-by-step proposals (Pokalova 2015, 74).

In addition to the initiatives proposed by the OSCE Minsk Group, the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan held direct talks in various locations, including Washington, DC, Paris, Key West, and Sochi. The 2001 negotiations in Key West produced a new settlement proposal suggesting that Nagorno-Karabakh and Lachin reunite with Armenia, while Azerbaijan would receive a land corridor to Nakhichevan through Armenia. Although both sides initially agreed to the settlement, Azerbaijan ultimately rejected it (Pokalova 2015; Broers 2019).

After the territorial swap concept was abandoned, talks resumed in the "Prague Process" in 2002, with presidential envoys and, in 2004, Foreign Ministers Vartan Oskanyan and Elmar Mammadyarov. The Prague Process proposed a hybrid approach to agreeing on a mechanism for determining Nagorno-Karabakh's final status, deferring implementation until after the return of occupied territories and the resolution of security issues (Broers 2019, 292-93). Broers (2019, 293) notes that, rather than drafting detailed proposals, Armenian and Azerbaijani diplomats focused on establishing a framework agreement of basic principles to guide a comprehensive peace agreement. In November 2007, their efforts led to the creation of what are now known as the "Madrid Principles."

The Madrid Principles offered a step-by-step approach to resolving the conflict, including the gradual withdrawal of Armenian forces from Azerbaijani territory surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh, the establishment of an "interim status" for local Armenians, and a commitment to hold a referendum at an unspecified date to determine the region's future status (De Waal 2019, 130-131). Further negotiations led the two countries' diplomatic representatives to meet in Moscow in November 2008 and sign the "Declaration on Regulating the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict" (Pokalova 2015, 77).

However, talks based on the Madrid Principles stalled during the Kazan Summit in June 2011, even though both Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan and Azerbaijani

President Ilham Aliyev had expressed hope of reaching a peace deal (Pokalova 2015, 77). According to De Waal (2019, 130-131), the impasse arose because accepting the proposed solution would have put both Armenian and Azerbaijani leadership in a difficult position.

For Armenians, the promise of Nagorno-Karabakh's independence felt increasingly remote, while the Azerbaijani government risked being accused of betrayal if it allowed Karabakh Armenians to vote on secession (Broers 2019). Moreover, both Yerevan and Baku were closely monitoring recent European events. Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence had sparked hopes that Armenian secessionism would gain international support, while Azerbaijan hoped the same by strongly condemning Russia's annexation of Crimea.

In the meantime, incidents and casualties continued along the line of contact in Nagorno-Karabakh and across the entire Armenian-Azerbaijani border (Broers 2016, 6). During this period, economic and political dynamics in both countries changed significantly (Cornell 2017, 1). On the one hand, Armenia's political and economic standing suffered severe damage due to the First Karabakh War. In contrast, Azerbaijan experienced a substantial boost in both its economy and defense budget after signing the "Contract of the Century" with a consortium of international oil companies in 1994. Broers (2019, 190) notes that in 2011 Azerbaijan's military budget amounted to \$3.1 billion, surpassing Armenia's state budget of \$2.8 billion. At the same time, military action was strongly supported in both Armenian and Azerbaijani societies. In 2014, President Aliyev asserted, "I am completely confident that our territorial integrity will be restored by any means. The Armenian occupation of 20% of Azerbaijani territory is a temporary condition" (Azertac 2014).

In April 2016, a four-day war erupted along the line of contact. On April 5, Russian Minister of Defense Sergey Shoygu brokered a ceasefire agreement without the other Minsk Group co-chairs' involvement (Cornell 2017, 2). Although Azerbaijani forces captured several Armenian front posts in Talish, Seysulan, and around Lale Tepe, the significance of this four-day conflict for Baku was largely psychological (Broers 2016, 12). In fact, Azerbaijan celebrated its first military success in over twenty years, helping to reverse longstanding feelings of humiliation.

3.1.3. The Second War (2020)

In September 2020, Azerbaijan launched a military campaign that quickly breached Armenian defenses, triggering the Second Karabakh War. This escalation followed a

series of clashes in July 2020 along the internationally recognized borders of Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Tavush/Tovuz region (Stronski 2020).

During this 44-day conflict, Baku reclaimed control of territories in and around Nagorno-Karabakh that Armenian forces had occupied during the First Karabakh War, as well as approximately one-third of Nagorno-Karabakh itself, including the strategically important city of Shusha/Shushi (Landgraf and Seferyan 2024). Beyond its historical significance to both Azerbaijanis and Armenians, the settlement has major military importance, serving as an effective defensive barrier for Stepanakert, only 10 km away, as well as for the Lachin corridor (Spencer and Ghoorhoo 2021).

Baku's superior weaponry also made the Azerbaijani victory possible. As Hedenskog et al. (2020) note, while both the Armenian and Azerbaijani armies originated in the Soviet era, Baku benefited from upgraded Soviet equipment alongside modern armaments from Turkey and Israel, including drones for strikes and reconnaissance, as well as precision-guided munitions. In contrast, the Armenian and Nagorno-Karabakh forces primarily depended on older military equipment, with only a handful of modern systems, such as Russian Su-30SM fighter jets and Iskander missiles, though these were in limited supply. Furthermore, reports suggest that Azerbaijan used Syrian mercenaries in its campaign against Nagorno-Karabakh, transporting them through Turkey (OHCHR 2020).

On November 9, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev signed a Russia-brokered ceasefire agreement. Although the deal did not pave the way for definitive, lasting peace, it ended the most intense fighting in the region in nearly three decades. The Second Karabakh War resulted in the deaths of nearly 7,000 soldiers and about 170 civilians, with many others wounded (Crisis Group 2025).

The ceasefire agreement provided for the deployment of 1960 Russian peacekeepers in the Armenian-populated areas of the conflict zone until November 2025, with the option of a five-year extension unless either Armenia or Azerbaijan requested otherwise (President of Russia 2020). One of these areas was the Lachin corridor, the vital route linking Armenia and Karabakh, where Azerbaijan was required to ensure the uninterrupted free movement of people and goods. A Russian-Turkish monitoring center was also established in the Aghdam district. Finally, the agreement required Armenia to "guarantee the safety" of transport links between mainland Azerbaijan and its Nakhichevan exclave, with oversight by the Border Guards of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) (President of Russia 2020).

3.1.4. The Second Interwar Period and the Third War (2021-2024)

In the aftermath of the Second Karabakh War, hostilities spread beyond Nagorno-Karabakh, affecting the entire Armenian-Azerbaijani border (De Waal 2024a; Landgraf and Seferyan 2024). Azerbaijani forces launched incursions into both Nagorno-Karabakh and sovereign Armenian territory in May 2021, November 2021, and September 2022. In March 2024, Armenian authorities reported that 31 villages, covering approximately 200 square kilometers of Armenia's sovereign territory, had come under Baku's control (Eurasianet 2022; Zanatta 2024).

Within Nagorno-Karabakh, the situation remained precarious. In March and August 2022, reports indicated that Azerbaijani forces had breached the line of contact in Nagorno-Karabakh, including areas under the supervision of Russian peacekeeping forces (De Waal 2024). That same year, Baku imposed a blockade of the Lachin Corridor, the sole highway connecting the region to Armenia and the outside world. Beginning in December 2022, movement through the Lachin Corridor was partially or completely obstructed, initially by government-directed environmental activists and later by Azerbaijani border guards (De Waal 2024a). Although Russian peacekeepers and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) were able to facilitate the delivery of food, medicine, and transportation for residents on some occasions, the estimated 120,000 inhabitants of Nagorno-Karabakh faced severe shortages of essential supplies, including food, medicine, electricity, heating, water, and fuel (Landgraf and Seferyan 2024).

On September 19, 2023, Azerbaijani forces launched a decisive offensive that, within 24 hours, ended Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians' decades-long aspiration for independence and triggered their mass exodus to neighboring Armenia. On September 28, 2023, Samvel Shahramanyan, the president of Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh, signed an order dissolving it, effective January 1, 2024 (Landgraf and Seferyan 2024).

After the events of September 2023, the long-standing territorial question of Nagorno-Karabakh has, in practical terms, ended. However, the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan persists. A series of unresolved and deeply sensitive issues remains: agreeing on the precise delineation and demarcation of the interstate border; addressing the legacies of the 2020 war, including the contested transport link between mainland Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan exclave and the fate of Armenian prisoners of war; and, finally, how the two governments and their societies might begin, slowly and cautiously, to move toward normal diplomatic relations.

While these developments are important for assessing Russia's role in the region, this

study confines its scope to the territorial dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh. Methodological and empirical feasibility considerations motivate this decision. Including subsequent dynamics would turn the thesis into a constantly evolving project, as the issues mentioned above remain unresolved.

3.2. Russia's Practices and Interests in the Conflict

3.2.1. The First War

Some scholars (Abushov 2009, 195) have characterized Soviet policy at the onset of the First Karabakh conflict as incoherent and lacking clear strategic direction. In contrast, others (Kopeček 2019, 124) argue that the Gorbachev administration's involvement was driven primarily by a desire to avert the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Kopeček (2019, 124) further asserts that Moscow's support was often contingent on which side it perceived as most aligned with its interests at any given moment.

Initially, Moscow may have seemed responsive to the Karabakh Armenians' claims (Kopeček 2019, 124). Indeed, the Kremlin directly governed the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) for much of 1989, rather than the Azerbaijan SSR. However, in November of that year, the government in Baku assumed authority. The Soviet leadership intensified its support for Azerbaijan between 1990 and 1991 (Cornell 2001; De Waal 2019). According to the literature (Cornell 2001; De Waal 2013; Coyle 2017), this shift was partly catalyzed by Armenia's emergence in 1990 as the first Soviet republic to elect a non-Communist government under the Armenian National Movement. By the end of that year, Yerevan declared its independence and appointed Levon Ter-Petrosyan as its first president. Subsequently, Armenia opted to boycott the March 1991 referendum aimed at preserving the Soviet Union.

In contrast, Azerbaijan remained closely aligned with Soviet interests and did not pursue independence until after the August 1991 coup. Although the Popular Front in Azerbaijan, described by Broers (2019, 112) as a “heady mix of pan-Turkism, pan-Azerbaijani nationalism, recriminations against Russian-speaking Azerbaijanis, populist messianism, and anti-Armenian rhetoric,” emerged around the same time as the Armenian National Movement, it faced significant repression from Soviet authorities in January 1990 and did not gain substantial political influence until late spring 1992.

Furthermore, Azerbaijanis benefited more than Armenians from the distribution of Soviet military equipment agreed upon at a meeting of post-Soviet states in Tashkent in May 1992 (De Waal 2019, 121). Although Ayaz Mutalibov was appointed party leader

after the events of January 1990, De Waal (2019, 114) notes that his Russian deputy, Viktor Polyanichko, significantly influenced him and received substantial support from the security establishment in Moscow. The Soviets entrusted Polyanichko with overseeing operations in Nagorno-Karabakh and countering the Armenian insurgency, with assistance from Azerbaijani special police and Soviet troops.

It is also important to note that, in the immediate wake of the Soviet Union's collapse, former Soviet soldiers were actively involved in military operations on both sides of the conflict. These units, primarily composed of Russians but also including Ukrainians, Belarussians, and other nationalities, remained in the region and served as mercenaries. While some members of the 23rd Motorized Rifle Division participated in the so-called “Operation Ring” from April to May 1991 to expel ethnic Armenians from areas surrounding the NKAO in coordination with Azerbaijani security forces, others from the 366th Motorized Rifle Regiment were reportedly implicated in the Khojaly massacre in January 1992 (Croissant 1998, 31–42).

Scholars have offered varied interpretations of the Russian government's involvement in operations conducted by former Soviet soldiers. While Cornell (2001) argues that this was part of a strategic initiative by Moscow to escalate the conflict for its own advantage, others, such as De Waal (2013) and Coyle (2017), contend that the role of former Soviet soldiers was not a deliberate Kremlin strategy but rather arose from the troops' geographic positioning and composition. For instance, the 366th Motorized Rifle Regiment, deployed in Stepanakert since August 1988, included a significant number of Armenian officers and personnel, and Karabakh Armenians often rented tanks from the regiment. In contrast, the 23rd Motorized Rifle Division, stationed in Ganja, had many Azerbaijani soldiers. Moreover, Coyle (2017, 29) notes that Boris Yeltsin, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (SFSR) and the first President of the Russian Federation, was a staunch opponent of Operation Ring and perceived the central government's actions against Armenian separatists as a troubling precedent for Moscow's standing in the region.

While the Soviet Azerbaijani strategy was beginning to pressure the Armenians, it was abruptly interrupted by the failed coup in Moscow in August 1991. Accusations of close ties to the plotters forced Polyanichko to leave Azerbaijan (De Waal 2019, 115). Meanwhile, public sentiment against Moscow and the communist leadership intensified in Azerbaijan, particularly after the Soviet military intervention in January 1990 (Cornell 2001, 53). The situation further deteriorated after the Khojaly massacre in February 1992.

Cornell (2017, 10) observes that Azerbaijanis increasingly believed that Russia had become Armenia's principal sponsor and a direct participant in the conflict, with Russian forces actively involved in Armenian military operations. This perception was compounded by the fact that Armenian offensives in Shusha and Lachin began the day after Armenia and Russia signed the Tashkent Treaty in May 1992. Viewed as a pro-Russian figure, Mutalibov was held responsible by Azerbaijani society for its military setbacks and was subsequently ousted (De Waal 2013, 45). Abulfaz Elchibey, who had risen to prominence as the leader of the Popular Front during the tumultuous events of Black January in the 1990s and was known for his antagonistic stance toward Russia, succeeded him.

This period marked a significant turning point, as experts on the conflict argue that Moscow began extending military support to Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh (Broers 2019; De Waal 2019). Afterward, Russia began sending large supplies of arms and fuel to Armenia. Defense Minister Pavel Grachev built strong ties with Armenian military leaders, further solidifying this support (De Waal 2013). While Russian assistance was pivotal in helping Yerevan bridge its military gap with Azerbaijan during 1992-1993, the extent to which it was the primary factor in its victory in 1993-1994 remains debated (De Waal 2013; Broers 2019).

Furthermore, a crucial factor in Armenia's success was the deterioration of relations between Russia and Azerbaijan. This tension peaked in 1993, when the Azerbaijani government decided to oust Russian military bases from its territory. Additionally, Azerbaijan refused to join the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and sought to strengthen its relationships with Turkey and Western nations (Furman 1994). In response, Russia began to support separatist movements among the Talysh and Lezgin ethnic groups and played a significant role in facilitating Surat Huseynov's 1993 coup against President Elchibey. Huseynov's forces acquired weapons from the departing Russian military unit in Ganja, enabling them to attack an undefended Baku and ultimately oust Elchibey (Cornell 2001; De Waal 2013).

The Russian representative in the OSCE Minsk Group, Vladimir Kazimirov, successfully negotiated a ceasefire (the Bishkek Protocol) that took effect on May 12, 1994. Following that, Grachev invited his military counterparts to Moscow and proposed deploying a contingent of 1,800 Russian peacekeepers to the front lines in Karabakh (De Waal 2013). However, Azerbaijan refused to consent to Russian soldiers' presence.

3.2.2. The First Interwar Period and the Second War

As a joke often heard in this region puts it, if Russia had to choose between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, it would always side with "conflict" (Bennet 2023; Broers 2023). After the First Karabakh War, many observers widely believed that Moscow was not genuinely committed to resolving the Armenian-Azerbaijani dispute but instead leveraged the status quo to maintain its influence over Baku and Yerevan (Cornell 2001; Babayan 2015; Coyle 2017; Romashov and Rytövuori-Apunen 2017; De Waal 2019; Gafarli 2022; Çakmak and Özşahin 2023).

This belief stemmed from the complexity and incoherence of certain policies Russia adopted during its involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The following paragraphs summarize them.

3.2.2.1. *Armenia's Ally, Azerbaijan's Strategic Partner*

Scholars have emphasized that one reason the status quo mattered to Russia was the preservation of its friendly relations with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey (Broers 2019; Davidzon 2022). This view holds that the Kremlin would have lost influence in the South Caucasus and faced polarization in its ties with one of the two parties after the conflict.

On the one hand, Armenia is a participant in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Furthermore, Yerevan maintains bilateral agreements with Moscow in the spheres of politics, defense, and the economy. However, given Armenia's significance to my aim of illustrating Russia's pursuit of ontological security, I examine these dynamics in greater detail in a dedicated chapter. Conversely, despite its pledges to Armenia's defense, Moscow has treated Azerbaijan as a strategic ally (Isachenko 2020).

As previously discussed, significant tensions marked Russian–Azerbaijani relations during the First Karabakh War. These frictions stemmed not only from large segments of Azerbaijani society viewing Russia as Armenia's principal supporter after 1992, but also from Elchibey's attempts to expel Russian military bases from Azerbaijan, together with his efforts to deepen ties with the West through initiatives such as GUAM, NATO's Partnership for Peace, and closer cooperation with Turkey, which provoked considerable unease in Moscow (Furman 1994; Abushov 2019).¹²

¹² GUAM was founded in October 1997 when the leaders of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova issued a joint communiqué to establish a quadrilateral partnership aimed at enhancing stability and security in Europe. Four years later, in June 2001, the leaders of these states signed the Yalta Charter, which outlined the objectives and principles of their collaboration. The partnership was later expanded to include Uzbekistan. However, Tashkent withdrew from the organization in 2005 when GUAM opted to pursue

Although Russian–Azerbaijani relations continued to be shaped by mutual distrust, Elchibey's departure and the Aliyev family's consolidation of power created more favorable conditions for pragmatic cooperation (Markedonov 2018). However, this underlying mistrust never completely disappeared. At the time of writing, tensions remain pronounced, particularly in light of the incident in which an Azal Airlines flight was shot down and the subsequent arrests of several ethnic Azerbaijanis in Yekaterinburg between late 2024 and 2025 (De Waal 2024; Figari Barberis and Zanatta 2025).

Nevertheless, Russian-Azerbaijani relations now feature more areas of convergence in Russia's and Azerbaijan's foreign policy agendas than ever before. Baku has no intention of joining NATO or the EU. Just before the Kremlin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev visited Moscow to sign a declaration on Allied Interaction (President of Azerbaijan 2022). In April of the same year, Aliyev reaffirmed Azerbaijan's support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and called for the de-occupation of its territories. However, he stopped short of labeling Russia the aggressor (Izvestiya 2022). In August 2024, Baku took another significant step by officially applying for BRICS membership (Huseynov 2024).

While Azerbaijan has benefited from the Russia-Ukraine war by positioning itself as a key natural gas exporter to the EU, it has also sought to mitigate criticism from its Western partners about its authoritarian regime by fostering positive relations with Moscow (Markedonov 2018). The Kremlin has likewise viewed Azerbaijan as a trustworthy partner in the fight against "color revolutions" in the South Caucasus (Cornell 2017; Toal 2017; Markedonov 2017). The two countries also maintain strong economic and energy ties. As of 2022, Azerbaijan accounted for 50% of Russia's trade with the South Caucasus, and the Russian energy company Lukoil plays a crucial role in Azerbaijan's upstream hydrocarbon sector (German 2022, 1601).

Ultimately, it is crucial to underscore the growing importance of (inter)regional infrastructure in Russian-Azerbaijani relations. In fact, Azerbaijan has become an important hub in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), which aims to improve connectivity among Russia, Iran, and India (Romashov and Rytövuori-Apunen 2017). Additionally, under the trilateral ceasefire agreement of November 10, 2020, FSB border service agencies were authorized to supervise transportation links

deeper European integration by forming partnerships with the EU) and the NATO to create a unified security framework.

between Azerbaijan and its exclave, the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic, via Armenia's Syunik region. Some experts posit that Russia's interest in developing this transportation corridor is driven by the prospect of establishing a land route to Turkey (Chedia 2024).

3.2.2.2. The Role of Turkey

A brief discussion of Turkey's role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is essential to understanding how the literature has examined specific Russian strategic interests in the region. Because of Azerbaijan's alliance with Ankara and its strategic partnership with Moscow, the dynamics in Nagorno-Karabakh strongly influence Russian-Turkish relations (Romashov and Rytövuori-Apunen 2017, 8). Just as the Russian and Ottoman empires were long-standing adversaries on multiple fronts, relations between Republican Turkey, which joined NATO in 1952, and the Soviet Union were similarly complex. Nonetheless, until the Soviet Union's official dissolution, Ankara adopted a cautious approach in its interactions with Moscow, especially regarding the fate of Turkic populations residing in the Soviet Union (Aras 2017, 176).

After the Cold War, Turkey adopted a foreign policy defined by two distinct yet seemingly contradictory vectors. The first sought to position the Caucasus as an alternative transit route for Caspian hydrocarbons, within the broader context of Turkey's aspirations for EU candidacy and NATO membership (Oskanian 2014, 144). The second vector emerged from two prevailing currents in its geopolitical thinking, "neo-Ottomanism" and "Eurasianism" (Cheteryan 2023, 1274). The former represented the strategy of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi), which sought to extend its influence in the provinces of the former Ottoman Empire. In contrast, the latter was an ideology embraced by Turkish nationalists seeking to assert power in the Turkic-speaking republics of the former Soviet Union.

In this context, Turkey prioritized building strong ties with Azerbaijan. Broers (2019, 231) characterizes the relationship between the two countries as "geopolitically intimate." In fact, Ankara was the first country to recognize Azerbaijan's independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union and, during the First Karabakh War, provided Baku with some "passive assistance" (Coyle 2017, 43). In 1992, Ankara threatened Yerevan with the possibility of launching a military campaign, asserting its role as the security guarantor of Azerbaijan's exclave Nakhichevan. The following year, Turkey closed its border with Armenia to protest the seizure of the Kelbajar district by Armenian forces.

As of this writing, the border between the two countries remains closed.

Meanwhile, Turkey and Azerbaijan rekindled their historical and linguistic ties. The slogan "one nation, two states" (*Bir millət, iki dövlət* in Azerbaijani; *Bir millet, iki devlet* in Turkish), articulated by Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev during his speech to the Turkish parliament in 1995, inspired future leaderships in the two countries to enhance their relations (Ismayilov and Graham 2016). Since then, the partnership between Turkey and Azerbaijan has expanded significantly across various domains. One key area is energy politics, which has been crucial to their relationship for the past three decades (Ismayilov and Graham 2016, 10).

On the diplomatic front, Turkey has consistently backed Azerbaijan during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, even at the cost of complicating its efforts to normalize relations with Armenia (De Waal 2019; Broers 2019). It is crucial to recognize that Ankara's strained relationship with Yerevan stems from factors on both sides. From the Turkish perspective, the insecurities that have plagued Turkish society since the establishment of the Republic, often referred to as the "Sèvres syndrome," play a significant role. This term encapsulates a widespread, irrational fear among the Turkish populace of being dismembered by other major powers and regional rivals (Oskanian 2014).

According to Oskanian (2014, 146), the Sèvres syndrome has significantly shaped and constrained successive governments in Ankara, particularly regarding Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. From an Armenian perspective, the Turkish government's ongoing refusal to acknowledge the 1915 Armenian genocide, coupled with its support for Azerbaijan in the conflict due to Turkic solidarity, has led Armenian society to draw parallels between the 1915 genocide and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, viewing both as manifestations of a Turkic threat (Gamaghelyan 2010; De Waal 2019).

Furthermore, Azerbaijan's stance on Turkish-Armenian relations adds another layer of complexity (Broers 2019; De Waal 2019). In October 2009, the foreign ministers of Armenia and Turkey signed two protocols in Switzerland to restore relations and reopen their border. However, because the agreements did not explicitly address the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Azerbaijan strongly opposed them. De Waal (2019, 243) notes that Azerbaijani officials protested vigorously in Ankara against the protocols, even threatening to renegotiate Baku's gas supplies to Turkey. That same year, then-Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan called for Armenia to withdraw from the occupied territories. As a result, the protocols were not ratified, and relations between Armenia and

Turkey deteriorated further.

Military cooperation has been a cornerstone of Turkish-Azerbaijani relations since the early 1990s (Hovsepyan and Tonoyan 2024). Baku and Ankara have signed several agreements and protocols, including the 2010 Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance Agreement, to strengthen their security collaboration. This framework has facilitated Turkey's growing involvement in Azerbaijan's efforts to retake Nagorno-Karabakh (Isachenko 2020). During the Second Karabakh War, Turkey not only deployed Syrian mercenaries to support Azerbaijani forces but also provided military, logistical, and intelligence assistance to its ally (Rácz 2020, 2). Turkey's support for Azerbaijan during the war has strengthened its position in the South Caucasus, as evidenced by the establishment of the Turkish-Russian monitoring center in Aghdam, which emerged as one of the key outcomes of the conflict (Gafarli 2022). In June 2021, Baku and Ankara also signed the Shusha Declaration on allied relations (President of Azerbaijan 2021).

In the 1990s, the Russian elite viewed the close partnership between Azerbaijan and Turkey as an attempt by a NATO member to undermine its interests in the post-Soviet space (Croissant 1998). When Ankara threatened military intervention against Armenia, Russian Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev stated that the Kremlin would protect Yerevan from any potential military action by its Turkish neighbor (Ter-Matevosyan and Ghazaryan 2019, 184). In light of these developments, some observers warned that one of the biggest risks of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute was its potential to escalate into a broader confrontation between Turkey and Russia (Ter-Matevosyan and Ghazaryan 2019).

However, following the December 2006 suspension of EU-Turkey talks on Ankara's membership and a general decline in Turkish-Western relations, Russian-Turkish relations have improved (Aras 2017). Aras (2017) notes that Turkey recognized Russia's continued significance as a key player in the South Caucasus's geostrategic dynamics and saw potential for collaboration with Moscow, especially as the conflicts in Chechnya during the 1990s threatened to escalate beyond Russia's borders. Consequently, Ankara adopted a largely pragmatic and non-aggressive approach toward Moscow, which helped reassure the Kremlin about Turkey's interests in exploiting secessionist movements among Turkic populations in Russia.

In the wake of the 2016 Russo-Turkish crisis in Syria, triggered by Turkey's downing of a Russian Su-24 aircraft on its way to the Khmeimim airbase in December 2015, Ankara and Moscow inaugurated a relationship that, in the words of Cheteryan (2023,

1271), combines elements of a tactical alliance with strategic competition. Despite competing on rival geopolitical axes stretching from Syria to Libya and ultimately to the South Caucasus, the two sides effectively collaborated on energy projects, including the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant and the Turkish Stream (2018). In 2017, Turkey also signed an agreement with Russia to acquire its S-400 air defense system (Gafarli 2022, 360-61).

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Turkey chose not to join the Western economic and financial sanctions imposed on the Kremlin (Cheteryan 2023, 1273). Instead, Ankara leveraged the conflict and the shifting global landscape to strengthen its economic and energy ties with Moscow (Cheteryan 2023, 1286). Turkey has positioned itself as a mediator between the warring parties, seeking to balance its relationships with Ukraine and the West on one side and with Russia on the other. For example, in July 2022, Ankara, alongside the UN, played a crucial role in facilitating an agreement between Ukraine and Russia to resume Ukrainian grain exports through Black Sea ports (Reuters 2022).

3.2.2.3. Main Mediator, Main Weapons' Supplier

After facilitating the signing of the Bishkek Protocol in 1994, Russia became the principal mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Initially, its engagement was largely nominal, limited to its role as a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group. As John Maresca (1996), who served as US Ambassador to the OSCE and was appointed special representative for mediation in Nagorno-Karabakh, noted, the Kremlin grew increasingly dissatisfied with the Minsk Group and began boycotting its activities.

Meanwhile, the concept of the post-Soviet space as a distinct zone of interest for Russia began to take shape. In a 1993 speech, President Boris Yeltsin had already stressed that "Russia continues to have a vital interest in the cessation of all armed conflicts on the territory of the former Soviet Union" and that "the world community is increasingly coming to realize our country's special responsibility in this difficult matter" (Baev 1997, 181). As Yevgeny Primakov succeeded the ostensibly liberal Andrei Kozyrev as Minister of Foreign Affairs, the pursuit of great-power status and a commitment to multilateralism in international relations became central themes of Russian foreign policy. Primakov's vision for restoring Moscow's position as a great power focused on countering U.S. unipolarity through a strategic alliance with states such as China and India, as well as on fostering greater integration within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (Lynch 2001). This new approach to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict rejected the status

quo as a viable solution, instead seeking a partial resolution that aligned with a broader vision of Russia-centered security in the post-Soviet space (Broers 2019).

In the wake of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, then-President Dmitry Medvedev and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov significantly ramped up efforts to hold a series of trilateral discussions with their Armenian and Azerbaijani counterparts, Serzh Sargsyan and Ilham Aliyev (Romashov and Rytövuori-Apunen 2017, 5). In the same year, Russia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan signed the Moscow Declaration, in which the parties expressed their firm intention to resolve the conflict.

Although the 2011 Kazan Summit, as previously noted, failed to achieve a political resolution to the conflict, the Kremlin maintained its position as the primary mediator in the dispute (Abushov 2019). In May 2012, Russia signed a decree with the other two co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group (France and the United States) reaffirming its commitment to a peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Point 49 of the 2013 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation stated that Moscow aimed to “contribute to the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in collaboration with other OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs, building on the principles contained in the joint statements made by the Presidents of Russia, the USA, and France in 2009-2011.” In the same year, then-President Dmitri Medvedev reiterated the belief expressed by Yeltsin 20 years earlier, declaring that “Russia, like other countries in the world, has regions where it has privileged interests. These are regions where countries with which we have friendly relations are located...” (Kramer 2008, 9).

In August 2014 and June 2016, following escalations along the line of contact between Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh, Russian President Vladimir Putin held bilateral discussions with Presidents Serzh Sargsyan and Ilham Aliyev, followed by trilateral negotiations. Russian officials repeatedly stressed that Russia aimed to “find mutually acceptable solutions within the shortest possible time” (MFA of the Russian Federation 2016). Finally, as discussed above, in November 2020 the Kremlin brokered a ceasefire that ended the Second Karabakh War and facilitated the deployment of Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh. Overall, the major Russian efforts in the peace process are summarized in the following table:

Year	Initiative Name	Broker/Actor	Russia's Role
1992	Minsk Group (OSCE)	OSCE	OSCE member, initially supportive of group format
1994	Bishkek Protocol	CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly	Main initiator, mediation through the CIS and the OSCE to end the First Karabakh War.
1997	Step-by-Step & Package Deal	OSCE Minsk Group	Nominally supportive
1997	Phased Approach / Step-by-Step Plan	OSCE Minsk Group	Nominally supportive
1997	Territorial Swap I (Informal)	OSCE Minsk Group	Not formally involved, skeptical of territorial adjustments that shift influence
1998	Common State Proposal	OSCE Minsk Group	Nominally supportive
2007	Madrid Principles	OSCE Minsk Group	Nominally supportive
2011	Kazan Summit	Russia	Mediator, proposed compromise on Karabakh status
2016	St. Petersburg Meeting	Russia	Lead mediator, proposed de-escalation. End of the 2016 April War.
2020	November Ceasefire Agreement	Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia	Main broker, deployed peacekeepers to Nagorno-Karabakh. End of the Second Karabakh War.
2023	EU-led Brussels Peace Talks	European Union	Not directly involved, overshadowed by EU initiative

Table: Leonardo Zanatta • Source: De Waal (2019); Broers (2019). • Created with Datawrapper

Table 1: Russia's Efforts in the Nagorno-Karabakh Peace Process (1992 - 2023). (Source: the Author through Datawrapper)

At the same time, Russia served as the primary arms supplier to both Yerevan and Baku during the conflict (Broers 2019; SIPRI 2020). A 2020 report from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) estimates that from 2011 to 2020, Moscow provided 94 percent of Armenia's major arms and approximately 60 percent of those for Azerbaijan. According to some experts (Romashov and Rytövuori-Apunen 2017), this practice stemmed from Russia's need to maintain control over the arms race. If Russia were to supply weapons exclusively to Armenia while Azerbaijan sourced armaments from other countries, Russia's influence over Azerbaijan's military capabilities would be significantly diminished—furthermore, economic considerations led to the export of arms

to both nations. As will be discussed later, Armenia purchases weapons from Russia at discounted prices, whereas Azerbaijan acquires them at full price (Markedonov 2018; Broers 2019; De Waal 2019). Consequently, by exporting weapons to both countries, Moscow aimed to offset the financial losses incurred from supplying arms to Armenia on preferential terms (Romashov and Rytövuori-Apunen 2017, 6).

Russia's multiple and contrasting roles—Armenia's ally, Azerbaijan's strategic partner, primary mediator, and primary arms supplier—have sparked discussion about the Kremlin's (un)willingness and/or (in)capacity to resolve the Armenian-Azerbaijani rivalry effectively. Some Western observers have examined Russia's involvement in Nagorno-Karabakh within the broader context of "frozen conflicts" in the post-Soviet space. According to this thesis, the Kremlin either exploited or even created the unresolved conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia to maintain its grip on the post-Soviet space (Blank 2008; Coyle 2017; Kazantsev et al. 2020; Sieniawski 2024). Coyle (2021, 165) writes, "Russia supplied the weaponry to create a hot war [First Karabakh War] in 1992, and it has supplied the diplomacy that has kept the conflict "frozen" but not resolved ever since."

Broers (2019) uses the term "Pivotal Deterrence," first coined by Crawford, to describe how Russia's different roles in the conflict interact. Both Broers (2019) and Crawford (2014) argue that pivotal deterrence occurs when an actor successfully instills uncertainty in its targets. In the context of Nagorno-Karabakh, ambiguity about Russia's role led Azerbaijan to adopt a cautious approach, even though its military capabilities outmatched Armenia's. Conversely, this uncertainty fostered Armenia's dependence on Moscow, allowing the Kremlin to dissuade Yerevan from pursuing a more pro-Western foreign policy. However, this theory has clear limits. As Broers admits, this dynamic is effective only if neither side has viable alternative alliances. As discussed in this chapter, Baku successfully forged strategic and allied relations with Turkey and expanded its military capabilities by importing arms from Israel.

In contrast, Russian scholars emphasized that despite significant efforts to resolve the conflict, Moscow lacked the leverage to compel both parties to begin the peace process (Markedonov 2018; Suchkov 2018; Sushentsov and Neklyudov 2020). As Markedonov (2018, 5) writes, "Baku and Yerevan do not show any signs of reaching a compromise; their maximalist approaches determine their foreign policy, and Karabakh itself in the Armenian and Azerbaijani societies is perceived to some extent as sacred territory. In such circumstances, Moscow is not interested in accepting exclusive

responsibility and accelerating any solutions, especially given the difficulty of implementing prospective agreements. In case such agreements failed, this would pose some extra risks to Moscow's reputation and might sour its security environment." Other scholars adopted a position between these approaches, noting that the Kremlin, though playing an important role in the conflict and undoubtedly benefiting from the status quo, was not instigating it (Abushov 2019; De Waal 2019). Abushov (2019) contends that Russia favored the peace process and sincerely invested in its resolution. However, it avoided exerting much pressure on the conflicting parties.

3.2.2.4. Cooperation and Rivalry with the West

An important aspect to consider is the West's role in Russian foreign policy. The US and the EU have expanded their regional footprint since the 1994 signing of the "Contract of the Century" with Azerbaijan. Initially, their involvement focused on energy transit routes for hydrocarbon deposits, such as the proposed Nabucco gas pipeline, the Baku–Tbilisi–Çeyhan oil pipeline, and the Southern Gas Corridor. These initiatives are strategically important because they allow the EU to diversify its hydrocarbon imports from Russia. Additionally, the US entered the military and political spheres by promoting Georgia's inclusion in NATO, at least under the G.W. Bush administration, before scaling back its aspirations under the Obama administration (Lynch 2006, 51–54).

The EU also began to play an important role in the region's security environment. In 2003, it appointed its first Special Representative for the region (EUSR); the EU facilitated the agreement that ended hostilities during the Russia-Georgia war in August 2008 (Hedenskog 2022). Since then, Brussels has co-chaired the Geneva International Discussions with Georgia, Russia, and representatives of the two de facto republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which focus on the post-conflict setting (Hedenskog 2022).

In May 2022, Charles Michel, President of the European Council, convened the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan in Brussels. He emphasized the critical importance of ensuring stability and security along the Armenia-Azerbaijan border as the delimitation process is undertaken, particularly in light of the historic meeting of both countries' border commissions scheduled for two days later (Hedenskog 2022). Furthermore, in October 2022, the EU further solidified its commitment to conflict resolution by initiating a short-term civilian monitoring mission along the internationally recognized border between Armenia and Azerbaijan (De Waal 2024a).

Over time, Russia came to view these Western efforts as tools to encircle it with

hostile or unfriendly governments. Russian apprehensions intensified with the rise of democratic movements in Ukraine (the Orange Revolution of 2004-2005), Kyrgyzstan (the Tulip Revolution in 2005), and Georgia (the Rose Revolution in 2003). Moscow perceived these uprisings not as spontaneous events but as orchestrated efforts by the West to establish anti-Russian, pro-Western regimes, thereby undermining its influence in the post-Soviet space (Toal 2017).

Consequently, Russia became increasingly determined to prevent similar developments in the region. When NATO announced in 2008 that Georgia would eventually join the alliance, Russia stated that it would not tolerate such a shift and intervened in support of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in their conflict with the Georgian government (Toal 2017). In this context, some scholars argued that one of Russia's interests in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was to mitigate the growing Western influence in the region (Toal 2017).

However, not all scholars agree with this perspective. For instance, Romashov and Rytövuori-Apunen (2017, 6) contend that after 2008, Russia needed to signal to the West that the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh was distinct from the events in Georgia and that it sought to collaborate on a peace proposal for the region. According to Markedonov (2017, 137), Russia actively engaged with the West through the OSCE Minsk Group. Mankoff (2012, 10-11) notes that Moscow's mediating role within the Minsk Group was strongly supported by the United States and France, exemplifying US-Russian cooperation in the post-Soviet space.

Even after hostilities erupted between Armenia and Azerbaijan in April 2016, the Kremlin did not position its mediation as a viable alternative to the Minsk Group's efforts. Instead, it framed its actions as complementary to the Minsk Group's initiatives (Markedonov 2017). Following Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russia claimed that the other two countries had ceased cooperating within the Minsk Group framework. However, the United States refuted these allegations, asserting that it still valued the format (Chanadiri 2022).

Overall, the literature has predominantly examined Russia's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through the lens of outcome-based practices. I contend that this pattern emerged primarily for two reasons. First, for an extended period, academic discourse both within Russia and internationally has depicted the Kremlin's foreign policy in the South Caucasus as heavily dependent on military strength and focused on counterbalancing regional and non-regional competitors. Moreover, several esteemed

scholars on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, many with substantial connections to policy analysis, have reiterated this dominant perspective (Broers 2019; De Waal 2019). Although these contributions offer valuable insights into conflicts in the South Caucasus, they often fail to incorporate elements of social constructivism, such as contextual meanings, historical backgrounds, and the cognitive and emotional dimensions of Russian foreign policy.

Second, scholars who examine the identity dimension of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict often focus on its ethnopolitical roots and their impact on Armenian and Azerbaijani nationhood (Gamaghelyan 2010; Oskanian 2014; Saparov 2014). However, like much scholarship on Russian foreign policy, they overlook the conflict's subjective implications for Russia, which has been involved in the political affairs surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh since the 19th century.

3.2.3. The End of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic

Among several interpretations of Russia's decision not to halt the Azerbaijani offensive in September 2023, some observers (Chawryło and Bartosiewicz 2023; Sabbagh 2023; De Waal 2024) argue that Russia's lack of response to Azerbaijan's actions in Nagorno-Karabakh stemmed primarily from its focus on the war in Ukraine, which left it unable to address other regional issues. Although it is documented that the Russian military's invasion of Ukraine prompted the withdrawal of a significant number of skilled personnel from its peacekeeping forces in Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as from bases in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Armenia (JamsNews 2022), this perspective overlooks earlier and concurrent events that, regardless of the situation on the Ukrainian battlefield, already signaled Moscow's declining commitment to fulfilling its security responsibilities in the region.

For instance, in December 2020, well before the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russian peacekeepers failed to stop Azerbaijani forces from taking control of two villages in Nagorno-Karabakh that were supposedly within their area of responsibility under the terms of the November 2020 trilateral ceasefire agreement (Shahverdyan 2024). In May and November 2021, Azerbaijani troops carried out incursions into Armenia's Syunik and Gegharkunik provinces, despite Yerevan's appeals for intervention from the CSTO (De Waal 2024a). In March 2022, shortly after the war in Ukraine started, Azerbaijani troops moved further into the area that the Russian peacekeeping force was supposed to be in charge of (De Waal 2024a). In March 2022, shortly after the onset of the war in Ukraine, Azerbaijani forces further advanced into the

territory within the area of responsibility designated to the Russian peacekeeping contingent (De Waal 2024). Finally, in December 2022, Baku blocked the Lachin corridor, the only route connecting Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia and the outside world, and Russian peacekeepers either failed to intervene or chose not to reopen it (Shahverdyan 2024). These events show that Moscow had already failed to respond meaningfully to Azerbaijan's renewed assertiveness in Nagorno-Karabakh and against Armenia, even before the full-scale war in Ukraine and right after it.

Other analysts (Broers 2023; Krivosheev 2024; Von Essen and Hedenskog 2025) have argued that Moscow prioritized its relationship with Baku for strategic reasons, including Azerbaijan's importance to Russia's connectivity projects with Iran and India and the need to avoid straining ties with Turkey, Baku's main regional ally. However, this perspective overlooks key implications essential to fully understanding Russia's foreign and security policies in the South Caucasus. First, following Azerbaijan's military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh, relations between Russia and Armenia, traditionally viewed as Moscow's outpost in the region, have sharply deteriorated. Since then, Yerevan has increasingly pivoted toward the West and India to diversify its security partnerships, sought to normalize relations with neighboring Turkey, whose role in regional dynamics has significantly expanded, and signaled its intent to withdraw from the CSTO and reduce the presence of Russian military forces on its territory (Broers 2023; De Waal 2024; Krivosheev 2024; Zanatta 2024).

Azerbaijan's substantial energy resources, its close strategic partnership with Turkey, and its pivotal role in infrastructure projects linking Europe and Central Asia make it a key player for Moscow in the South Caucasus (Broers 2023). However, these same attributes enable Baku to pursue a largely autonomous foreign policy, unlike Armenia, which has remained heavily reliant on Russia for security and economic support. Despite its 2024 application to join BRICS, Azerbaijan has refrained from joining the CSTO and the EAEU, which are widely regarded as instruments the Kremlin uses to secure the alignment of loyal regimes across post-Soviet Eurasia (Frost 2009; Davidzon 2022). Consequently, a comprehensive peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan would likely empower both states to recalibrate their foreign policies, diminishing Russia's influence. This shift would be especially significant because the provisions validating Moscow's role as the essential mediator under the 2020 ceasefire agreement would no longer hold (Fraser 2025).

The second implication concerns Turkey's role. While Russia is becoming

increasingly dependent on Ankara as a regional partner due to economic isolation from sanctions and travel bans imposed by other countries following its invasion of Ukraine, this partnership also poses potential risks to Moscow's position in the South Caucasus (Gürer and Walczak 2024). From a security standpoint, Ankara is a NATO member, has supplied weapons to Ukraine, supported Kyiv's NATO aspirations, and periodically denied Russian warships access to the Bosphorus Straits (Aydin et al. 2022). It is not surprising that the Kremlin has long viewed the potential expansion of NATO influence into the South Caucasus as equivalent to losing a critical strategic buffer (Makarychev 2008; Oskanian 2014).

Furthermore, Turkey's deep cultural ties with the Central Asian republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan), coupled with these states' growing desire to reduce their economic dependence on Russia and China, pose a challenge to Russian foreign policy in yet another area where Moscow has historically sought hegemony (Eldem 2022). From a geo-economic standpoint, these concerns may manifest in competing infrastructure and transport projects. For instance, Turkey's Trans-Caspian "Middle Corridor" initiative, which connects Europe to China via Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan, the Caspian Sea, and the aforementioned Central Asian republics, has gained renewed significance following Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Eldem 2022). Growing interest in this corridor could undermine the viability of Russia's International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), which links Russia to Iran and India through Azerbaijan.

Thus, the events of 2023 have significantly altered the foundations of Moscow's strategy in the region. In re-evaluating the Kremlin's security practices, I contend that its disengagement from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict further highlights the limitations of interest-based explanations, both before and after these developments. To offer a more nuanced contribution to the literature on Russia's role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and, more broadly, in the South Caucasus, this study deliberately moves away from an outcome-oriented approach.

3.3. The Constructivist Turn in Russian Foreign Policy

Scholars typically explain Russian interventions in the post-Soviet space through three mainstream perspectives. A first cluster emphasizes domestic political drivers, arguing that Moscow's assertiveness stems from regime-security concerns, whether through diversionary tactics designed to generate rally-around-the-flag effects (Diamond

et al. 2016; Mandelbaum 2019) or efforts to prevent the spread of democratic models that could destabilize Russia's authoritarian order (Kagan 2018; Person and McFaul 2022). A second group advances geopolitical explanations, viewing Russia's interventions as the predictable behavior of a great power-seeking strategic depth, regional primacy, and insulation from Western encroachment (Mearsheimer 2014; Charap and Colton 2017). Applied to the Caucasus, this perspective stresses the close security interdependence between its northern and southern regions, with developments on either side potentially affecting the other. In particular, the independence of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan from Russian control could provide an attractive precedent for autonomous republics in the North Caucasus with recurring separatist aspirations (Oskanian 2014; Markedonov 2017; De Waal 2019). Therefore, maintaining influence in the South Caucasus is seen as important to Russia's territorial integrity, allowing Moscow to better manage persistent security challenges in the North Caucasus.

Finally, a third set of interpretations highlights ideational influences, focusing either on civilizational or imperial identity narratives that structure what Russian elites see as possible or legitimate, or on status ambitions that tie great-power identity to the maintenance of a regional sphere of influence (Adomeit 1995; Hopf 2002; Mankoff 2009; Zarakol 2011; Cooley 2012; Tsygankov 2014a; Neumann 2015; Grigas 2016; Larson and Shevchenko 2019; Sakwa 2020; Curanović 2021; Narozhna 2021; Kanet and Moulioukova 2022).

In accordance with this final cluster, I analyze the characteristics of Russian foreign policy that the existing literature frequently interprets as manifestations of ontological insecurity. As the next section of this chapter will show, the dissolution of the Soviet Union revitalized a series of interconnected narratives rooted in deeper forms of ontological insecurity. Influential episodes in Russian history have shaped these narratives, including the Mongol conquest, Peter the Great's efforts at westernization, the 1917 Revolution, Stalinist terror, and Gorbachev's final years in office. These narratives continue to resonate, not least because memory practices occupy a central position in Russian political life. Collectively, these narratives establish a foundation for identifying the primary sources of anxiety and the gaps this study aims to address. Fundamentally, these narratives revolve around themes of biographical (dis)continuity, the existential threat of disintegration, self-perceived great power status, and moral subjectivity.

3.3.1. Biographical (dis)Continuity

As Laing and Giddens established, preserving a coherent biographical narrative is

essential for any social actor to attain ontological security. When this coherence is compromised or disturbed, agents may experience feelings of anxiety or shame. The literature defines such moments as critical situations. Although Russia's history offers a wealth of symbolic resources for developing a new national identity, this legacy has consistently been entangled with ideological conflicts and, consequently, risked becoming a point of contention among different political factions during the collapse of the Soviet Union (Malinova 2017, 44).

This explains why, since the start of his first presidential term in 2000, Russian President Vladimir Putin has consistently sought to reinterpret the nation's Tsarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet histories as interconnected and mutually reinforcing elements of a comprehensive, unified national narrative (Laruelle 2009, 155; Wijermars 2018, 7; Sakwa 2020, 3). These efforts have been evident in Putin's discourse across different periods of his presidency. In a speech before the Federal Assembly in December 2012, the Russian president stated:

"In order to revive national consciousness, we need to link historical eras and get back to understanding the simple truth that Russia did not begin in 1917, or even in 1991, but rather, that we have a common, continuous history spanning over one thousand years, and we must rely on it to find inner strength and purpose in our national development" (President of Russia 2012).

Four years later, during his speech to Russian soldiers at the Heroes of the Fatherland Day (День Героев Отечества/Den' Geroyev Otechestva) commemoration, he declared:

"We have equal respect for the defenders of ancient Russia, the Russian Empire, the heroes of 1812, and the Great Patriotic War... We will not forget how our defenders fearlessly risk their lives to fulfill their military duty in Syria" (President of Russia 2016).¹³

Over the past decade, Putin's efforts to consolidate the nation's diverse and sometimes conflicting histories into a cohesive, continuous biographical narrative have largely focused on developments in Ukraine. On 18 March 2014, during Russia's annexation of Crimea, the Russian president addressed both chambers of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, emphasizing the ongoing nature of Russia's historical narrative and the pivotal role of Ukraine within it.

"Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride. This is the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptized. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy laid the foundation for the culture, civilization, and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. The graves of Russian soldiers whose bravery brought Crimea into the Russian Empire are also in

¹³ The heroes of 1812 are the Russian soldiers who fought against Napoleon's troops during the French invasion of Russia.

Crimea. This is also Sevastopol—a legendary city with an outstanding history, a fortress that serves as the birthplace of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet. Crimea is Balaklava and Kerch, Malakhov Kurgan and Sapun Ridge. Each one of these places is dear to our hearts, symbolizing Russian military glory and outstanding valor. Crimea is a unique blend of different peoples’ cultures and traditions. This makes it similar to Russia as a whole, where not a single ethnic group has been lost over the centuries.” (President of Russia 2014).

Seven years later, Putin reaffirmed Ukraine's importance in the Kremlin's historical narrative by publishing his 5,000-word essay, "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians," on the Kremlin's website in July 2021. The document was released shortly after diplomatic tensions with Kyiv escalated, coinciding with a significant Russian deployment of troops and equipment near the Ukrainian border (Reuters 2021).

Spanning from the period of Kyivan Rus’ (a fragmented federation of principalities that existed from the late 9th to the mid-13th century at the crossroads of Byzantium, Lithuania, and the Golden Horde) to the developments following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the essay offers a highly selective and ideologically driven interpretation of more than a thousand years of history. In its conclusion, the Russian president stated:

“I am confident that true sovereignty of Ukraine is possible only in partnership with Russia. Our spiritual, human, and civilizational ties have formed for centuries and have their origins in the same sources; they have been hardened by common trials, achievements, and victories. Our kinship has been transmitted from generation to generation. It is in the hearts and the memory of people living in modern Russia and Ukraine, in the blood ties that unite millions of our families. Together we have always been and will be many times stronger and more successful. For we are one people” (President of Russia 2021).

Thus, by positioning Ukraine as a core part of the country's identity, the Russian president has transformed it into a symbol embodying the collective longing for wholeness while also attempting to address tensions within his country’s autobiographical narrative.

The second narrative that warrants analysis in relation to Russia’s ontological security is the Soviet Union’s victory over Nazi Germany in World War II. This event, known in Russian discourse as the “Great Patriotic War” (Velikaya Otechestvennaya Voyna/Великая Отечественная Война), is commemorated every year on May 9 during “Victory Day” (Den’ Pobedy/День Победы). Putin has defined the latter as “a sacred symbol of loyalty to the Motherland, [and] which lives inside every one of us” (President of Russia 2013).

The war between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany from 1941 to 1945 was the most extensive military confrontation in global history, resulting in the deaths of approximately 27 million Soviet soldiers and civilians (Hoffmann 2021, 1). Given this

immense toll, the conflict's memory has played a prominent role in post-Soviet Russian identity (Gudkov 2005; Hoffmann 2021). Although the Great Patriotic War had long been commemorated in Soviet times through history textbooks, parades, monuments, museums, literature, and films, it emerged as one of the most politically salient aspects of the collective past available to the Kremlin after the Soviet Union's collapse. This was largely possible because of its prior institutionalization, which had transformed it from a mere historical narrative into a site of memory in the sense articulated by Nora (1989), as well as its broadly accepted positive significance within Russian society (Malinova 2017; Wijermars 2018).

Malinova (2017, 65) contends that although both Yeltsin and Putin drew on the victory over Nazi Germany to legitimize their regimes, they invoked the memory of the war in markedly different ways. Yeltsin sought to separate the heroism of the war effort from the Soviet regime's repressive legacy, advancing a narrative of dual victimhood and resistance to both Nazi invasion and Soviet authoritarianism. Putin, by contrast, recast the war as part of an unbroken, triumphant Russian legacy, selectively embracing Soviet achievements while downplaying their more troubling dimensions. As Gudkov (2005) notes, this is precisely why any critical reassessment of the Soviet Union's role in the Great Patriotic War remains taboo for the Kremlin.

The war in Russia is framed as patriotic (*otechestvennaia/отечественная*) rather than global (*mirovaia/мировая*) or common (*obshchaia/общая*). Both Soviet and Russian leaderships have consistently emphasized the exceptional role of Soviet troops in liberating Central and Eastern Europe while downplaying the Western Allies' contributions (Malinova 2017; Kucherenko 2021). Anyone familiar with Russian politics will likely recall Putin's speech at the 18th annual meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club in October 2021, which quickly drew widespread attention on social media and in news outlets.

"Who was it that stormed Berlin? The Americans? The British or the French? It was the Red Army! Have you forgotten?" (President of Russia 2021).

References to the Second World War have become a central theme in Russian official rhetoric regarding the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In fact, since 2014, the Kremlin has revived historical narratives involving Ukrainian pogroms and the torture of Jews after Nazi forces occupied large parts of Ukraine in 1941, during which an estimated 4,000 people were reportedly killed by Ukrainian mobs collaborating with the Germans (Moulioukova and Kanet 2022, 126). This narrative

gained additional traction amid the Maidan protests in Kyiv. While this event was dominated by EU and Ukraine's blue-and-yellow flags, red-and-black flags associated with Ukrainian nationalists also appeared, sparking debate over the role of radical nationalism in the revolution. In this context, the Kremlin transformed the red-and-black flag seen on Maidan Square into a symbol of supposed ongoing Nazi affiliations among Ukrainian protesters, labeling the newly formed Ukrainian government as "neo-Nazis" and accusing it of committing genocide against Russians and other ethnic minorities in Ukraine (Kulyk 2014, 100).

In his March 2014 address to the Russian Parliament, Vladimir Putin framed the events in Ukraine as a coup against the legitimately elected president, orchestrated by "nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes, and anti-Semites." He also noted that:

"The situation in Ukraine has turned out in such a way that we are forced to begin work on returning Crimea to Russia. Because we cannot leave this territory and people there adrift, under the steamroller of nationalists" (President of Russia 2014).

Similarly, during his (in)famous speech that launched the full-scale invasion of Ukraine—referred to by the Russian government as a special military operation (*Spetsial'naya voennaya operatsiya*/Специальная военная операция)—he declared that the invasion's purpose was "to denazify Ukraine."

Just as the narrative of Kyivan Rus' is used to reinforce Ukraine's place within Russia's historical Self, the Soviet Union's fight against Nazism has become a foundational memory that the Kremlin strives to maintain through assertive policies (Edenborg 2017; Ryan 2023). Russia's use of the Great Patriotic War as a foreign-policy instrument has faced growing opposition from rival counter-narratives, particularly those advanced by the Baltic states, Poland, and Ukraine (Malinova 2017; Belavusau 2022). While post-Soviet Russian narratives highlight Soviet military heroism during 1941–45, these countries have focused on earlier or more contentious events—such as the 1939 Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact and the repression of groups labeled as "disloyal" by Stalin in Soviet-liberated territories, including Poles (1939–1941 and 1944–1945), Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians (1941 and 1945–1949), and Crimean Tatars (1944), which has also been a point of contention (Rudling 2021). Therefore, these elements can undermine Russia's sense of ontological security, with assertiveness serving the Kremlin as a means of preserving the coherence of its narratives, in its own view.

3.3.2. The Threat of Disintegration

Throughout the centuries, Russia has experienced nine significant invasions,

including assaults by Sweden, Poland, and France. The most catastrophic event occurred in 1941, when Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union (Sakwa 2020, 24). More recently, in August 2024, amid the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War, the Ukrainian armed forces launched an offensive into Russia's Kursk region and held portions of Russian territory for nearly a year. These events have instilled in the Russian consciousness what Tsygankov (2014a, 6) describes as a "psychological complex of insecurity." Yevgeny Primakov, then Foreign Minister and later Prime Minister, argued that NATO's expansion was "not a military problem, but a psychological one" (Tsygankov 2014, 108).

Throughout his presidency, Putin has repeatedly warned of societal fragmentation in his public addresses. For example, in May 2003, during his annual address to the Federal Assembly, he declared:

"A country like Russia can live and develop within its current borders only if it is a strong power. In all periods of the country's weakening—whether political or economic—the threat of disintegration has always and inevitably arisen before Russia" (President of Russia 2003).

Amid worsening relations with the West and events unfolding in Ukraine, Putin has repeatedly emphasized that Russia's rivals have consistently sought its disintegration. For example, during a working trip to the Republic of Buryatia in March 2023, he said:

For us this [the war in Ukraine] is not a fight to achieve some geopolitical status. For us, it is about a fight for the survival of Russian statehood, because our adversary, or, as I referred to them previously, our partners, have one goal—and we know this from previous decades—which is to destabilize us and pull our country apart. That is the point. So, for us, this is not a geopolitical goal but a matter of survival of Russian statehood and the creation of proper conditions for further development of our country and our children. This is what is at stake for us (Putin 2023).

In highlighting the threat of disintegration, Putin has frequently used the terms "smuta" (смыта) or "smutnye vremena" (смутные времена). These terms are often rendered as "times of trouble." Historically, *смыта* refers to a turbulent period of political upheaval during the foreign occupations by Polish and Lithuanian forces between 1598 and 1612/13 (Coalson 2012; Petersson 2013; Sakwa 2020). Nonetheless, Putin has frequently likened this historical moment to the tumultuous aftermath of the Soviet Union's dissolution (Mjør 2018, 19). Other episodes of *смыта* that Putin has frequently referenced include the fall of Kyivan Rus', the period following the Mongol invasion, and the Bolshevik Revolution.

Another event Putin recently described as *смыта* was the attempted military uprising in June 2023, orchestrated by Yevgeny Prigozhin, the head of the private military company (PMC) "Wagner." In a televised speech to the citizens of Russia, Putin

announced:

Today, Russia is waging a tough struggle for its future, repelling the aggression of neo-Nazis and their patrons [reference to the war in Ukraine]. The entire military, economic and informational machine of the West is directed against us. We are fighting for the lives and security of our people, for our sovereignty and independence, for the right to be and remain Russia, a state with a thousand-year history... Therefore, any actions that split our nation are essentially a betrayal of our people, of our comrades-in-arms who are now fighting at the frontline. This is a knife in the back of our country and our people. A blow like this was dealt to Russia in 1917, when the country was fighting in World War I. But the victory was stolen from it: intrigues, squabbles, and politicking behind the backs of the army and the nation turned into the greatest turmoil, the destruction of the army, the collapse of the state, and the loss of vast territories, ultimately leading to the tragedy of the civil war. Russians were killing Russians, and brothers were killing brothers, while all sorts of political adventurers and foreign forces profited from the situation by tearing the country apart to divide it. We will not allow this to happen again. We will protect our people and our statehood from any threats, including from internal betrayal... Once again, any internal revolt is a deadly threat to our statehood and our nation. It is a blow to Russia, to our people” (President of Russia 2024).

Putin articulated the threat of disintegration through two distinct modalities. The first pertains to the ongoing conflict wherein Russia is engaged in Ukraine. The second involves the use of the term *смыта*, comparing Prigozhin’s attempted coup to the events following the 1917 revolution. This discursive strategy underscores how the Russian President depicts disintegration as a grave and alarming prospect. Consequently, he can portray himself as a resolute leader and Russia as a resilient, cohesive nation, thereby fostering national unity and morale.

The notion of a powerful, centralized "strong state" (*сильное государство/sil'noye gosudarstvo*) is deeply rooted in the autocratic tradition of Tsarist rule (*самодержавие/samoderzhaviye*) mentioned in the preceding section. It remains fundamental to Russia's sense of national identity and honor (Tsygankov 2014, viii). The latter:

“...has been established over the course of millennia. Rooted in Eastern Christianity, it came to include a distinctive concept of spiritual freedom and the ideal of a strong and socially protective state capable of defending its own subjects from abuses at home and threats from abroad” (Tsygankov 2014, 28).

During the Soviet period, the notion of a strong state became a similarly powerful one-party system characterized by a strict monopoly on authority (Kanet and Moulioukova 2022, 14). According to Kotkin (2016), a strong and assertive state, capable and willing to pursue its own interests, has remained the primary guarantor of security for post-Soviet Russia. As Vladimir Putin himself wrote in 2000:

“For Russians a strong state is not an anomaly that should be gotten rid of. Quite the contrary, they see it as a source and guarantor of order and the initiator and main driving force of any change” (Putin

2000).

Putin emphasized the importance of the strong state concept in a December 2015 speech to the Federal Assembly, during which he mentioned the annexation of Crimea. On this occasion, he announced:

“We crossed another milestone in 2014 when Crimea and Sevastopol were reunified with Russia. Russia declared a *voce piena* its status as a strong state with a millennium-long history and great traditions, as a nation consolidated by common values and common goals” (Putin 2015).

3.3.3. Russia as an Unrecognized Great Power

The Kremlin’s self-perception as a great power and its pursuit of equitable, horizontal relations with the West have attracted considerable scholarly attention. Numerous scholars, including Adomeit (1995), Hopf (2002), Mankoff (2009), Zarakol (2011), Tsygankov (2014a), Neumann (2015), Sakwa (2020), Curanović (2021), Narozhna (2021), Kanet and Moulioukova (2022), and many others, have examined these themes. As Neumann observes:

“Russia is stuck in a prison of its own making. The name of that prison is great power identity. Time and again since the fall of the Soviet Union, we have heard Russians state that Russia has to be a great power, or it will be nothing” (Neumann 2015, 5).

From its early interactions with the Holy Roman Empire to greater engagement during and after Peter the Great's reign, and throughout the Soviet period, Russia sought equal recognition from Europe's leading powers and, later, from the United States (Neumann 2015, 128). As the country gradually embraced modernity within an increasingly hierarchical international order, Western recognition became critical to its self-identity. Securing a "rightful" place within contemporary European international society emerged as a top priority for Russian leaders (Narozhna 2021, 65).

According to Zarakol (2011, 10-12), Russia's status as a latecomer to the Western core of the international order led to its frequent labeling as "backward" or "uncivilized," creating a long-standing stigma within the global hierarchy. This stigma has long contributed to Russian elites' ontological insecurity (Zarakol 2011, 17). One notable example is Peter the Great's (1682-1725) Westernizing reforms, which sought to transform Russia from a traditional Orthodox tsardom into a more Europeanized state. Manifestations of Russia's perceived inferiority have resurfaced several times throughout history. A telling example comes from the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin (1922-1952), who once stated:

“The history of the old Russia was the continual beating she suffered because of her backwardness. She was beaten by the Mongol khans. She was beaten by the Turkish beys. She was beaten by the Swedish

feudal lords. She was beaten by the Polish and Lithuanian gentry. She was beaten by the English and French capitalists. She was beaten by the Japanese barons. All beat her—for her backwardness... We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in ten years. Either we do it, or we shall be crushed” (Stalin in Sakwa 2020, 187-88).

In a 2010 interview, then-Russian president Dmitry Medvedev (2008-2012) said:

“We believed that we would be welcomed, that we were all open, modern, no longer threatening anyone, and would quickly and easily integrate into the ranks of other civilized, developed countries. It turned out differently...the West was not fully ready to abandon stereotypes either” (President of Russia 2010).

Frustration and anger over the West's misrecognition have dominated Putin's speeches in recent years. During the televised press conference and public dialogue titled "Results of the Year" (Itogi Goda/Итоги Года) on December 19, 2024, Putin commented on the alleged pro-Western stance of the first president of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin, stating:

“Everything seemed fine; they patted him [Boris Yeltsin], and turned a blind eye when he drank. He was welcome in all Western circles. But as soon as he raised his voice in defence of Yugoslavia, as soon as he said that it violated international law and the UN Charter, as soon as he said that striking Belgrade, the capital of a European country, without UN Security Council approval was unacceptable in modern Europe, they immediately started having a go at him, calling him names, saying he was a drunk, and so on. Do you not remember that?” (Putin 2024).

After the Soviet Union's collapse, three major ideological camps emerged in Russian political discourse, each with a distinct vision for the country's international direction (Jackson 2003, 40-45). Jackson (2003, 45) identifies three groups: liberal Westernizers (Zapadniki/Западники), pragmatic nationalists, and nationalist fundamentalists. Although factions debated the precise meaning of Russia's greatness, they all agreed on one point: Russia was "doomed to be a great power" by virtue of its very identity, as Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev put it (1994, 62). The first post-Soviet Foreign Policy Concept echoed this sentiment, explicitly framing its objectives around securing recognition for the Russian Federation as "a great power with a centuries-long history" (Russian Federation 2005, 27).

With Putin's rise to power, the concept of "great power" (Derzhavnost'/Державность) became more prominent and exclusive in Russian discourse. While the gradual dissolution of the ideological divide between the pre-Soviet and Soviet pasts marked a significant departure from the immediate post-Soviet era, Putin actively sought to restore continuity between these identities, framing them within the logic of great power status (Kanet and Moulioukova 2022, 27). In 2000, in an open letter

to Russian voters, he stated:

“Russia has ceased to be an empire, but it has not wasted its potential as a great power. We no longer dictate to anyone, and we do not keep anyone from leaving us; instead we have the time and resources to devote to ourselves. The new generation has got a great historic chance to build a Russia that it will not be ashamed to pass on to its children” (Putin 2000).

According to Kazharski (2019, 29), Putin and Medvedev used phrases such as "enormous country" (*ogromnaya strana/огромная страна*) and "one-sixth of the Earth's dry land" (*odna shestayaya chast' sushi/одна шестая часть суши*) to instill national pride after the Soviet Union's territorial loss. In 2002, Putin stated, "Russia will be either great or nothing" (*великой или никакой/Velikoy ili nikakoy*) (Samokhvalov 2017, 213).

While the Kremlin has long viewed itself as a great power, it has long perceived the West as failing to recognize this status (Smith 2014, 357). A series of events in the early 2000s reinforced this perception. For example, Moscow viewed the 2003 invasion of Iraq as evidence of Western disregard for its interests, particularly given Bush's decision to invade a country that was once a Soviet client and in which Russia had significant financial stakes, without consulting Putin (Hansen 2004).

Furthermore, NATO's 2004 eastward expansion, which included Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia; the "color revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine in 2003 and 2004; and the ongoing US military presence in Central Asia all contributed to Russia's perception of Western encirclement and disregard for its status as a great power. Putin's (in)famous speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007 centered on the Kremlin's frustration with its inability to establish more balanced relations with the United States, arguing that NATO expansion had nothing to do with modernizing the alliance or enhancing European security.

“On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: against whom this expansion is intended?” (Putin 2007).

Meanwhile, Russia's perception of being misunderstood by the West as a great power fueled what became known as the "conservative turn" in Russian politics. According to Curanović (2021, 100), elite figures now emphasize Russia's unique role in preserving traditional values. These traditional values include marriage as a partnership between a man and a woman, the value of family, religious beliefs, the importance of the state, and patriotism (Trenin 2014). An initial shift toward conservative narratives emerged around 2005-2006, likely in response to the previously mentioned events in Russia-West relations, but a more pronounced shift emerged domestically between 2012 and 2013. This later development coincided with the ruling elite's declining legitimacy amid

widespread protests over alleged election rigging in the State Duma (Laruelle 2015).

The Kremlin's adherence to traditional values became inextricably linked to its opposition to Western influence, framing Russia's identity within a broader context of resistance to Western encroachment (Hansen 2016). In a February 2014 interview with "Kommersant," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated that:

"Moral relativism, the promotion of almost unlimited freedom and hedonism, strengthening the position of militant atheism, the withdrawal from the traditional values which have defined the moral foundations for human development for centuries. Furthermore, all this is promoted with messianic zeal both inside their own country and in relations with their neighbors" (Kommersant 2014).

In 2022, President Putin described the Western value system, which includes diverse family arrangements, acceptance of sexual minorities, and multiple gender identities, as "outright Satanism" (President of Russia 2022). In November of the same year, amid the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the Russian government issued a policy document titled "State policy for the preservation and strengthening of traditional Russian spiritual and moral values" (President of Russia 2022).

As a result, these deeply rooted perceptions of anger and humiliation have become central to Russian self-identity. The Kremlin's attachment to the conflict with the West offers a sense of familiarity and stability. According to ontological security theory, engaging in conflict with a significant Other provides the routines that help an actor maintain a sense of ontological security.

3.3.4. Moral Subjectivity and Cultural Allies

The final dimension of post-Soviet Russia's Self, discussed in this chapter, concerns what I designate as matters of moral subjectivity. The latter signifies the concept that Russia perceives itself as a fundamentally moral force globally, and that the roles it assumes within the international system serve as expressions of its intrinsic need for recognition as a superior moral authority. Understanding this facet is vital to understanding how Russia constructs its pursuit of ontological security, not solely through the desire for recognition in lateral relationships with the West, but also through the necessity of upholding hierarchical or vertical relations with its periphery.

For centuries, Russia operated as a political entity that predated the emergence of European international society, maintaining a social world in which it held the normative authority to set standards and affirming both its own primacy and the perceived superiority of significant others (Narozhna 2021, 65). In the mid-15th century, following the fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Empire, Russia began articulating a vision of itself

as the “Third Rome,” positioning itself as the spiritual heir to the Byzantine Empire and the new global center of Orthodox Christianity (Tsygankov 2014a, 34). In the early 16th century, the monk Philotheus of Pskov wrote a letter to Prince Vasili III declaring that Russia was now responsible for preserving the Christian faith after the fall of Rome in 476 and Constantinople in 1453 (Curanović 2021, 103). As Ryabova and Ryabov (2010, 58) point out, this idea played a key role in masculinizing Russia’s discourse and self-image, shaping its portrayal as both guardian and warrior and reinforcing its enduring sense of honor.

Prominent thinkers, writers, and philosophers expanded on Russia’s image as a Christian and moral power. Among them was the Slavophile philosopher Ivan Kireyevsky, who believed Russia protected Christianity’s true essence and guarded “spiritual Truth” (Neumann 1996, 34-35). Fyodor Stepun shared this conviction, and Fyodor Dostoyevsky famously depicted Russia as a “God-bearing nation,” fated to redeem humanity through its faith and suffering (Romanowski 2013, 86). Eurasianist thinker Konstantin Leontiev saw Russia as the rightful successor to Byzantium’s historical mission (Curanović 2021, 123).

Importantly, Russia’s self-conception was not merely symbolic. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this image served as a powerful political justification for Russia’s repeated military confrontations with the Ottoman Empire. These campaigns were, at least in part, framed as efforts to protect the rights of millions of Christians, who at the time made up more than a third of the Ottoman population (Tsygankov 2014a, 34). Article I of the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774, which marked the end of the Russo-Turkish War of 1768–74, stated that “pardon and amnesty were granted in relation to all Christian subjects within the Ottoman Empire who fought against the Ottomans” (Jakjimovsjka n.d.).

This tradition of framing intervention as a moral obligation did not end with the imperial era; instead, it continues to shape Russia’s self-perception as a moral authority today. Examining Russia’s interventions in Georgia in 2008 and in Crimea in 2014, Reshetnikov (2017, 165) describes the Kremlin’s actions as reflexive practices that reaffirm a stable sense of Self through the language of moral obligation. For example, in May 2014, during a QandA session at the Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum, President Putin stated that had Russia not annexed Crimea, “there would be more casualties there than in Odessa,” referring to the tragic incident at Odesa’s Trade Unions House, where clashes and a fire caused by Ukrainian nationalist paramilitaries resulted in

48 deaths and hundreds of injuries.

Russian officials deliberately invoked the specter of "genocide" against the Ossetian people during the 2008 conflict, portraying the operation as a moral imperative (Reshetnikov 2017). In August 2008, while serving as prime minister, Putin visited a tent hospital housing refugees from South Ossetia. After hearing accounts of atrocities by Georgian troops, he responded, "They have gone totally mad. It is genocide, really" (Toal 2017, 182). In September 2008, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov emphasized that Russia would "responsibly" undertake its "mediation mission in the negotiation process and peacekeeping" efforts in Nagorno-Karabakh, noting that "each place has its specific features, its formats, and mechanisms of mediation" (Allison 2008, 190).

While it might be argued that interventions are merely reflexive acts by which Russia seeks to maintain the coherence of its biographical narrative, I contend that such practices cannot be studied in isolation. Rather, they must be understood in relation to those "Others" who recognize and affirm Russia's moral authority. In this regard, Tsygankov's concept of "cultural allies" is especially valuable, as it shows how external recognition has shaped Russia's sense of moral purpose as central to its pursuit of ontological security, rather than merely a reflexive act.

Cultural allies are nations or communities with which Russia identifies at a given historical moment and toward which it adopts a distinctly paternalistic stance (Tsygankov 2014, 34; Curanović 2021, 135). Russia does not regard cultural allies as equal partners but as kin deserving its protection and care (Curanović 2021, 135). As Obolonsky (2018, 80) observes, this hierarchical perspective on foreign policy traces back to Fyodor Dostoyevsky, who believed only Russia could unite and protect the Slavic peoples and Orthodox nations. According to Tsygankov, the concept of "cultural allies" has never been static but has evolved. As he writes:

"The definition of cultural allies changed over time. In the twentieth century, the ideologically transformed Soviet Russia was no longer committed to defending Christians or Slavs as it had been a century earlier. Instead, the state's international assistance was geared to support the honor of socialism and egalitarian ideology. The Soviet rulers provided financial assistance and political support for communist parties across the world" (Tsygankov 2014, 34).

Today, Tsygankov (2014a, 35) argues that the Russian Federation perceives a similar moral obligation to defend the so-called "Russkiy mir" (Русский мир). According to the Russkiy Mir Foundation (n.d.), established in 2007 under President Putin's leadership, this collective comprises ethnic Russians, non-Russian citizens of the Russian Federation,

the Russian diaspora, individuals fluent in Russian, and those who express concerns about Russia's future. Patriarch Kirill characterized *Russkiy Mir* as a community based on the Orthodox faith, Russian culture and language, a common historical memory, and a model of socio-economic development (Russian Orthodox Church 2009). According to Curanović (2020, 135), following the annexation of Crimea, the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, and the war in Syria, Russian-speaking populations in former Soviet republics and Christians in the Middle East have increasingly come to be seen as part of this extended kinship.

While I adopt Tsygankov's concept of cultural allies as a key reference for understanding the role of significant Others in Russia's quest for ontological security, I find it important to raise two main critiques of how he frames this notion. First, although Tsygankov states that the overarching aim of his book is "to demonstrate change and continuity in Russia's foreign policy as shaped by considerations of state honor" (2014a, 8), he primarily conceptualizes continuity in relation to Russia's engagement with the West, paying comparatively little attention to its ties with cultural allies. In fact, he treats Russia's interactions with post-Soviet countries primarily as outcomes of its broader great-power ambitions, suggesting that horizontal relations determine the nature of vertical ones.

This interpretation underestimates the relations between the Kremlin and the republics that emerged from the remnants of the Soviet Union. These nations, connected to Russia through nearly 270 years of shared political history, faced a critical decision: either to relinquish its imperial legacy in favor of equal, sovereign partnerships or to persist in perceiving the former Soviet space as its inherent sphere of influence.

From the perspective of the Russian leadership, these states were regarded both as separate entities and as extensions of the Russian Self. Vladimir Kazimirov, who served as Ambassador-at-Large and Plenipotentiary Representative of the President of the Russian Federation in the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process from 1992 to 1996, aptly characterized this ambiguous boundary. In his reflections on this conflict, he noted:

"At that point, we were instructed not to view the conflict as 'our own': both Azerbaijan and Armenia had already proclaimed their independence. But it was impossible to treat it as a foreign affair either: both the Azeris and the Armenians were still our own fellow countrymen for us – our own lads were dying! And this later proved to be one of the distinctive features of our peacemaking efforts in Karabakh" (Kazimirov 2014, 25).

The necessity for the Russian leadership to elucidate its ambiguous relations with

these states coincided with the emergence of ethno-territorial conflicts throughout the post-Soviet region—including Azerbaijan, Armenia, Moldova, Georgia, and Tajikistan—and within Russia itself, affecting regions such as Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, and Dagestan. In subsequent years, Moscow has increasingly become involved in these conflicts, successfully mediating ceasefire agreements, strengthening its military presence, and fostering integration mechanisms aimed at incorporating these nations into its sphere of influence.

In this context, the notion of Russia reclaiming its historical role as the region's protector resurfaced. In 1992, Armenian-born Russian political scientist Andranik Migranyan, at that time an adviser to President Boris Yeltsin and a professor at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), contended that “many of these territories [post-Soviet countries] were part of the Russian Empire long before their incorporation into the newly independent states, and therefore, they deserved protection by Russia” (Sagramoso 2000, 37). Even during Russia's brief period of pro-Western foreign policy, in a 1993 speech to the Civic Union Congress, President Yeltsin proclaimed:

“Stopping all armed conflicts on the territory of the former Soviet Union is Russia's vital interest. The world community sees more and more clearly Russia's special responsibility in this difficult undertaking” (Yeltsin 1993 in Toal 2017, 43).

The enduring concept of Russia as a moral authority is firmly embedded in its post-Soviet identity. Although Tsarist imperial practices appeared to diminish by the time of the Soviet Union's dissolution, their continued presence during the Soviet era, even in modified forms, contributed to their deep-rooted integration into the Russian identity. As articulated by Oskanian:

“Russia also saw itself as a defender of a certain kind of instrumentally bounded authenticity for ‘its’ peoples. While the Tsars’ ‘becoming a brother to the conquered’ turned into the Bolsheviks’ ‘brotherhood of peoples’” (Oskanian 2017, 4).

Russia's relationship with its periphery is central to its self-image as a distinct civilization bridging Europe and Asia, as well as to the enduring sense of exceptionalism that has shaped the Russian Self throughout the Tsarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet eras (Layton 1995; Morozov 2015; Oskanian 2017; Curanović 2021). These themes are reflected in the 2023 Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, which, in point 49, states that “Russia, strengthening its position as one of the influential sovereign centers of world development and civilization [needs] to ensure sustainable long-term good-neighborly relations and to combine the strengths in various fields with the CIS

member states, which are connected with Russia by centuries-old traditions of joint statehood, deep interdependence in various fields, a common language and close cultures.” Similarly, point 43.5 highlights the importance of “preserving centuries-old civilizational and spiritual ties between the people of Russia and the peoples of these states.”

Hence, the Russian Self can be argued to be grounded in a proud belief in Russia’s civilizing mission toward its periphery and in its role as the bearer of a dominant order over populations viewed as subordinate to the imperial center (Morozov 2015, 65). Oskanian (2017, 4) similarly notes that this sense of exceptionalism has long justified a hierarchical outlook toward Russia’s eastern periphery, particularly the Caucasus and Central Asia. Tsarist expansion in these regions illustrates the diversity of imperial policies. In the Caucasus, where Christian populations such as Georgians and Armenians were already established, the Russian Empire often pursued protectorate-like relationships with these groups while simultaneously conducting relentless military campaigns against Muslim tribes portrayed as uncivilized and resistant to Russian authority (Layton 1995, 2).

With these premises established, I now revisit the concept of cultural allies and their importance to the Kremlin’s ontological security. Several scholars previously cited interpret Moscow’s decision to engage in armed conflict with Georgia and its subsequent declaration of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states in 2008 primarily as a reaction to a profound sense of humiliation within its relations with the West. Events purported to have influenced this sentiment include the “color revolutions” in Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004), NATO’s enlargement in 2004 to include the Baltic states, Western endorsement of Kosovo’s independence in 2008, and the NATO summit held in Bucharest that same year. During this summit, Ukraine and Georgia were officially considered for prospective NATO membership. Russia consequently issued vehement warnings regarding the political and military repercussions of such expansion (Tsygankov 2014a, 246; Curanović 2021, 228).

Another significant event worthy of consideration is Russia’s justification for its use of force against Georgia in the 2008 war, which it framed as a necessary measure to protect its allies. The Kremlin defended its intervention as an effort to safeguard “compatriots and peacekeepers” in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, citing the widespread issuance of Russian passports to local populations and the presence of Russian peacekeepers in these territories since the early 1990s (Reshetnikov 2017, 173–74).

Russia's use of the language of humanitarian responsibility, grounded in international legal norms such as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), has been interpreted as reflecting its engagement with the West and its need to have its self-ascribed role as a great power recognized (Allison 2008; Mankoff 2009). While I agree with Morozov (2015, 19) that Russia has been integrated into the Eurocentric international order and remains normatively dependent on the West, this sense of responsibility cannot be understood solely as Russia's desire for recognition as an equal. It must also be viewed through the lens of Russia's self-perception as a morally superior force in the region.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that understanding Russia's role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict requires, first and foremost, a clear grasp of the conflict's evolution and of the debates that have shaped its interpretation. The opening sections traced the emergence of the Armenian–Azerbaijani dispute, the dynamics of the three war periods, and the shifting military, diplomatic, and socio-political conditions that defined both interwar phases. This overview was necessary not only to contextualize Russia's involvement but also to clarify the complexity of the environment in which Moscow operated.

The subsequent sections examined how scholars have interpreted Russian practices across these stages, whether as Armenia's ally, Azerbaijan's strategic partner, Turkey's counterpart, the main mediator, or the main weapons supplier. Despite their differences, these accounts share a common reliance on outcome-based explanations. As the chapter demonstrated, this dynamic has limited the literature's ability to analyze how Russia itself perceived the conflict or the deeper reasons behind its persistent ambiguity. It also raises the point that, despite formal alliance commitments, the Kremlin has been anything but a reliable ally for Armenia or Karabakh Armenians, showing once again how the protector image analyzed in the next section is far from historically coherent. Finally, the review of constructivist approaches to Russian foreign policy highlighted the Kremlin's main ontological concerns: biographical continuity, the existential threat of disintegration, great-power identity, and moral subjectivity tied to hierarchical recognition and culturally meaningful allies.

While this final insight illuminates important dimensions of Russian selfhood, it has not been applied to Russia's involvement in Nagorno-Karabakh. Nevertheless, it is precisely this aspect—only that—that lies at the core of my argument: Russia's sense of itself as a morally significant actor is not merely a reflection of its search for horizontal

recognition from the West but is rooted in a vertical, hierarchical conception of honor inherited from its pre-modern imperial identity, in which certain cultural allies, such as Armenia, play a crucial role in affirming Russia's moral standing.

4. METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Having acknowledged that prevailing interpretations of Russia's (dis)engagement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict have been shaped predominantly by outcome-oriented analyses, this study contends that adopting a meaning-centered approach, which investigates how post-Soviet Russia ascribes significance to its security practices in the South Caucasus in relation to its sense of Self, provides a unique contribution to the literature on Russian foreign policy.

To develop this argument, the dissertation brings the concepts of ontological security, collective memory, and honor into conversation, arguing that their intersection, viewed through the prism of a politics of deference toward cultural allies in the region, constitutes an important dimension of post-Soviet Russia's pursuit of a stable and coherent biographical narrative. As discussed in Chapter 2, while these concepts have been widely used to examine Russia's pursuit of horizontal, ostensibly equal relations of recognition with the West, far less attention has been devoted to their role in structuring the Kremlin's vertical relations with its former periphery. By bringing this dimension to the fore, the dissertation draws on Clément et al.'s (2017) hero-protector narrative as a particularly productive analytical framework for tracing the actors, roles, and narrative sequences through which this politics of deference is articulated.

This section outlines the methodological approach and research design used to address the research question introduced in the dissertation's opening chapter. I restate it here: This dissertation explores how Russia navigated anxieties about its self-image as a benevolent protector during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between 2015 and 2024, with particular emphasis on how Russian actors perceived Armenia's (mis)recognition of this role. Addressing this question requires: (1) reconstructing the mnemonic foundations of Russia's biographical narrative; and (2) examining how that narrative was mobilized and adapted in Russian discourse on Armenia during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

These two stages form a single abductive research process in which emotions serve as an interpretive lens that brings collective memory and foreign policy into dialogue. Rather than seeking frequent or explicit invocations of the Tsarist past by Russian actors to legitimize the persistence of an asymmetric security relationship with Armenia, the analysis examines how historically rooted expectations surrounding Russia's self-

ascribed role as a hero-protector and Armenia's corresponding position as both a protected ally and a victim surfaced through emotions in discourse during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The chapter proceeds in three steps. It first situates the analysis within the growing literature on emotions in IR. It then unpacks the emotional dynamics underpinning the hero-protector narrative and situates them within the honor-inflected sociopolitical setting of imperial Russia. Finally, it introduces EDA as the method for tracing these dynamics in the empirical material. The final section presents the research design, outlining its philosophical and methodological foundations, the rationale for selecting actors and sources, the temporal scope of the analysis, and the procedures for data collection, sampling, and coding.

4.1. Social Constructivism and Emotions

In accordance with the theoretical premises delineated in the preceding chapters, this research asserts that post-Soviet Russia relies on the historical legacy of Tsarist–Armenian interactions not as an explicit justification for its current policies, but rather as an implicit interpretive framework through which it constructs a politics of deference toward Armenia and, in doing so, seeks ontological security. Given the distance of this historical memory, frequent or explicit references to the Tsarist era are unlikely to be identified. Instead, the focus is on how this memory is embedded within recurrent discursive patterns that influence Russia's self-representations and its portrayal of Armenia. Specifically, the analysis concentrates on the emotional dynamics through which the expectations of recognition associated with these roles are perpetuated within official and semi-official discourse.

Emotions occupy a central place in this study insofar as they mediate the relationship among the theoretical concepts developed in Chapter 2. While ontological security is intrinsically bound up with anxiety, honor and deference are not emotions themselves but moral values whose political significance is expressed through emotion. Existing scholarship suggests that honor and deference are most closely associated with compassion and anger (Mosquera 2022), the two emotions at the heart of the hero-protector narrative. At the same time, these emotions sustain and reinforce the moral hierarchies of values and beliefs through which political action is rendered meaningful (Mercer 1996). The politics of deference can thus be understood as a relationship constituted through emotional hierarchies, in which historically sedimented narratives

shape whose emotions are regarded as worthy of, in Gustafsson and Hall's (2021, 976) words, "consideration, respect, and priority."

Matsumoto (2009, 179) defines emotions as "a transient, neurophysiological response to a stimulus that excites a coordinated system of bodily and mental responses that inform us about our relationship to the stimulus and prepare us to deal with it in some way." In everyday language, people often conflate emotion with affect, though the two are analytically distinct. Affect refers to pre-reflective bodily sensations that precede or exceed conscious awareness and cognitive representation (Clément et al. 2017; Koschut 2020). It encompasses transient embodied states, including moods, intuitions, dispositions, and other subconscious bodily responses. Emotions, by contrast, arise from the social and cultural interpretation of these embodied sensations (Hutchison 2016). They involve attributing meaning to bodily experience, rendering it intelligible in relation to particular actors, objects, or situations.

While Matsumoto's definition captures the physiological and individual dimensions of emotion, it accords less attention to its sociocultural and collective character. From a social constructivist perspective, emotions not only arise through social interpretation but also shape and reflect shared understandings of values, norms, and ideals (Crawford 2014). Accordingly, Mercer (2014, 216) offers a broader definition of emotion as the "subjective experience of some diffuse physiological change...a feeling that has intrinsic importance to an actor in some relationship with an entity." This conception also brings to the fore emotion's constitutive relationship with identity. As Mercer (2014) argues, emotions invest identities with significance and foster attachment to them, while identity, in turn, provides the basis for collective emotions.

Building on this understanding, Halperin (2011) conceptualizes emotions as directed toward specific objects and comprising four interrelated components: (1) the perception of a stimulus; (2) the appraisal of its significance; (3) the corresponding physiological experience; and (4) the action tendencies it generates. Crucially, such appraisals are mediated not merely by objective events but by social norms, cultural meanings, and accumulated experience. These appraisals constitute evaluative judgments through which actors make sense of particular objects or situations, while action tendencies are the behavioral orientations that arise from these evaluations (Halperin 2011).

Of Halperin's four components, appraisals and action tendencies are especially relevant to this study's methodological purposes. Unlike physiological experiences, which remain inaccessible to textual analysis, appraisals and action tendencies can be

discerned in language and discourse. Appraisals reveal how actors evaluate and attribute meaning to their relationships with others, while action tendencies indicate the behavioral orientations associated with those evaluations.

Before turning to the methodological considerations involved in the study of emotions and introducing the method employed to analyze them, it is necessary to situate the two emotions at the core of the hero-protector narrative, compassion and anger, within the Russian sociocultural context. Doing so establishes the meanings through which these emotions find expression in the Russian Self and the appraisals and action tendencies associated with them, enabling their subsequent interpretation in the empirical material.

4.1.1. Compassion

Clément et al. (2017, 4) identify “compassion for suffering victims” as one of the two principal emotional resources through which the hero-protector narrative is mobilized. Compassion arises from the perception that another actor is suffering undeservedly and lacks the capacity to alleviate that suffering. Therefore, those who become objects of compassion are portrayed as innocent and vulnerable, and their inability to escape their predicament renders them legitimate recipients of the protection offered by a more powerful actor (Ahmed 2004).

Like emotion and affect, compassion is often conflated in everyday language with two other terms: empathy and sympathy. Empathy denotes the capacity to understand another person's emotional or psychological experience without necessarily sharing or evaluating it. Sympathy goes beyond understanding by involving an affective response to another's condition while maintaining a distinction between Self and Other (Breyer 2020, 7–9). By contrast, compassion is inherently moral insofar as it is directed toward undeserved suffering and combines emotional concern with a motivation to alleviate it. It is thus both Other-oriented and action-oriented (Breyer 2020, 9–13).

These distinctions are even more clearly reflected in the Russian emotional lexicon. Three concepts are especially relevant in this regard: *sočuvstvie* (сочувствие), *sostradanie* (сострадание), and *sopereživanie* (сопереживание). All three share the prefix “so” (co), which conveys the notion of shared experience or joint participation (Vinogradov 1960). As Gladkova's (2010) cross-linguistic analysis demonstrates, *sočuvstvie*, conventionally translated as sympathy, and *sostradanie*, commonly rendered as compassion, both imply a closer emotional connection between the experiencer and the sufferer than their English counterparts. They combine recognition of another's suffering with affective co-experiencing and a benevolent orientation toward the sufferer.

The distinctive meanings of compassion in the Russian language and sociopolitical context cannot be fully understood without reference to the Christian tradition. Within that tradition, compassion lies at the heart of the believer's relationship with God, with Jesus Christ serving as its principal exemplar and mediator (Steenbergh and Ibbet 2021, 5). One of its clearest expressions appears in the Gospel of Luke, in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37 | Carson 2012).

In the parable, a Jewish traveler is assaulted and robbed by the roadside. A priest and a Levite pass by without offering assistance, whereas a Samaritan, despite belonging to a community traditionally regarded as hostile to the Jews, stops to care for the injured man (Ure and Frost 2013, 6). Compassion, in this sense, finds expression in charity, understood as the practical enactment of love through the alleviation of another's suffering (Garber 2004, 19–20).

While scholars such as Nussbaum (2001), Monroe (2006), and Linklater (2007) argue that compassion can foster democratic solidarity and expand the boundaries of moral responsibility, others highlight its more ambivalent political consequences. In fact, compassion may reinforce victimhood, legitimize paternalistic and hierarchical relationships between the helper and the sufferer, generate compassion fatigue, and become entangled with other morally problematic emotions, including anger (Boltanski 1999; Crisp 2008).

In this sense, the Christian understanding of charity also contains an important element of ambiguity. Because compassion is exercised by those in a position to assist those in need, it often establishes an asymmetrical relationship between the giver and the recipient. As Lampert (2005, xiv) observes, compassion has historically been paternalistic, flowing from the strong to the weak and, in doing so, denying the latter equal moral agency. Those who receive charity may consequently experience embarrassment or shame, as the very act of receiving assistance underscores their dependence and subordinate position within a broader social hierarchy (Frederick and Goddard 2008; Aptekar 2015).

The paternalistic logic underpinning Christian compassion also extended to conceptions of political authority. Monarchs who ruled by divine right were regarded as God's representatives on earth and were expected to embody divine mercy in their relations with their subjects (Garber 2004, 20). In Russia, this ideal was institutionalized through the close relationship between the state and the Orthodox Church, in which the religious duty to alleviate suffering became intertwined with broader projects of political

and social order (Caldwell 2010, 332–33).

During the Muscovite period and the early Russian Empire, the Orthodox Church collaborated with authorities to promote religious conversion and consolidate a unified political and religious order, making charitable activity a key component of state-building (Khodarkovsky 1996). By the nineteenth century, this relationship increasingly took shape through organized philanthropy, as Orthodox charitable activity focused on poverty relief and care for the poor through institutions such as poorhouses and work-relief programs (Lindenmeyr 1996; Kaiser 1998). This development broadened the understanding of charity as both a moral duty and a path to personal salvation, encouraging believers to regard compassionate assistance to those in need as a central expression of Christian piety (Lindenmeyr 1996; Kenworthy 2008).

As these practices became increasingly prevalent in daily life, compassion also began to occupy a prominent position within Russia's popular consciousness, emerging as a recurrent theme within Russian literature and philosophy. For instance, in *The Idiot*, Dostoevsky articulated that “compassion is the most important and perhaps the sole law of existence for all mankind” (1869| Avsey 2022, 275). Similarly, Lev Tolstoy observed that “authentic compassion commences only when one places oneself in the position of those who suffer, thereby experiencing genuine suffering” (Sekirin 1997, 375). Likewise, Nikolai Berdyaev contended in *Spirit and Reality* that “man is a being who suffers and is compassionate, who is sensitive to pity, and in these ways affirms the dignity of human nature” (Lampert 1913|2018, 56).

Finally, the association between political authority and compassion also shaped retrospective representations of Russia's imperial past. A paradigmatic example appears in post-Soviet Orthodox portrayals of Nicholas II. As Rousselet and Agadjanian (2011) observe, hagiographies present the last Tsar as a compassionate Christian ruler who continually strove to alleviate his people's suffering, while emphasizing his meekness, goodness, modesty, simplicity, and closeness to his subjects.

4.1.2. Anger

Alongside compassion, Clément et al. (2017, 4) identify anger as the second principal emotional resource through which the hero-protector narrative is mobilized. Halperin (2016, 52) conceptualizes anger as “a negative feeling evoked in response to a perceived negative event that frustrates a desired goal and is intensified when the event is caused by a specific agent and viewed as unjust or illegitimate.” Unlike hatred, which attributes an inherently evil and immutable nature to its target, anger focuses on specific actions

perceived as unjust, unfair, or norm-violating. Whereas hatred condemns what a group is, anger condemns what a group does (Fischer et al. 2018).

Because it is rooted in perceptions of injustice, anger is a particularly powerful catalyst for political action. It mobilizes individuals and groups to act on behalf of those perceived as suffering and to direct moral outrage toward those held responsible for that suffering and the practices that perpetuate it (Faulkner 2013). For this reason, scholars have long regarded anger as a moral emotion (Thompson 2006, 127).

This characteristic is especially clear in the Russian emotional lexicon. As Wierzbicka (1998) argues, the Russian noun “*gnev*” (гнев), conventionally translated as anger, differs semantically from its English counterpart because it presupposes not merely that harm has occurred but that such harm constitutes a violation of fundamental moral principles. In this respect, “*gnev*” more closely resembles the English notion of wrath, conveying righteous moral condemnation rather than mere personal irritation.

Anger should also be distinguished from shame, which, as discussed in the theoretical chapter, plays a central role in both ontological security and honor. Whereas anger arises from the perception of being wronged by another (Averill 1982), shame is a self-conscious emotion elicited by the perception of violating important moral or social standards or of appearing inferior in the eyes of others (Tangney 1992). The two emotions have different behavioral implications. Because anger attributes responsibility for wrongdoing to an external agent, it generates a desire to confront or punish the perceived offender. This punitive orientation may be expressed through a variety of responses, including verbal or physical aggression, confrontation, displaced aggression, or other actions intended to redress perceived injustice (Averill 1982).

At the same time, anger is not elicited solely by experiences of injustice. It may also arise when valued identities are threatened or when actors perceive themselves to have been denied the respect to which they believe they are entitled (Tajfel 1978; Stets and Burke 2000; Miller 2001). As a response to perceived harm, unfair treatment, or misrecognition, anger communicates concern for status and social standing (Rosen 2005). Because respect affirms an actor's identity and position within a social hierarchy, anger often reflects an attempt to defend a status perceived as unjustly challenged (Wolf 2011).

The relationship between anger and status assumes particular significance in the Russian socio-cultural context. Constructivist scholarship on Russian foreign policy has consistently shown that Russia's post-Cold War anger stems from the belief that the West has denied it the recognition and status it considers its due as a great power (Tsygankov

2012; Larson and Shevchenko 2019; Curanović 2021). Nonetheless, this literature says comparatively little about the historical traditions through which status and hierarchy came to matter so much in the political cultures of Muscovy and the Russian Empire.

Kollmann's (2016) study of Muscovite honor shows that institutions protecting honor emerged in response to profound social change and intensifying competition for social position. In this context, insults were never merely personal offenses. They challenged an individual's publicly recognized standing and, by extension, the hierarchical order in which that standing was embedded. Responding to an affront was not simply to vindicate one's personal dignity but also to reaffirm one's rightful place in society. This logic was reflected in legal practices, where compensation for dishonor was calibrated by social rank, simultaneously restoring individual reputation and reinforcing existing hierarchies (Kollmann 2016, 52–53, 248–50).

These dynamics did not disappear with the emergence of the Romanov Dynasty. As Morrissey (2003) demonstrates, nineteenth-century Russia remained organized around deeply hierarchical and patriarchal relationships linking rulers and subjects, landlords and serfs, and fathers and households. Within such a social order, challenges to one's recognized position inevitably carried a strong emotional charge. Therefore, anger was not simply a reaction to personal offense but a response to perceived threats to honor.

4.2. Emotions in IR and Discourse

Emotions have become an increasingly important focus of inquiry in IR (Campbell 1992; Hansen 2006; Sasley 2011; Hall 2015; Koschut 2020; Gustafsson and Hall 2021; Koschut and Ross 2026), reflecting a growing recognition of their analytical value for understanding the relationship between collective identity and foreign policy.

A significant strand of this scholarship examines emotions through discourse, understood as the “framings of meaning and lenses of interpretation” through which political reality is rendered intelligible (Hansen 2006, 7). From this perspective, emotions are not merely articulated through discourse. They also provide political actors with interpretive resources for apprehending the social world and orienting their engagement with it. As Hutchison and Bleiker (2017) argue, emotions thereby help constitute identities, power relations, and status hierarchies. This understanding resonates with Foucault's (2003) conception of discourse as delimiting what may legitimately be articulated and represented.

Building on these insights, Gustafsson and Hall (2021) distinguish between two

broad approaches to studying emotions in IR. The first, which they term political emotion, examines how emotional responses, affective states, and lived experiences shape international political processes and decision-making (Gustafsson and Hall 2021, 974). Drawing primarily on psychology and neuroscience, this literature investigates how the physiological, experiential, and cognitive dimensions of emotion influence actors' preferences, beliefs, motivations, and behavior (Mercer 2005). Emotions are therefore treated as causally consequential, either as independent forces or as intervening variables that shape political outcomes.

By contrast, the second approach, which Gustafsson and Hall (2021, 974) label emotional politics, shifts attention from emotional experience to how emotions are invoked, constructed, and mobilized through discourse and symbolic representation. This perspective encompasses studies of emotional performances that construct particular political images (Hall 2015) and analyses of how political actors mobilize emotions such as fear, anxiety, or uncertainty to generate support and legitimize political action (Kinnvall 2004). Rather than asking how emotions influence politics, this body of scholarship examines how emotions themselves become objects of political contestation and strategic mobilization.

The second approach is particularly relevant to the present study. Scholarship on ontological security has shown how emotional meanings shape actors' experiences of ontological (in)security and translate into foreign policy practices (Rumelili and Togay 2025). Research on collective memory likewise shows that emotions and historical narratives are mutually constitutive: emotions shape representations of the past while those narratives constitute and reproduce them (Subotić and Zarakol 2020). Across both literatures, scholars argue that emotions are best understood not as private psychological states but as socially meaningful phenomena articulated, negotiated, and reproduced through discourse.

4.2.1. Emotion Discourse Analysis

Research at the intersection of discourse and emotion can be broadly divided into two strands: discourse on emotions and emotion discourse (Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990; Koschut 2018). The former concerns “the way emotions are talked about scientifically or in everyday parlay. It defines the way we ontologically and epistemologically conceive of emotions as being rational/irrational, biological/cultural, personal/social, or spontaneous/strategic” (Koschut 2018, 277). The latter refers to “how actors talk about emotions and how they employ emotion categories when talking about subjects, events

or social relations” (Koschut 2018, 277).

Building on this second strand, EDA starts from the premise that discourse is never emotionally neutral but inherently contains emotional content or produces emotional effects (Edwards 1997, 170). Its objective is to “empirically show what the emotions built into discourse actually do in terms of, for example, revelation of the speaker's motives and attitudes, recognition of audience reception and responses, construction of power relationships and hierarchies, or stimulating certain performances and behavior” (Koschut 2018, 281).

Accordingly, EDA examines how foreign policy stakeholders mobilize emotions and emotional categories in representing subjects, events, and social relationships. Emotional language may serve strategic functions by attributing praise or blame, legitimizing particular courses of action, or reinforcing social hierarchies through contrasting emotional registers (Koschut 2022, 168). At the same time, such emotional expressions cannot be regarded as purely strategic. Instead, they rest on values, historical experiences, and collective memories ingrained in actors' self-identities.

The political significance of emotions is closely tied to questions of power. As Koschut (2017) argues, emotions and power are mutually constitutive, with power shaping what can be expressed and emotional expressions both reflecting and reproducing existing power relations. Likewise, emotional language encourages actors to adopt particular beliefs, values, and roles, thereby reinforcing norms of power and authority (Ahmed 2004). Rather than establishing causal relationships, EDA explores what emotional expressions reveal about the construction of identities, hierarchies, and power relations within discourse (Foucault 1972; Laclau 2004; Koschut 2020).

EDA proceeds in three stages: 1) selecting relevant texts; 2) mapping their emotional content; and 3) interpreting how emotional expressions shape discourse's meaning and sociopolitical effects (Koschut 2018).

The first stage of EDA involves constructing a corpus of texts suitable for emotional analysis (Koschut 2018, 281). Because emotions are expressed differently across textual genres, Koschut (2018; 2020; 2022) encourages including diverse sources, ranging from official statements and legal documents to autobiographies, media articles, and cultural materials. Whereas personal or artistic texts often express emotions explicitly, formal documents tend to convey them through more indirect or technically neutral language (Koschut 2018, 281). Therefore, combining different genres enables the capture of a broader range of emotional expressions and the reconstruction of the emotional dynamics

underlying political discourse.

Although the specific actors included in the corpus are identified and justified later in this chapter, it is important to note that the decision to examine both official and semi-official actors reflects this methodological consideration. Examining different articulations of the hero–protector narrative across these sources captures the diverse emotional registers through which it is reproduced, ranging from the more restrained and institutionalized language of official communication to the more explicit and emotionally charged formulations that characterize semi-official discourse.

The selection of texts should also account for their intertextual and temporal dimensions. Emotionally salient texts frequently emerge during crises or other transformative moments, when emotional expressions become more visible and may serve as discursive reference points or "landmarks" (Koschut 2018, 282; Laclau and Mouffe 1985). At the same time, emotional meanings cannot be understood in isolation, as they are continuously reproduced, adapted, and contested across interconnected texts (Der Derian et al. 1989). Accordingly, this study examines how the hero–protector narrative was reproduced not only across actors and textual genres but also across periods of escalation and relative stability in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between 2015 and 2024. This temporal periodization allows examination of how both moments of crisis and periods of relative stability reinforced and/or challenged the discursive construction of Russia's hero–protector role.

The second stage of EDA focuses on identifying the emotional potential of selected texts by distinguishing between their descriptive and emotional meanings (Koschut 2018, 283). To this end, Koschut (2022) distinguishes between explicit and implicit emotional expressions. Explicit emotions are signaled by direct references to emotion categories, including nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs denoting emotions such as anger, compassion, pride, shame, fear, or gratitude. Implicit emotions, by contrast, are signaled by emotionally charged connotations, evaluative language, metaphors, historical analogies, and representations of Self and Other. In addition, Koschut attends to linguistic markers that amplify or mitigate emotional intensity, as well as to instances in which emotionally loaded meanings are obscured by more neutral or sanitized formulations.

In this study, both explicit and implicit emotional expressions are analytically relevant for tracing Russia's politics of deference. Explicit references to emotions such as compassion and anger reveal how Russia responds to perceived challenges to the hero–protector narrative. Implicit emotional meanings, particularly those embedded in

historical analogies to the Tsarist–Armenian encounter, make it possible to reconstruct the hero–protector narrative through which Russia's politics of deference was articulated.

The final stage interprets emotional expressions within their broader discursive and political context to assess their sociopolitical effects (Koschut 2018, 285). In developing EDA, Koschut argues that the emotionalizing effects of discourse can be examined through a range of discursive practices, including emotional othering, stigmatization, naming and shaming, intertextuality, performativity, interpellation, and emotional narratives (Koschut 2018, 2022). Emotional othering focuses on how emotional language constructs and differentiates the Other by establishing chains of connotations that attach particular emotional meanings to specific actors, identities, or ideas (Koschut 2018).

Stigmatization, by contrast, stems from the perception of moral transgression. It creates emotional distance between the transgressor and those who condemn them, transforming their relationship into one of exclusion and separation (Koschut 2020, 11). The stigmatized actor is cast as morally deviant and positioned outside the international community's accepted norms. Through naming and shaming, actors are publicly held accountable for violating these norms, reflecting the assumption that they are unlikely to change their behavior without external pressure (Zarakol 2011; Adler-Nissen 2014).

Other categories capture different ways discourse constitutes emotions. Intertextuality highlights how emotional meanings circulate across texts and are reinforced through interconnected texts, while performativity emphasizes the strategic enactment of emotional subjectivities through language. Interpellation is the process by which individuals come to identify with emotionally charged subject positions constituted by ideology (Koschut 2022, 174). Finally, emotional narratives examine how political actors employ storytelling to interpret and communicate emotional experiences, encouraging collective action by framing it as a moral imperative embedded in compelling narratives (Steele 2008; Inayatullah and Dauphinee 2016).

4.3. Research Design

Ragin (1994, 191) defines research design as a plan for collecting and analyzing evidence that enables researchers to address their research questions effectively. It encompasses the full course of inquiry, from decisions about data collection to selecting appropriate analysis methods. As Yanow (2004) observes, the rise of interpretivism has complicated the traditional binary division of social science methods into quantitative and qualitative approaches, giving rise instead to a threefold distinction between quantitative-

positivist, qualitative-positivist, and qualitative-interpretive methodologies. Adopting the latter has important implications for the design of the present study, requiring choices attuned to how the Russian Self is articulated and reproduced through discourse. Accordingly, the following sections set out the approach to theory development, research strategy, case selection, data collection, temporal scope, and coding process through which the politics of deference was rendered amenable to empirical analysis.

4.3.1. Contextualization

My inquiry into the Russian Self is guided by the interpretivist premise that understanding a phenomenon requires examining what it does and how particular people use and make sense of it in specific contexts (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012, 23). Unlike positivist approaches, which view the social world as an objective reality independent of the observer and assume that it can, in principle, be fully understood (Della Porta and Keating 2013, 23), interpretivism shifts the focus from generalization to contextualization (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2012, 47).

Rather than seeking universally applicable findings, interpretive research aims to develop contextually grounded understandings of social phenomena. Consequently, it places the responsibility for assessing whether findings apply to other settings on the reader rather than the researcher. As Yanow (2014) argues, the data of interpretive research are not the people, events, conversations, settings, actions, or documents themselves, but the researcher's interpretations of these phenomena, as recorded in field notes and analytical materials (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2012, 47).

In this study, the hero-protector narrative is understood as a mnemonic manifestation of the Russian Self, rooted in interactions between the Russian Empire and Armenians from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century and, crucially, in how Tsarist authorities represented those interactions and endowed them with meaning. Accordingly, the findings of this dissertation should be understood as contextually grounded rather than as broadly generalizable to Russian foreign policy or to theories of states' ontological security.

At the same time, the symbolic and mnemonic significance of the South Caucasus in Russian collective memory, which this dissertation highlights, naturally raises questions about the exclusion of two other regional actors: Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This omission is particularly noteworthy given the protector-like rhetoric that has figured prominently in Russian political discourse during conflicts involving these territories and Georgia, especially in the context of Russian military intervention. Nevertheless, both

cases follow distinct historical trajectories that would have required separate historical reconstructions and thus fall beyond the scope of this dissertation.

The case of Abkhazia illustrates these complexities particularly well. In the aftermath of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, Tsarist authorities accused the Abkhaz population of collaborating with the Ottoman Empire and subsequently subjected them to large-scale forced deportations, known as “mahajirism” (Bgazhba and Lakoba 2007, 236–40). This experience produced a markedly more ambivalent relationship with Russian imperial rule than in the Armenian case, thereby complicating the dynamics underpinning the hero-protector narrative examined in this dissertation.

I acknowledge that limiting the analysis to the Armenian case narrows the dissertation's comparative scope. A systematic comparison with Abkhazia and South Ossetia would undoubtedly enrich our understanding of the conditions under which the hero-protector narrative emerges and the extent to which it travels across different contexts. Nevertheless, this methodological choice aligns with the interpretivist objective of producing a contextually rich account of how the Russian Self has been constituted through a particular historical relationship, rather than identifying a generalizable pattern across cases. Therefore, the transferability of these findings depends on the reader's assessment of their relevance to other empirical settings. I regard the omission of these cases as a limitation of the present study and intend to address it in future research by expanding the comparative scope of this project as I revise the dissertation into a monograph following the completion of my PhD.

4.3.2. Abduction

Another important feature of a coherent research design is the alignment between the approach to theory development and the philosophical assumptions underpinning the study. A central consideration is whether research primarily tests existing theory, generates theory from empirical observations, or moves iteratively between theoretical and empirical insights (Saunders et al. 2019, 152). These orientations are conventionally associated with three modes of reasoning: deduction, induction, and abduction.

Deductive reasoning proceeds from theory to empirical observation. Researchers begin with an existing theoretical proposition, often drawn from the relevant literature, and devise a research strategy to test it empirically (Saunders et al. 2019, 153). Blaikie (2010) characterizes deduction as a sequential process rooted in the positivist tradition, in which theoretical premises about relationships between concepts or variables are translated into testable propositions. Researchers then examine these propositions against

systematically collected evidence to assess whether the empirical findings corroborate, challenge, or require modification of the initial theoretical expectations.

Inductive reasoning reverses this direction of inquiry. Rather than beginning with theoretical propositions to test, researchers collect and examine empirical material to identify patterns from which they may develop broader conceptual or theoretical propositions (Saunders et al. 2019, 153). Therefore, induction entails an inferential movement from particular observations toward more general claims. Such conclusions are supported, rather than logically guaranteed, by the available evidence, and their plausibility depends on the strength of that evidentiary foundation (Ketokivi and Mantere 2010).

Abductive reasoning, by contrast, neither proceeds exclusively from theory to data nor from data to theory. It entails an iterative movement between the two, through which theoretical understandings enter into conversation with empirical observations and are progressively reconsidered in light of one another (Suddaby 2006; Saunders et al. 2019, 153). Abduction typically begins with a puzzle, anomaly, or otherwise surprising observation and seeks to render it intelligible by identifying the conditions under which it ceases to appear anomalous (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2012, 27). Accordingly, abductive inquiry is better conceived as circular or spiral than linear, involving repeated movement among theoretical propositions, empirical material, and emerging interpretations (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2012).

The theory-development approach adopted in this dissertation follows this abductive logic. The study neither tests a predetermined theory of Russian behavior nor seeks to generate an entirely new theoretical framework from the empirical material. Rather, it moves iteratively between existing theoretical concepts and the meanings encountered in the historical and contemporary material. Ontological security, honor, and collective memory provide established conceptual resources for studying Russian foreign policy. At the same time, the hero-protector narrative offers a framework within the broader IR literature for exploring their intersection.

4.3.3. Ethnography

Research strategy is the overarching plan through which a research question is addressed, providing a methodological bridge between a study's philosophical foundations and the methods used for data collection and analysis (Denzin and Lincoln 2018).

In considering the strategy most appropriate to the research question, I focus on

approaches primarily associated with qualitative inquiry. One such approach is the case study, which entails an in-depth empirical examination of one or a small number of phenomena to understand their particular configurations and, potentially, illuminate a broader class of related phenomena through developing and assessing theoretical explanations (Ragin 2000). A case, in this sense, refers to a phenomenon or event that is selected, conceptualized, and empirically examined as an instance of a broader category of comparable phenomena or events (Yin 1994; George and Bennett 2005; Vennesson 2008).

A second strategy is grounded theory, which Strauss and Corbin (1998, 12) define as “theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process,” in which data collection, analysis, and theory remain closely related. Its defining characteristics are developing theory from empirical material and its iterative or recursive character, whereby data collection and analysis proceed concurrently and are repeatedly revisited (Bryman 2012, 387).

Finally, ethnography is a research strategy traditionally characterized by sustained immersion in a social setting, through which the researcher observes practices, listens to interactions, and engages with participants in order to apprehend the meanings through which they experience their social world (Bryman 2012, 711). Historically associated with anthropological encounters with societies under colonial rule, ethnography also bears an important and problematic relationship to imperial knowledge production and administration (Saunders et al. 2019, 199). Contemporary ethnographic research encompasses different epistemological orientations. Whereas realist ethnography aspires to relatively objective accounts of social reality, interpretive ethnography foregrounds the plurality of situated meanings and the researcher’s reflexive engagement with them. Critical ethnography, in turn, focuses on relations of power and the possibilities of social transformation (Saunders et al. 2019, 200).

To develop a contextualized, meaning-centered understanding of the Russian Self and the politics of deference toward Armenia during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, this dissertation adopts a research strategy that draws most closely on the interpretive tradition of ethnography. While it does not constitute ethnography in the conventional sense of sustained participant observation within a contemporary social setting, it adopts an ethnographic sensibility grounded in a close, immersive reading of historiographical accounts of Russian imperial policy in the Caucasus alongside the contemporary discourse through which historical narratives are articulated and reproduced. In doing so,

I sought to recover not only the meanings attached to the Russian imperial past, but also the emotional investments through which contemporary political actors interpret that past and mobilize it in relation to Armenia.

As an ethnographer, I immersed myself in the mnemonic and symbolic world through which Russia's relationship with Armenia is rendered meaningful, developing the contextual sensitivity needed to understand the hero-protector narrative during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Rather than observing social practices directly, I approached historical narratives as an interpretive "field" through which I could reconstruct expectations of deference underpinning Russia's pursuit of ontological security.

4.3.4. Time Horizon

A key consideration for any researcher when designing a study is whether the research should serve as a "snapshot" of a specific moment or resemble a diary composed of a sequence of snapshots that capture developments over time (Saunders et al. 2019, 2012). This choice also largely depends on the research question. The "snapshot" approach is known as "cross-sectional", while the diary-like perspective that tracks changes over time is called "longitudinal" (Saunders et al. 2019, 212).

At first glance, my research question might suggest a longitudinal analysis. However, I focused on three pivotal junctures in the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict, each representing a moment of major escalation or transformation. I chose a cross-sectional approach because these junctures mark key ontological turning points that either reinforced, challenged, or reshaped Russia's self-perception as Armenia's protector and security guarantor in the South Caucasus.

The first is the Four-Day War of April 2016, a brief yet intense confrontation that tested the limits of Russian mediation and its credibility as Armenia's ally. The second is the 44-day war of 2020, a full-scale conflict that resulted in Armenia's decisive defeat and exposed the fragility of Russia's diplomatic and military stance. The third is Azerbaijan's military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023, which led to the final collapse of Armenian control over the region and directly undermined Russia's standing as a security guarantor. Each of these critical junctures comprises moments of escalation surrounded by earlier and subsequent events in which Russia's role in the Armenian-Azerbaijani dispute was articulated and negotiated.

By focusing on these three moments, I hoped to examine how the hero-protector narrative was produced, narrated, and transformed across contexts, especially in those in which the Armenian side increasingly questioned Russia's role as a protector. Variations

in discourse may involve shifts in terminology as well as changes in the underlying functions of these narratives. Such variations tend to become most apparent at critical turning points, where Russia's role as a protector is most acutely contested.

4.3.5 Data Collection

Similarly, in pursuing my inquiry on the Russian Self, I aimed to generate what Weldes (2014, 233) describes as "high data". The latter are "official or semiofficial sources circulating among elites and from elites to various publics" (Weldes 2014, 233). I did so because, even before collecting my data, I expected various discursive texts to offer distinct takes on Russia's role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, thereby strengthening the credibility of my empirical analysis. On one hand, I expected that official texts could reflect the state's canonical self-representation. At the same time, semi-official channels amplify the affective register and reveal more explicit demands for Armenian recognition of the hero-protector narrative. Although the next section provides a detailed description of my target population and the reasons for its selection, this clarification contextualizes and justifies the data collection methods used in this dissertation. Common qualitative and quantitative techniques include structured, semi-structured, or open interviews, surveys, document analysis, and field observation (Gray 2008, 129).

While I recognized that field observation and surveys did not directly align with my research objectives, interviews would have provided an interesting way to collect additional data and triangulate my analysis of Russian discourse. Therefore, at the initial stage of my PhD, I considered approaching actors within semi-official discourse for interviews as a potentially more accessible alternative. However, several factors led me to conclude that such an approach would be difficult to pursue effectively. Beyond these actors' likely reluctance to participate in academic interviews, as suggested by the scarcity of relevant scholarship on such interactions, my own positionality was an important methodological consideration. Conducting research on Russian political discourse in the context of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine meant that access to these actors could not be separated from the broader political environment in which the research was undertaken.

This consideration is especially relevant to interpretivist inquiry, in which data are not merely collected from an external social reality but are generated and interpreted through the researcher's situated engagement with the research context (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2014, xxi). From this perspective, my position could not be regarded as

neutral or external to a potential interview setting. Rather, my nationality, institutional affiliation, and location within European academia shaped the conditions under which I negotiated access and produced interview data.

More specifically, my position as an Italian doctoral researcher affiliated with a Hungarian university could have influenced how prospective participants interpreted both my research and my intentions. In the increasingly polarized political environment surrounding Russia–Europe relations, these characteristics might have led some actors to approach an interview request with suspicion or to associate me with a broader European political and academic milieu they already mistrusted. At the same time, attempting to establish direct contact with individuals associated with Russian semi-official discourse in the context of the ongoing conflict could have raised questions within European academic circles. Therefore, my decision not to pursue interviews was not solely based on practical feasibility but also guided by a reflective assessment of how my positionality and the broader geopolitical landscape might have influenced the research relationship and, consequently, the data generated.

Finally, document analysis is a systematic process for reviewing and interpreting both printed and digital materials. It involves examining various types of data to uncover meaning, deepen understanding, and build empirical knowledge (Strauss and Corbin 1998; Bowen 2009). Documents include texts recorded without direct researcher intervention, such as advertisements, agendas, attendance sheets, meeting minutes, manuals, background documents, books, brochures, diaries, journals, event programs like printed outlines, letters, memos, maps, charts, newspapers, press releases, project proposals, application forms, summaries, scripts for radio and television programs, organizational reports, survey data, and other public records (Bowen 2009, 27). The process entails locating, selecting, evaluating, and synthesizing the information in these materials to make sense of it (Labuschagne 2003).

While some of the sources I am examining, especially at the official level, fit this definition of documents, most sources from semi-official discourse do not. I am particularly interested in gathering texts, spoken language, or other communicative forms that can be analyzed to understand how Russian actors use the hero-protector narrative to construct meaning around their security practices concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Armenia. However, what matters most in this document analysis technique is a systematic approach to collecting data and capturing the relevant context surrounding these sources. Based on the accessible data sources, in my case, digital internet resources,

and considering the extent of data that can be analyzed within the scope of the research project, a variety of empirical data can be collected while adhering to certain key considerations (Reisigl and Wodak 2006, 38). According to Reisigl and Wodak (2006, 38), these include focusing on specific political units and relevant time periods linked to significant discursive events related to the topic.

Following this systematic collection process, I worked as follows. I conducted targeted keyword searches in Russian across official government websites, state press agencies, and semi-official Telegram media channels. Initial keywords included “Armenia” (Армения/Armenia), “Nagorno-Karabakh” (Нагорный Карабах/Nagorny-Karabakh), “Pashinyan” (Пашинян/Pashinyan). To do so, I restricted my searches to the three critical junctures mentioned above (2015–2018, 2020–2022, 2023–2024), ensuring each period included a balanced mix of official, semi-official, and Armenian/diaspora voices.

Initially, I obtained a large number of texts, most of which were not directly relevant to tracing the hero-protector narrative. However, guided by the understanding that my research is grounded in the theoretical connection among ontological security, honor, and collective memory, I searched for historically related expressions associated with the protector image, such as “history” (история/istoriya), “common history” (общая история/obshchaya istoriya), “genocide” (геноцид/genotsid), “Russian Empire” (Российская Империя/Rossiyskaya Imperiya), and “First World War” (Первая мировая война/Pervaya mirovaya voyna). Additionally, I supplemented this corpus with excerpts from talk shows, primarily on the Russia-1 TV channel, where many semi-official sources are invited to discuss political issues. These shows are accessible online, often via VPN, which made it straightforward to include them in the corpus.

Overall, I compiled a corpus of about 75 primary texts produced between 2015 and 2024. These texts encompass both official Russian discourse, such as presidential press conferences, Ministry of Foreign Affairs statements, and government websites, and semi-official discourse, including pro-Kremlin media outlets, talk shows, Telegram channels, and interventions by prominent Russian-Armenian figures.

4.3.6. Sample and Population

It is now essential to identify the universe of units from which the sample was drawn, namely the population, and to justify the method used to select the segment of the population for investigation, namely the sampling technique (Bryman 2012, 187). According to Saunders et al., sampling depends on factors such as research objectives,

the desired level of generalizability, and available resources (Saunders et al. 2019, 319). Given the qualitative interpretive research design, non-probability sampling techniques are appropriate. Nevertheless, these techniques manifest in various forms.

Convenience sampling, also called availability sampling, involves selecting cases based solely on their easy accessibility or convenience. While convenience sampling is commonly employed, it is susceptible to various biases and external influences that are difficult to control (Saunders et al. 2019, 319). Purposive sampling uses the researcher's judgment to choose cases that best address the research questions and achieve the objectives. Therefore, they should carefully consider how their decisions to include or exclude certain cases may affect their research. This approach is often used with very small samples, such as in case study research, or when selecting particularly insightful cases (Saunders et al. 2019, 323).

Quota sampling is a non-random method often used as an alternative to probability sampling in internet- or interviewer-administered surveys. It assumes the sample will accurately reflect the target population because the variability of key variables within the sample matches that of the population (Baker et al. 2019). Snowball sampling is a technique where participants voluntarily choose to take part in the research rather than being selected by the researcher. It is frequently used when it is challenging to locate members of the target population (Lee 2000).

After reviewing these techniques, I relied on the fact that, for my research objectives, it was essential to select sources and actors that offered profound insights into the discursive and political dynamics under investigation, while remaining faithful to the interpretive nature of my research. Hence, I did not aim to encompass every voice or achieve statistical representativeness of the Russian Self, but rather to focus on statements with the most explicit and influential emphasis in constructing the hero-protector narrative.

Unlike quota sampling, I did not attempt to evenly cover different groups because official discourse tends to produce fewer but more authoritative texts. At the same time, semi-official sources often generate more emotionally intense material. This choice was not simply about convenience either. Although plenty of commentary on Armenia is available online within the Russian media landscape, only a small number of actors consistently commented on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and explicitly stated their views. Finally, snowball sampling was not appropriate here because I did not rely on personal networks. Instead, purposive sampling helped me build a collection of sources

that reflects not the entire range of Russian opinions, but the voices that carry the most symbolic and institutional influence in the politics of deference.

Since my primary goal was to generate high-quality data, the first category of Russian actors I focused on for my text selection was the so-called “elite tier.” According to Pan and Korolev (2021, 121), a biographical narrative based on official statements and speeches reveals how the state perceives itself and the image it aims to project. This includes official state actors such as President Vladimir Putin and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ Sergey Lavrov, as well as their respective spokespersons, Dmitry Peskov and Mariya Zakharova. These materials are publicly available on the ministries’ official websites and are frequently cited by major news agencies such as TASS, RIA Novosti, and Interfax.

I selected figures within semi-official discourse based on three primary criteria. The first was consistency, meaning they regularly commented on Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. My extensive engagement with Russian public debates on these topics helped me identify the key figures and institutions that consistently express their views on this issue. The second criterion was visibility and amplification, as their Telegram channels, newspaper columns, and television appearances reach wide audiences and are often rebroadcast by official media outlets. The third criterion was institutional embeddedness; although the state may not directly control their personal platforms, they frequently participate in initiatives led by state broadcasters. These actors are analytically significant because they serve as intermediaries who translate official discourse into emotionally resonant narratives, dramatize themes of victimhood and protection, and thereby reinforce Russia’s protector identity beyond formal state statements.

The first level I focused on to identify additional actors within Russian semi-official discourse was the state-controlled media landscape. The Kremlin wields powerful tools to shape and disseminate its narratives, primarily through the strategic use of media outlets (Hinck et al. 2021, 84). Domestically, the Russian government has largely succeeded in persuading its population to adopt and internalize its interpretations of international affairs (Pupcenoks and Seltzer 2021). Moreover, Hinck et al. (2021, 88) highlight the importance of Russian media in shaping narratives of autobiographical continuity, which reinforce Moscow’s ontological security both internally and externally. For this reason, analyzing the narratives generated within Russia’s broadcast and information spaces is crucial.

In this context, this study investigated the discursive outputs of prominent figures

such as Margarita Simonyan, Editor-in-Chief of RT, and Vladimir Solovyov. Their content is accessible via their official Telegram channels and through their regular appearances on state television talk shows and programs. Notably, “Evening with Vladimir Solovyov” (Вечер с Владимиром Соловьёвым/*Vecheer s Vladimirom Solovyovym*) ranks among the most widely watched programs in the country. Additional sources included speeches delivered by Duma politicians who actively voiced their opinions regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. These encompassed Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, who led the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (Либерально-демократическая партия России/*Liberalno-demokraticeskaya partiya Rossii*) until his passing in 2022, and Konstantin Zatulin, First Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee on Post-Soviet Affairs and Eurasian Integration. Both consistently provided commentary on Russia’s role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The second significant layer of analysis drew on data from a broader population within Telegram communication. Farbman (2023) highlights the platform’s importance, noting that even Russian television, long a cornerstone of the Kremlin’s propaganda apparatus, has increasingly adopted narratives that initially circulated on Telegram. Following the events in Ukraine in 2014 and the subsequent bans on numerous Russian media outlets across Europe, many of these outlets began using Telegram to distribute their content. Like other authoritarian regimes, Russian authorities have recognized the importance of digital media in shaping public opinion (Fedor and Fredheim 2017). Telegram’s significance has grown further as platforms such as YouTube, long central to Russia’s online culture, face substantial disruptions. Since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, bans on US-based social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have left no major competitors to fill this gap (Statista 2025). Alyukov (2021, 401) describes this environment as a “hybrid media system,” in which the government seeks to coordinate reporting across broadcast and digital media.

Four prominent military bloggers, known in Russian as *voenkory* (военкоры), were identified as particularly relevant to my corpus: Semyon Pegov, who writes under the alias War Gonzo; Boris Rozhin, known as Colonel Cassad; Rostislav Zhuravlyov; and Aleksandr Kots, who maintains his own Telegram channel and also contributes to the tabloid *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. These individuals are not only highly popular within the Russian information space, owing to their large subscriber bases, but they also extensively covered the conflict and frequently expressed strong sympathies for the Armenian side in the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute. For instance, journalists such as Semyon Pegov,

popularly known as WarGonzo, and Aleksandr Kots were particularly active during the 2020 war; they traveled to Nagorno-Karabakh while it was still under Armenian control and consistently voiced compassion and support for the Armenian cause.

In both layers, some Armenian commentators were also considered noteworthy. Relying on their Armenian roots and a substantial Armenian audience, they endorsed the Kremlin's foreign policy and recognized Russia's protective role, with direct implications for the stability of the hero-protector narrative. Following the events of September 2023, Arayik Harutyunyan, head of the Armenian Prime Minister's office, posed a provocative question in a Facebook post: "How is it that the most vile propagandists of Russian TV channels are Armenians?" (The Insider 2023). He was referring to prominent Russian media personalities of Armenian origin who enjoy significant popularity in Russia and have actively promoted pro-Russian perspectives on Russian-Armenian relations.

Among these figures is Margarita Simonyan, the editor-in-chief of RT, who has openly criticized Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan since 2020 for his handling of Nagorno-Karabakh and his attitude towards Russia (Kolstø and Blakkisrud 2021). Another key figure is Tigran Keosayan, a filmmaker, actor, and television host, who was married to Simonyan until his death in September 2025. Both were banned from entering Armenia on the grounds of being "agents from different countries with Armenian surnames who exhibit a disrespectful attitude towards Armenia" (Avetisyan 2025).

Additionally, Roman Babayan and Semyon Bagdasarov should be mentioned. The first is a journalist and reporter, host of the program "Your Truth" (Svoya Pravda/Своя Правда) on the NTV channel, and a member of the Moscow City Duma (Moscow City Duma n.d.). He also serves on the Commission for Informational Support of the State National Policy within the Council under the President of the Russian Federation, which focuses on inter-ethnic relations (Moscow City Duma n.d.). The second worked in the Ministry for Commonwealth of Independent States' (CIS) Affairs and served as an assistant to the chairman of the CIS Interstate Economic Committee (Parlamentskaya Gazeta n.d.). In 2016, both Bagdasarov and Babayan campaigned for the Russian State Duma and received an endorsement from the Armenian Presidential administration under Serzh Sargsyan (Mejlumyan 2018). Both came to the attention of the Azerbaijani authorities for visiting Nagorno-Karabakh when it was still under Armenian control (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Azerbaijani Republic n.d.). Like Keosayan and Simonyan, they have been vocal critics of Armenia's Pashinyan government.

4.3.7. Analysis and Coding

This dissertation follows a two-stage research process guided by an abductive logic of inquiry. The first stage reconstructs Russia's autobiographical narrative through an iterative dialogue between historical scholarship on Tsarist Russian policies toward Armenians and the theoretical concepts of ontological security, collective memory, and honor. This dialogue is guided by the hero-protector narrative, which provides the analytical framework for identifying the roles and sequences that underpin the politics of deference.

In particular, this stage looks beyond contemporary Russian-Armenian relations to examine the mnemonic foundations of Russia's self-representation as a heroic protector. These foundations trace back to the imperial period, when Russia was portrayed as the protector of Armenians, who were in turn portrayed as a vulnerable and victimized community. This framing generated corresponding expectations of deference from Armenians and, when those expectations were not met, contributed to periods of alienation between the two sides and, most importantly for the study of the hero-protector narrative, to shifts in their narrative characterization.

To trace these dynamics, I rely primarily on secondary historiographical scholarship. Particular weight is given to Ronald Grigor Suny's *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (1993) and Stephen Badalyan Riegg's *Russia's Entangled Embrace: The Tsarist Empire and the Armenians, 1801–1914* (2020). These accounts are complemented by works from other historians, including George Bournoutian, Viktor Shnirelman, Richard G. Hovannisian, Firouzeh Mostashari, and Muriel Atkin. While meticulously chronicling Russia's conquest of the Caucasus and its conflicts with the Ottoman and Persian Empires, these sources also offer valuable insights into how Tsarist authorities perceived these populations and how they were incorporated into Russian society and political structures.

The second stage examines how this narrative was mobilized and adapted in Russian discourse on Armenia during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from 2015 to 2024. Here, the analysis moves from the mnemonic foundations of the hero-protector narrative to its contemporary articulation, focusing on how Russian official and semi-official actors portrayed their country's and Armenia's respective roles and articulated expectations of deference tied to the Kremlin's self-ascribed role as a benevolent protector.

I collected and analyzed all materials in their original Russian. Having studied the language for several years, I worked directly with Russian-language sources and

translated only the excerpts selected for inclusion in the dissertation after the analysis was complete. This is especially important when studying emotions, whose meanings are often deeply embedded in particular cultural and linguistic contexts and may resist straightforward translation. Koschut (2022, 172), for example, points to culturally specific emotion terms such as the German *Schadenfreude* and the Japanese *amae*, neither of which can be fully conveyed through direct lexical equivalence.

I conducted all coding manually, in keeping with the study's interpretive orientation. This allowed me to attend closely to contextual, metaphorical, and relational features of emotional language that would have been difficult to capture through automated procedures. The corpus comprised official and semi-official Russian discourse, including speeches, interviews, media articles, and Telegram posts. I read each text repeatedly and annotated it along two interconnected dimensions, with a thematic layer concerned with how the four roles of the hero-protector narrative were discursively enacted and an emotional layer concerned with the affective cues through which these roles were constituted, connected, and differentiated.

The thematic layer drew directly on the hero-protector narrative framework. Its four narrative roles served as sensitizing analytical categories, each associated with recurrent expressions and motifs in the Russian-language material. Indicative expressions of the hero-protector role included terms such as protector (защитник/*zashchitnik*), savior (спаситель/*spasitel'*), peacekeeper (мироотворец/*mirotvorets*), duty (долг/*dolg*), honor (честь/*chest'*), mission (миссия/*missiya*), and responsibility (ответственность/*otvetstvennost'*), as well as verbs such as to save (спасти/*spasti*) and to defend (защищать/*zashchishchat'*). Markers associated with the victim role included innocent (невинный/*nevinnyy*), suffering (страдание/*stradanie*), victim (жертва/*zhertva*), helpless (беспомощный/*bespomoshchnyy*), brotherly people (братский народ/*bratskiy narod*), and loyal (верный/*vernyy*). The aggressor role was identified through expressions such as aggressor (агрессор/*agressor*), provocation (провокация/*provokatsiya*), enemy (враг/*vrag*), fear (страх/*strakh*), and deception (обман/*obman*). Finally, recurring cues associated with the coward role included failure (провал/*proval*), betrayal (предательство/*predatel'stvo*), treachery (коварство/*kovarstvo*), cowardice (трусость/*trusost'*), ingratitude (неблагодарность/*neblagodarnost'*), and lack of will (безволие/*bezvolie*).

Within and across these thematic categories, I applied the three EDA steps outlined above. I first identified the linguistic, rhetorical, and metaphorical cues through which

emotions were expressed or attributed to different narrative actors, paying particular attention to shifts between compassion and anger while remaining receptive to other emotions emerging from the material. I treated these shifts as potential ontological turns, that is, moments when Russian actors felt compelled to navigate the anxiety generated by challenges to established biographical narratives. Subsequently, I examined the appraisals underlying these emotional expressions by considering toward whom or what each emotion was directed and how Russian actors positioned themselves and others through these appraisals.

Finally, I considered the action tendencies associated with these appraisals and what they revealed about the relationships among the different narrative roles. Through this process, I traced how the politics of deference was reproduced in contemporary Russian discourse and how it shifted when Russian actors perceived challenges to their ontological security.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological architecture underpinning the dissertation, showing how its philosophical assumptions, theoretical orientation, and empirical procedures cohere into a unified research design. Anchored in an interpretivist philosophy and guided by an abductive logic of inquiry, the study treats Russia's self-representation as a hero-protector as a process of meaning-making rooted in collective memory and a historically informed sense of honor, with its relevance to contemporary foreign policy discernible through emotions. Overall, this stance allows the study to move beyond outcome-oriented accounts of Russian (dis)engagement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and to examine how Russian actors understood their country's relationship with Armenia and the expectations of deference attached to its self-ascribed role as a historical benevolent protector.

The research design operationalizes this approach as a two-stage process. The first stage reconstructs the mnemonic foundations of the hero-protector narrative through an abductive dialogue between historiographical scholarship on Tsarist–Armenian relations and the concepts of ontological security, collective memory, and honor. In doing so, it identifies the roles, meanings, and expectations through which representations of Russia as a protector and of Armenians as a protected and victimized community became intertwined. The second stage brings this mnemonic repertoire into dialogue with contemporary Russian discourse, examining how the hero-protector narrative was

mobilized and adapted during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between 2015 and 2024.

Selecting three temporal junctures provides the contextual depth needed to trace these dynamics across successive crises. Rather than presupposing a linear transformation of Russia's protector self-image, this temporal structure enables the analysis to examine how the roles attributed to Russia, Armenia, and other actors were articulated and renegotiated as their relationship evolved.

The chapter also detailed how the population and sample were delimited in accordance with the study's interpretivist orientation. The relevant population encompassed the broader field of official and semi-official Russian discourse concerning Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. At the same time, purposive sampling enabled the construction of a corpus comprising the actors and texts best positioned to illuminate the construction and circulation of the hero-protector narrative across the selected temporal junctures.

Finally, the material was analyzed manually along two interconnected dimensions. Thematic coding provided a sensitizing framework for identifying the four roles of the hero-protector narrative, while EDA illuminated the emotional dynamics through which these roles acquired relational meaning. By moving from emotional expressions to underlying appraisals and associated action tendencies, EDA enabled discernment of the hierarchies and expectations of recognition and deference embedded in Russian discourse.

5. THE MNEMONIC FOUNDATIONS OF THE HERO-PROTECTOR NARRATIVE

Introduction

Having established the theoretical and methodological foundations for examining Russia's pursuit of ontological security, this chapter turns to Armenia's place in Russia's collective memory. More specifically, it examines how the roles and sequences of the hero-protector narrative took shape within the Russian Empire's imperial imaginary between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, and how elements of this narrative persisted through the Soviet period.

From the Russian Empire through the Soviet Union to the present-day Russian Federation, Russia has maintained a steadfast relationship with Armenia and its people. In the 19th century, Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovsky, a trailblazer of Russian Romanticism of Armenian descent, and Armenian General Mikhail Loris-Melikov, celebrated for his contributions during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, exemplify this connection. As we progress into the 20th century, the notable contributions of Anastas and Artem Mikoyan to Soviet politics and aviation emerge. In the post-Soviet era, Russia's foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, whose father was of Georgian-Armenian descent, epitomizes the Russo-Armenian legacy.¹⁴

Contemporary evidence of historical interaction between Russia and Armenia appears in the numerous landmarks that adorn both nations. During a visit to Saint Petersburg, visitors can see the white-and-blue façade of the Armenian Church of Saint Catherine, built in 1780 at the behest of Armenian financier Ivan Lazarev, amid the magnificent architecture of Nevsky Prospekt. Alongside Armenian churches, numerous prominent Russian cities have witnessed the establishment of memorials and khachkars honoring the victims of the Armenian Genocide.^{15 16}

At the same time, Armenia hosts numerous locations and institutions with Russian

¹⁴ Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Armenians made up the largest minority in Georgia. Since then, their numbers have declined, although they still reside in Georgia's capital, Tbilisi, in the breakaway republic of Abkhazia, and in the rural Samtskhe-Javakheti region near the Armenian border (Baluveld and Berglund 2016).

¹⁵ Khackar (խաչքար) is an outdoor stele sculpted from stone by artisans in Armenia and the Armenian diaspora.

¹⁶ The Armenian genocide, referred to in Armenian as “great evil” (Mets Yeghern/Մեծ եղին), refers to the systematic extermination of Armenian Christians living in the Ottoman Empire from 1915 to the fall of 1916. This event is pivotal to Armenian political identity and will be referenced multiple times throughout the dissertation.

nomenclature, including the Moscow Cinema, the Stanislavski Russian Drama Theatre, the Russian-Armenian University, and the Pushkin School. A statue of the Russian writer and diplomat Aleksandr Griboyedov, instrumental in the Russian Empire's expansion into the South Caucasus, is located on Tigran Mets Street in Yerevan, Armenia's capital. Adjacent to the Noy Wine Factory, a plaque commemorates the inaugural performance of his renowned comedy, “Woe from Wit” (Gore ot uma/Горе от ума 1833).

An even more prominent symbol of this connection is a nearly 5-meter-tall statue crafted from white-gray granite, illustrating two women bowing their heads in reverence to a cross while vigilantly standing guard over it. The monument's pedestal bears an inscription in Armenian and Russian: "The enduring friendship between the Armenian and Russian peoples is blessed." This statue inevitably evokes Russia as a protector, tracing back to the historical memory of the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries.



Figure 2: Monument "The centuries-old friendship between the Armenian and Russian peoples is blessed" in Central Yerevan. (Source: Visit Yerevan)

As Nora (1989) reminds us, memory constitutes a bond with the eternal present. In this sense, the Russo-Armenian encounter, and the meanings Tsarist authorities attributed to it, provide an important basis for understanding how the Kremlin would later interpret this relationship. The chapter therefore begins with the post-Soviet context, examining how the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict contributed to the consolidation of an asymmetric relationship in which Armenia became increasingly dependent on Russia across multiple domains. It then turns to the longer historical trajectory of Russo-Armenian relations, asking how this post-Soviet asymmetry can be understood not simply as the outcome of a particular configuration of material constraints, but also as assuming a narrative form

rooted in a more distant past. This historical repertoire provided the Kremlin with a familiar template structured around the dichotomy of protector and protected, through which it could interpret and reproduce the relationship while sustaining a sense of ontological security.

In this second section, I use historiographical accounts selectively, not primarily for context but for analysis. These accounts enable me to reconstruct perceptions and representations that constitute the mnemonic foundations of what I have designated as the politics of deference, along with its thematic coding, which serve as the analytical underpinning for the subsequent chapter. Building on the preceding section's discussion of compassion and anger as central emotions within the hero-protector narrative, and their articulation within the honor-based context of Imperial Russia, this analysis examines how these emotional dynamics were embodied in Tsarist representations of Armenians.

5.1. The Anatomy of an Asymmetric Alliance

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's relations with countries in the South Caucasus have shifted. Unlike Georgia and Azerbaijan, which have sought closer ties with the US, the EU, and Turkey, Armenia was the only country in the region that maintained a stable and relatively positive relationship with Moscow throughout *most* of this period. Russia is widely seen as playing a unique role in shaping Armenia's foreign and security policy, while Armenia holds a significant position in Russia's South Caucasus policy (Minasyan 2013, 1).

Officially, Armenia has adopted a foreign policy of "complementarism," which aims to sustain national security and foster the development of the Caucasian republic by balancing its strategic partnerships with Russia while promoting diverse political, economic, and cultural engagements with the EU and the US (Atanesyan et al. 2023, 261). However, even as Yerevan's discourse has positioned the West as its civilizational choice and normative ally, these sentiments have often been overshadowed by the more strategically significant relationship with Moscow (Papazian 2006; Mirzoyan 2010; Terzyan 2018). Officially, Russia and Armenia "have close allied relations marked by frequent bilateral visits at the high and highest levels" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia 2025).

The "strategic partnership" between the two nations was solidified through Yerevan's membership in the CSTO since 2002 and the EAEU since 2015 (Suchkov 2018, 316). These organizations are traditionally viewed as foreign-policy instruments the Kremlin

uses to secure the alignment of loyal regimes in post-Soviet Eurasia (Frost 2009; Cornell 2017; Davidzon 2022). Mirzoyan (2010, 38) writes that “close partnership with Moscow seemed so organic among ordinary Armenians that some even called to join the Russia-Belarus union.” For this reason, some observers defined Armenia as Russia’s “prime geopolitical beacon” (Suchkov 2018, 316) or “outpost” (Minasyan 2013, 1) in the South Caucasus.

Overall, the literature converges on the view that Armenia's decision to participate in Russia-led organizations is closely tied to the Kremlin's role during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Terzyan 2018; Abushov 2019; Broers 2019; De Waal 2019; Çakmak and Özşahin 2023). On the one hand, Moscow provided Yerevan with crucial weapon systems to maintain a military balance against Azerbaijan (Abushov 2019). On the other hand, Russia served as the primary mediator in the conflict, both unilaterally and through the OSCE Minsk Group (Abushov 2019; De Waal 2019). Furthermore, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict significantly shaped Armenia's perceptions of its allies and adversaries. While Azerbaijan and Turkey were unmistakably considered enemies, the need to counter their hostilities and safeguard national security led Yerevan to view Russia as a crucial security ally (Terzyan 2018, 6).

A central argument in the literature holds that Russian-Armenian relations constitute an asymmetric alliance, with Yerevan serving as Moscow's subordinate partner rather than an equal counterpart (Çakmak and Özşahin 2023, 975). In return, Armenia aligns with Russia to advance its global and regional objectives. For example, in 2019, Armenia assisted Russia in its military operation in Syria by sending a humanitarian mission to Aleppo (Ter-Matevosyan and Mkrtchyan 2021, 211). In January 2022, at the CSTO's request, Armenian authorities deployed troops to help suppress anti-government protests in Kazakhstan (OC Media 2022). In February 2022, shortly after the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Armenia was the sole member of the Council of Europe to support the Kremlin's delegation by voting against its suspension from the organization (OC Media 2022). In March, Yerevan, along with 35 other countries, abstained during the United Nations (UN) General Assembly emergency session that considered a resolution condemning Russia's military action in Ukraine (Asbarez 2022).

In this context, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict emerged as a significant instrument of influence at Russia's disposal. On the one hand, it constrained Armenia's foreign policy, particularly when Yerevan sought to free itself from Moscow's dominant influence (Abushov 2019, 83). On the other hand, it enabled Moscow to establish a strong economic

foothold and a military presence in the Caucasian republic (Terzyan 2018; Broers 2019; De Waal 2019).

A notable increase in both scholarly and non-scholarly contributions on the implications of this asymmetric alliance has emerged due to significant political changes in Armenia following the 2018 "Velvet Revolution" that brought Nikol Pashinyan to power (Abushov 2019; Terzyan 2023), as well as the geopolitical shifts in the South Caucasus after the 2020 Second Karabakh War (Broers 2023; Atanesyan et al. 2024; Landgraf and Seferyan 2024).

Since then, relations between Armenia and Russia have gradually deteriorated. A September 2023 poll by Russia's Levada Center found that Russians' positive feelings about Armenia have fallen from 79% in 2016 to 53% over the past seven years. At the same time, a March 2024 survey by the International Republican Institute (IRI) in Armenia found that 66% of the Armenian population views Russia as a threat to their country's security and political stability.

The Kremlin's inaction during the Azerbaijani military incursions into Armenian territory in 2021 and 2022, despite its security commitments to Yerevan, was particularly consequential. Additionally, the inability of Russian peacekeepers to prevent Azerbaijan's decisive offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023 marked a turning point for Armenian society.

In light of these events, the Armenian government has reevaluated its relationship with Moscow and sought to strengthen ties with the EU and the US (Broers 2023; De Waal 2024a). In early 2023, the EU increased its presence in the South Caucasus by engaging the region's Special Representative and, at Armenia's request, deploying a civil monitoring mission along the Armenian-Azerbaijani border (De Waal 2024). In September 2023, one week before the Azerbaijani military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh, US and Armenian forces conducted the "Eagle Partner" joint military exercise near Yerevan (Landgraf and Seferyan 2024). During the same period, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan stated in an interview that the country's heavy reliance on Russian security assistance had been a "strategic mistake" (Steinmann 2023).

At a press conference in February 2024, he also announced that Armenia would suspend its participation in the CSTO (OC Media 2024). After this decision, Yerevan opted out of the organization's military exercises, summits, and funding contributions, aiming to exit the alliance altogether eventually. Meanwhile, Pashinyan also claimed, without naming them directly, that both Russia and Belarus had supported Azerbaijan's

efforts to regain control of Nagorno-Karabakh (Avetisyan 2025). In September 2024, Armenian authorities accused Russia of plotting an armed coup to seize power in Armenia through the “Arbat” Battalion (Hambardzumyan 2024). The term "Arbat" is a diminutive of "Armenian Battalion" (Armyanskij Batal'on/Армянский батальон) and refers to an operational unit composed of soldiers of Armenian and Nagorno-Karabakh origin who have fought alongside Russian forces in Ukraine while operating under the Armenian flag (Hambardzumyan 2024). In June 2023, the unit formalized an agreement with the Russian Ministry of Defense following a ceremonial establishment at the Armenian Apostolic Church in Moscow. During this event, the "Arbat" Battalion received a blessing from Archbishop Ezras, head of the Russian Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church and brother of Garegin II, the Catholicos of All Armenians (Realtribune 2023).

5.1.1. Economy

Observers often analyze Armenia's economic dependence on Russia as a pivotal factor shaping Russian-Armenian relations. This dependence manifests in two key aspects. The first concerns Russia's role as Armenia's primary external trade partner. According to 2023 data, Moscow accounted for more than forty-nine percent of Armenian exports (Terzyan 2023, 6). Despite the decline in political relations, bilateral trade between Moscow and Yerevan has steadily increased.

Following the imposition of sanctions on Russia by the EU and the US in response to its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Armenia has emerged as a key conduit for Western goods entering Russia. In 2022, trade between Armenia and Russia almost doubled, totaling \$5.3 billion (Mgdesyan 2023). Armenia's exports to Russia rose nearly threefold, increasing from \$850 million in 2021 to \$2.4 billion in 2022 (Mgdesyan 2023). Total trade volume from January to August 2023 exceeded \$4.16 billion, the highest level recorded since the Soviet Union's dissolution (Mgdesyan 2023). In this context, Armenia's accession to the EAEU has provided several economic advantages, including exemptions from customs duties on certain goods and improved conditions for Armenian migrant workers. However, the Russian factor has become such a dominant force in the Armenian economy that developments affecting Russia, including sanctions and economic fluctuations, reverberate significantly across the Caucasian nation (Markosyan 2023).

The second aspect involves Moscow's control over critical sectors of Yerevan's economy. Since the early 2000s, the Kremlin has increased its dominance over Armenia's energy, industrial, telecommunications, and banking sectors through a series of equity-

for-debt agreements (Broers 2019; Terzyan 2023). In addition to holding a near monopoly on exports of essential commodities to Armenia, such as grain (Mgdesyan 2023), Russian multinational corporations—including Gazprom Armenia, VTB Armenia, and MTS Armenia—rank among the country's largest taxpayers (Terzyan 2023, 6). Gazprom Armenia, the local subsidiary of the Russian state-owned gas corporation Gazprom, controls the gas distribution infrastructure in Armenia, including the pipeline connecting the country to Iran (Markosyan 2023).

The Kremlin has strategically wielded this "energy weapon" to manipulate gas prices and exert political influence over the Armenian government (Markosyan 2023; Terzyan 2023). For example, in 2006 Russia raised gas prices for Armenia, prompting widespread discontent within the Caucasian republic. To secure a low-cost supply of \$110 per 1,000 cubic meters until 2009, the Armenian government had to cede a 40-kilometer section of its pipeline to Iran, which at the time was its only feasible alternative for energy supplies beyond those provided by Russia (Kramer 2008).

Moscow's influence on the energy sector of the Caucasian Republic extends well beyond control of natural gas pipelines. Although Yerevan is officially deemed self-sufficient in electricity, generating nearly 98 percent of its supply domestically, the reality is more complex (Markosyan 2023). Since electricity in the Caucasian Republic is produced through hydropower, thermal plants, and the Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant, it should not be forgotten that the latter relies exclusively on uranium imported from Russia, while the thermal power plants are largely dependent on natural gas, also imported from Russia (Shahverdyan 2023).

Furthermore, in 2002, Russia acquired a majority stake in the Hrazdan thermal plant (Broers 2019, 188). The following year, Armenia ratified an agreement allowing the Russian company RAO Unified Energy Systems (UES) to assume financial control of the Metsamor nuclear power plant, which accounts for approximately 40 percent of Armenia's electricity production (Shahverdyan 2023), as well as several hydroelectric stations. Additionally, in 2004, the two parties formalized an agreement granting Russia control over the Nairit chemical plant (Broers 2019, 188). In this way, Russia acquired about 90 percent of Armenia's power generation capacity (Terzyan 2018, 237).

Energy and trade are not the only assets that enable the Kremlin to exert significant economic influence over Armenia. In 2008, for instance, Russian Railways was awarded a 30-year contract to manage Armenia's railway system after being the sole bidder in a government tender, with an option for a 10-year extension (Mejlumyan 2021). During a

2016 meeting with Oleg Belozеров, Chairman of Russian Railways, then-Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan expressed appreciation for the arrangement and emphasized its importance as a key aspect of Russian-Armenian relations (President of Armenia 2016).

Two interpretations explain Armenia's economic dependence on Russia. On Moscow's side, the literature commonly cites the concept of "geoeconomic realism" to explain Russian policy priorities toward post-Soviet countries since the early years of Putin's presidency (Thorun 2009; Terzyan 2018). This perspective suggests that the Russian leadership at that time viewed international and regional affairs as a geopolitical contest for spheres of influence and, more critically, as a struggle for access to markets (Thorun 2009, 10).

On Yerevan's side, the material weakness of the Caucasian nation has been considered a key factor in provoking Russian coercive actions (Minasyan 2013; Delcour 2015; Ter-Matevosyan et al. 2017). Since the First Karabakh War ended in 1994, Azerbaijan and Turkey have worked together to keep Armenia out of regional energy and communication projects (Ter-Matevosyan et al. 2017, 344-45). Currently, Armenia has sealed 80 percent of its land borders, leaving only the borders with Georgia and Iran open. This situation creates heavy dependence on these two nations, especially Georgia, which is crucial to Armenia's foreign trade (Ter-Matevosyan et al. 2017, 345).

5.1.2. Armenia's Diaspora in Russia

The Armenian diaspora in Russia significantly influences the Russian-Armenian relationship economically and politically. In March 2024, during his address at the World Youth Festival, Dmitry Peskov, the Press Secretary for Russian President Vladimir Putin, stated:

"Do you know that there are more Armenians living in Russia than in Armenia? They are Russians, and they are doing well here. And we love them, and they love us, too. We have lived this way for centuries, and we will live this way for centuries. That is why we value the privileged high character of our relations with Armenia just as much" (News.am 2024).

Peskov's words reflect how Russia is home to the largest population of ethnic Armenians outside of Armenia. While the 2020 Russian census records approximately 946,000 Armenians, some estimates suggest the actual figure may be significantly higher, potentially reaching up to 2.5 million (De Waal 2024). Ziemer (2010, 410) categorizes the formation of the Armenian diaspora in Russia into three broad phases: the first spans from the 18th century to the early 20th century, the second extends from the 1920s to the 1940s, and the third encompasses the period from the 1950s to the late 1980s. The First

Karabakh War, which erupted in 1988, catalyzed this last wave of migration to Russia.

Despite its ancient origins, the Armenian community in Russia only recently began to organize politically, as the concept of diaspora was largely unrecognized during the Soviet era (Féron and Baser 2023, 389). Nonetheless, observers' opinions on the effectiveness of the Armenian diaspora's political efforts in Russia tend to diverge. Féron and Baser (2023, 389) note that efforts to unite and mobilize the diaspora through organizations such as the Union of Armenians of Russia (UAR) have faced obstacles due to competition among Armenian organizations in the country. Broers (2019, 189) writes that this organization “has secured a dominant, even monopolistic, role in Armenian community life in Russia, within which the image of the ‘integrated Armenian’ is important.” Founded in 2000, the UAR is the largest Armenian diaspora organization in Russia, with 85 regional branches and 647 city offices nationwide (UAR 2025). The organization’s primary mission, as outlined in its charter, is the “preservation of the Armenian diaspora’s identity in the country” (UAR 2025).

Féron and Baser (2023, 392) argue that, given the Russian political system's structure, diaspora organizations tend to adopt a less politically charged lobbying strategy than their counterparts in the US and France. Koinova (2021, 213) notes that the Armenian diaspora in Russia often refrains from political discourse, opting instead to focus on issues related to Armenia's economic development. Nevertheless, Broers (2019, 189) argues that the UAR has been proactive in mobilizing electoral support for President Putin among its members.

Some observers (Terzyan 2019; Broers 2019) argue that the Armenian diaspora in Russia, along with the significant migration of Armenian labor to the country, has been instrumental in shaping a pro-Russia inclination in Yerevan's foreign policy. Russia is a key destination for Armenian labor migrants (Galstyan et al. 2024, 169). In 2012, remittances from Russia accounted for a significant 15.5% of Armenia's GDP (Sukiasyan 2021; Ter-Matevosyan and Mkrtchyan 2021). This trend has largely been enabled by Armenia's membership in the EAEU, which mitigates visa-related barriers and facilitates the free movement of Armenian workers (Terzyan 2019, 125). Ara Abrahamyan, president of UAR, has repeatedly underscored Armenia's decision to join the organization, highlighting its significance for the Armenian community's security in Russia (Terzyan 2023, 6).

According to Terzyan (2019, 125), the Kremlin has exploited Yerevan's concerns about the potential mistreatment of Armenian migrants should the country pursue

independence from Russian influence. The Russian government's targeted campaign against Georgian migrants in Russia in October and November 2006 fueled such anxiety among Armenian authorities. As a result, Russia detained and expelled thousands in retaliation for Georgia's shift toward closer ties with the EU and NATO (Buchanan et al. 2007).

Furthermore, Terzyan (2019, 133) notes that the Russian government has actively encouraged prominent Armenian business tycoons to deepen their economic involvement in Armenia and bolster its influence over the country's economy. Cavoukian (2013, 714) notes that the activities of Russian-Armenian oligarchs significantly affect the political landscape of both countries. Although their involvement is often subtle, as they usually frame it within humanitarian and development-focused narratives (Féron and Baser 2023, 392), their political loyalty to the Russian government is well established (Broers 2019, 189).

Several Russian-Armenian businessmen have consistently ranked among the 200 wealthiest individuals in the country, according to the Russian edition of Forbes magazine (Asbarez 2016). Notable examples include Samvel Karapetyan, president and owner of Tashir Group, and Danil Khachaturov, head of Rosgosstrakh insurance company. In 2017, for example, Samvel Karapetyan campaigned for Karen Karapetyan's reelection as prime minister of Armenia (Danielyan 2017). Ara Abramyan, president of the Union of Armenians in Russia, is a prominent figure among Russian-Armenian businessmen. In 1993, he established JSC "Soglasye," which has become one of Russia's leading insurance companies.

Furthermore, Abramyan played a crucial role in securing the release of six Armenian pilots detained by local authorities in Equatorial Guinea in 2005 (Azatutyun 2005), twelve Russian sailors held captive in Nigeria in 2006 (Moscow Times 2006), and Trevor Reed, an American prisoner who had been held in Russia since 2019 (Asbarez 2022). In 2018, he reestablished the party "Our Home is Armenia," which had been dissolved in 2016, and formed a coalition with the Alliance Party for the 2021 Armenian parliamentary elections. However, the alliance failed to secure a seat in the National Assembly, receiving just 0.95% of the popular vote (ILurer 2021).

The Sarkisov brothers, Nikolai and Sergey, originally from Nagorno-Karabakh, have amassed considerable wealth as the owners of RESO-Garantia, one of Russia's leading insurance firms (Armenpress 2013). In 2013, Sergey Sarkisov was appointed Armenia's Consul General in Los Angeles, home to a significant portion of the Armenian community

in the United States (Armenpress 2013). Another prominent figure is Sergey Galitsky Harutyunyan, a major shareholder in the Magnit retail chain and president of the Krasnodar football team in Russia.

Lastly, Ruben Vardanyan is a billionaire and philanthropist, reportedly close to Russian President Vladimir Putin (Bernstein et al. 2016; Rapoza 2023). After renouncing his Russian citizenship, Vardanyan moved to Nagorno-Karabakh and served as state minister in the self-proclaimed government of Artsakh from November 2022 to February 2023 (Armenpress 2023). His rise to power provoked anger among the Azerbaijani government, which viewed him as a Kremlin-backed agent sent to undermine its efforts to regain full control over Nagorno-Karabakh (Kucera 2023). In September 2023, during Baku's takeover of Nagorno-Karabakh, he was detained and, as of this writing, remains imprisoned in the Azerbaijani capital (Kucera 2023).

5.1.3. Security

Throughout much of its independent history, Armenia regarded military cooperation with Russia as a vital component of its security and defense strategy. When the Soviet Union collapsed, and Yerevan declared independence on September 21, 1991, a significant number of Soviet troops remained stationed in the country. Unlike its neighbors, Azerbaijan and Georgia, Armenia chose not to expel them. In May 1992, Armenia and Russia were among six post-Soviet states (along with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) to sign the Collective Security Treaty (CST). Under Article 4, if an armed attack threatens the safety, stability, territorial integrity, or sovereignty of any member, all other members must promptly provide necessary assistance, which may include military support, to the affected ally (Davidzon 2022, 156). In September of the same year, the two parties inked the treaty “on the Status and Operating Conditions of the Border Troops of the Russian Federation on the territory of the Republic of Armenia.” The latter established a framework for the joint protection of Armenia’s borders with Turkey and Iran by Russian and Armenian border guards (Russian Federation and Republic of Armenia 1992).

In March 1995, the two countries signed a treaty establishing a “Russian military base in the territory of the Republic of Armenia.” This agreement led to the formation of the 102nd Russian military base in Gyumri, Armenia's second-largest city near the Turkish border, using the facilities of the former 344th Motorized Rifle Regiment, established in 1957. The base was supposed to accommodate over 3,000 Russian soldiers, with Armenia agreeing to cover 50% of its operational expenses, while Russia was

exempted from lease payments for the land (Grigas 2016, 383). That same year, a treaty established operational and tactical guidelines for joint military exercises (Abrahamyan 2016). On 29 August 1997, Moscow and Yerevan signed the “Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance.” Under this document, both nations pledged to aid each other in the event of military threats from third countries, enhance military and technical collaboration, align closely on foreign policy matters, and coordinate actions in other policy areas.

The 2000 Declaration on Allied Cooperation between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Armenia reiterated many of these commitments (Grigas 2016). In May 2002, Armenia joined the CSTO. In contrast to the largely declarative nature of the CST, this new organization's provisions markedly enhanced the military and political dimensions of cooperation. They established a formal structure to oversee decision-making and the alliance's operations (Davidzon 2022). In 2010, the treaty on the military base was extended by Armenian and Russian presidents, Serzh Sargsyan and Dmitry Medvedev, until 2044 (Grigas 2016, 383). In 2015, Russia and Armenia signed an agreement for the “creation of a joint regional air defense system as part of the united air defense system of the states making the CIS” (TASS 2015).

Armenia's dependence on Moscow for security and support during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict significantly facilitated the Kremlin's ability to establish a military presence in the Caucasian republic (Delcour 2015). In addition to its military base in Gyumri, Russia maintains other military installations in Armenia's capital, Yerevan, including a garrison in Yerevan's northeast suburb of Kanaker and the 3624th Russian airbase at Erebuni military airport (Nazaretyan 2023).

Between late 2020 and 2021, Russia strengthened its military presence along the border with Azerbaijan, where its deployment had not previously been requested (Nazaretyan 2023). In October 2020, Russia established a field camp near the village of Togh along the Goris-Lachin highway, which connects Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh. By November 2020, Russian border guards were stationed in various locations throughout Armenia's Syunik province. By early January 2021, these guards were patrolling the highway from Vorotan to Srashen, near Agarak, close to Kapan.

However, security cooperation between Russia and Armenia involves more than military bases and border guards. It also encompasses Yerevan's acquisition of arms from Moscow. Between 2011 and 2020, Russia was Armenia's main supplier of military equipment. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI),

Russia accounted for at least 94 percent of Armenia's arms imports during this timeframe. Moscow offers Yerevan credit to purchase weapons, which Armenia primarily purchases from Russia at discounted prices (Ter-Matevosyan and Mkrtchyan 2021, 211)

In 2015, Moscow offered Armenia a \$200 million loan, allowing the country to purchase BM-30 Smerch and TOS-1A Solntsepek multiple-launch rocket systems, Igla-S man-portable air defense systems, the Avtobaza-M electronic intelligence system, and additional military equipment (Nersisyan and Melkonian 2024). During the same period, Armenia also bought Skander-E missile systems, Su-30SM fighter jets, and Tor-M2KM air defense systems (Nersisyan and Melkonian 2024).

Armenia and Russia finalized a new arms supply agreement in August 2021, but they did not disclose the deal's specifics or value (Azatutyun 2021). In 2023, Andranik Kocharyan, the head of the Armenian parliamentary defense commission, revealed the contract's value at \$400 million (Reuters 2023). Arms purchases are another area where diplomatic relations between Russia and Armenia evolved after the Second Karabakh War. In November 2023, Pashinyan declared that Armenia had paid Russia for weapons that had not yet arrived (Reuters 2023).

In 2024, Yerevan took steps to reduce Russia's security footprint in Armenia, including by requesting the removal of Russian border guards from the Armenia–Azerbaijan frontier, Zvartnots International Airport, and the Armenia–Iran border crossing (Zanatta 2025).

5.1.4. Armenian Politics

Some observers also contend that Russia could not have exerted such significant influence over Armenia without establishing close ties with a segment of Armenian politics represented by Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan, who dominated Armenian politics for nearly two decades.

Both Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan, who hailed from Nagorno-Karabakh, played critical roles within the political apparatus of the self-declared republic, unlike Armenia's first president, Levon Ter-Petrosyan (1992–1998), who lacked personal connections to the region. Before his terms as Prime Minister (1997-1998) and President of Armenia (1998-2008), Kocharyan served as President of the self-declared Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (1994-1997). Similarly, before becoming Minister of Internal Affairs and National Security (1996-1999), President (2008-2018), and Prime Minister (2018) of Armenia, Sargsyan chaired the Self-Defense Forces Committee of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (1989-1992).

Their rise to prominence in Armenian politics was closely tied to the "Karabakh Movement," which brought together Karabakh politicians and Armenian military leaders who advocated unifying Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia (De Waal 2019, 126). Armenia's military victory in the First Karabakh War in 1994 significantly bolstered their influence and popularity (De Waal 2019, 126). In 1998, after months of internal turmoil, pressure from Kocharyan and Sargsyan played a crucial role in Ter-Petrosyan's resignation (Papazian 2008, 30).

Ter-Petrosyan viewed the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a major obstacle to the Caucasian republic's aspirations to become a democratic and sovereign nation. Consequently, he even advocated measures that might involve returning the region to Azerbaijan (Hynek and Ter-Ghazaryan 2023). In contrast, Kocharyan and Sargsyan adopted a harder line on the conflict, reflecting prevailing public sentiment among Armenians both domestically and in the diaspora (Świtalski 2020, 106). They championed a state-building initiative that emphasized the geopolitical narrative of an "augmented Armenia," envisioning the Caucasian nation as a unified entity encompassing Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding territories occupied during the First Karabakh War (Broers 2019).

Kocharyan and Sargsyan, along with other political figures from Nagorno-Karabakh who established their credentials through the struggle for the region's independence and later held political roles in Armenia, are often referred to as the "Karabakh Clan" (Czerewacz-Filipowicz and Konopelko 2016; Kopeček 2019). Notable members of this "clan" included Leonard Petrosian, who served as Prime Minister of Nagorno-Karabakh in 1997 and as Armenia's Deputy Defense Minister at the end of 1998. He held this role until he was tragically assassinated during the 1999 shooting in the National Assembly of Armenia's assembly hall.¹⁷

Another example is Slava Avanesyan, who served as Secretary of Karabakh's Security Council and later as an advisor to Armenia's Prime Minister, Andranik Margaryan (Panossyan 2001, 155). In 2005, he was appointed Deputy Mayor of Yerevan (Gov Arm 2005). Additionally, Oleg Yesayan, after serving as Prime Minister of Nagorno-Karabakh and President of the National Assembly of Nagorno-Karabakh, served as Armenia's ambassador to Russia and Belarus until 2017. Seyran Ohanyan, who

¹⁷ Back then, former journalist and political extremist Nairi Hunanyan, accompanied by his brother and three other gunmen, stormed the Armenian parliament and killed Prime Minister Vazgen Sargsyan, parliamentary speaker Karen Demirchyan, and six other senior officials.

served as Defense Minister of Karabakh for many years, became Chief of the General Staff of the Armenian army in 2007 and, in 2008, Armenia's Defense Minister (Panossyan 2001, 155). Finally, Karen Karapetyan, born in Stepanakert, served as Mayor of Yerevan from 2010 to 2011 before becoming Prime Minister of Armenia from 2016 to 2018.

Kocharyan and Sargsyan are also regarded as the main architects of the path that led to Armenia's economic and political absorption by Russia (Mirzoyan 2010; Oskanian 2014; Terzyan 2018; Broers 2019). Ter-Petrosyan argued that one of Armenia's primary risks in continuing to engage in the conflict was its growing tendency to align more closely with Russia politically and militarily (Terzyan 2023). Even during Ter-Petrosyan's tenure, Armenia continued to seek closer cooperation with Russia. He signed most of the key security agreements tying the two countries. While Azerbaijan withdrew from the CST, citing its inability to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute, Armenia remained a member of the organization (Davidzon 2022, 78).

However, in subsequent decades, Armenia's foreign policy was even more shaped by the "Nagorno-Karabakh factor," especially given the Karabakh clan's unique emphasis on Russia's role in the conflict (Czerewacz-Filipowicz and Konopelko 2016, 313). During his tenure, Kocharyan faced significant criticism for ceding control of strategic sectors of the Armenian economy and for failing to pursue alternatives to reduce reliance on Russia (Danielyan 2017). In September 2013, Sargsyan traveled to Moscow, where he publicly announced Armenia's decision to join the customs union with Russia and Belarus and to abandon a long-negotiated Association Agreement with the EU (De Waal 2019, 238). Broers (2019) describes how, under the leadership of Kocharyan and Sargsyan, Armenia's networked regime cultivated relationships with Russia-oriented oligarchs and strengthened ties to the Russian government (Broers 2019, 9).

One example is the already mentioned Karapetyan, who served as chief executive of Gazprom Armenia before starting his political career in Armenia. According to Terzyan (2019), Karapetyan's tenure as prime minister aimed to reassure Moscow that its representative was in charge while also suppressing Armenia's aspirations to reduce its reliance on Russia.

Terzyan (2018, 246) also argues that the two Armenian presidents' perceptions and preferences significantly shaped the pro-Russian course of Armenian foreign policy. According to him, the "success stories" of Russian-backed incumbents in Central Asian countries and Belarus, along with the rising challenges faced by political elites in other post-Soviet, Western-oriented, democratizing countries such as Georgia, Moldova, and

Ukraine, influenced Kocharyan's decision to follow the Russian path. Mirzoyan (2010, 49) writes that the Kremlin largely ensured the security of Kocharyan's and Sargsyan's regime, favoring the familiar figure of Kocharyan over an opposition advocating stronger ties with the West. Putin's spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, has called Kocharyan a "close friend of Russia" and noted that the two men "frequently communicate with each other" (Azatutyun 2021).

Like his predecessor, Sargsyan consistently affirmed the crucial importance of the Armenian-Russian strategic partnership, which is considered essential to strengthening national security (Terzyan 2019, 14-15). Sargsyan often strongly supported some of the most contentious and ambiguous elements of Russian foreign policy, including the 2014 crisis in Ukraine and the situation in Syria in 2014-2015 (Terzyan 2018, 17). Sargsyan's emphasis on cultivating good relations with Moscow was also reflected in his efforts to secure the appointment of Armenia's representative as the CSTO General Secretary (Kopeček 2019, 214). In April 2017, Armenia achieved this objective by appointing Yuri Khachaturov, the former Chief of the General Staff of the Armenian army, who was often seen as a member of the "Karabakh clan" (Kucera 2021).

Sargsyan's downfall during the Armenian Velvet Revolution effectively signaled the end of the "Karabakh clan's" influence in the political landscape of the Republic of Armenia (Kopeček 2019, 211). According to Poghosyan (2019), two actions by the Pashinyan government soon heightened tensions with Moscow. Yerevan initiated a criminal investigation into Yuri Khachaturov, Armenia's former high-ranking national security official, who was serving as the CSTO Secretary General at the time. Additionally, Kocharyan's arrest provoked negative reactions in Moscow, prompting the Russian foreign minister to warn against a "political vendetta."

5.2. Russia as a Hero-Protector

A significant dynamic that emerged during the events of September 2023 is that Russia's failure or reluctance to deter Azerbaijan from taking over Nagorno-Karabakh has dismantled the long-held belief that the Kremlin would protect the Armenians (Atasuntsev 2023; Zolyan 2023; Shahverdyan 2024). As Vahram Ter-Matevosyan, an associate professor at the American University of Armenia, stated in an interview with CNN shortly after Azerbaijan retook the disputed territory:

"Armenia has invested 30 years of its independence – I would even say 200 years of its recent history – in firmly believing that when the time comes and when need arises, Russia would [...] defend Armenia against any foreign aggression. That did not happen" (CNN 2023).

The erosion of this long-standing assumption is particularly consequential given how deeply the image of Russia as a protector is embedded in Armenian society. Historians have highlighted the role this perception has played in shaping contemporary Armenian political identity (Suny 1993; Shnirelman 2001; Libaridian 2007; Payaslian 2007; Badalyan Riegg 2020). The theme has also attracted attention in the IR literature (Oskanian 2017; Terzyan 2018; Abushov 2019; Terzyan 2023), where scholars have examined how the image of Russia as a savior, coupled with the perception of Azerbaijan and Turkey as threats, contributed to the Armenian leadership's securitization of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. As Mirzoyan claims:

“Armenian-Russian relations in the post-Soviet period should be situated within the complex interplay of the Armenian self that, for the last two centuries, has been premised on the idea of Russian support and regional geopolitics. Largely, the official articulation of this policy in Yerevan as “natural” and “organic” has coincided with the traditional Armenian perception of Russia as a protector” (Mirzoyan 2010, 53).

As discussed at length in the preceding sections, this dissertation contends that Russia's protection of Armenia cannot be understood solely in terms of its significance for Armenia itself. Instead, it has also taken on profound significance for post-Soviet Russia and, more specifically, for its quest for ontological security. Against this backdrop, this chapter's part traces the perceptions and representations through which the image of Russia as Armenia's protector became inscribed in Russian collective memory and, ultimately, incorporated into the Russian Self. In doing so, it examines how Russian political discourse, literature, and historiography articulated emotions of compassion and anger.

5.2.1. The Russian-Armenian Encounter

Although the initial contact between Russians and Armenians can be traced to the 10th century, when Armenian merchants traversed Byzantine markets along the Black Sea to reach trading posts in Kievan Rus (Badalyan Riegg 2020, 3), it was not until the mid-17th century, when Armenians established themselves as prominent traders and artisans in Moscow and Astrakhan, that Russo-Armenian relations began to develop significantly (Suny 1993, 32). By the end of the century, Armenians' economic influence had enabled them to enjoy a distinctive status among non-Russian ethnic groups within the Russian State (Badalyan Riegg 2020, 12).

In 1724, Peter I (1672-1725) exempted Armenians from military service and granted them various economic and social privileges. By 1746, Armenian traders in Astrakhan enjoyed tax-free trading rights and, by 1769, had the exclusive privilege of constructing

seagoing vessels for Caspian Sea trade. Thirty years later, Catherine the Great upheld Peter the Great's policy by exempting Armenian immigrants from merchant guild enlistment and related taxes. Additionally, she granted Armenians residing in Russia "rights and advantages equal to the Russians" (Suny 1993, 35). As a result, these measures integrated Armenian communities economically and politically into the Russian Empire (Ferrari 2005, 61).

Although initial interactions between the Russian Empire and the Armenians primarily occurred through trade, economic ties became an even more decisive factor in Russo-Armenian relations during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Blauvelt and Berglund 2016; Badalyan Riegg 2020). Although both adhere to Orthodox Christianity, the Russian Church follows the Eastern Orthodox tradition, while the Armenian Church aligns with the Oriental Orthodox tradition. Kyivan Rus' adopted Christianity in 988, whereas Armenia, recognized as the first nation to embrace Christianity officially, did so in 301, largely due to the efforts of Gregory the Illuminator and King Tiridates III (Tchilingirian 2014, 472). The main divergence between the two churches stems from Oriental Orthodox followers' rejection of the Council of Chalcedon's doctrine in 451 (Tchilingirian 2014, 473).

Two factors contributed to the importance of ecumenical ties in Russian-Armenian relations. The first was the lack of secular authority among Armenians in their historical territories since the mid-seventeenth century (Bournoutian 2021, 237). In fact, between the 15th and 17th centuries, what is referred to as "historic Armenia" was partitioned twice between the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Persia, as outlined in the treaties of Amasya (1555) and Zuhab (1639). The latter agreement resulted in the Ottomans conceding the majority of the South Caucasus to Persia, with the plain of Shuragial and the Arpachai River serving as the border (Bournoutian 1997, 81). The second reason is that, while the schism between Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Christianity may have seemed crucial, it was overshadowed, from the Armenian perspective, by the immense gulf between Russia and the Muslim Ottoman and Persian Empires (Badalyan Riegg 2020, 13).



Figure 3: Map of the Caucasus in the Late 18th century with the Designation of Eastern and Western Armenia. (Source: Bournoutian 1997, 45).

Mirzoyan (2010, 23) writes that benevolence toward Russia stemmed from a shared Christian heritage and the contrast between barbaric Asiatic Turks and Europeanized Russians. Paternalistic relations grounded in Christian power would have protected Armenians. In his novel *Wounds of Armenia* (Verk' Hayastani/Վերք Հայաստանի) (1858), Khachatur Abovyan, the founder of modern Eastern Armenian literature, wrote, "Blessed be the hour when the blessed Russian foot stepped upon our holy Armenian land" (Shervinskii 1977, 102).

5.2.2. Armenians Seeking a Christian Protector

Nagorno-Karabakh, in addition to being infamously known for the territorial dispute between Azerbaijan, which de jure held sovereignty over it, and its Armenian majority, which declared independence in 1991, can also be regarded as a crucial locus in the emergence of the image of Russia as a protector.

In the early 18th century, the Armenian nobility in this territory, along with the Armenian church, attempted to establish a national state with the help and protection of the Russian Empire (Ferrari 2004, 57). In the territories under Persian suzerainty, hereditary Muslim Khanates extended across the mostly flat regions from the Caspian Sea to the Ottoman frontier west of Lake Urmiah. At the same time, the plateau of Syunik-Karabakh housed semi-autonomous principalities administered by Armenian petty princes, also known as meliks (Hewsen 1972, 298).

Israel Ori, a prominent diplomat in the Armenian liberation movement, helped develop this pro-Russian stance. After journeying to several European courts to seek assistance against the Muslim oppressors of his people, he was entrusted by the meliks in 1699 to travel to Russia. In 1701, Ori presented a petition to Peter the Great, endorsed by the "princes and meliks of Greater Armenia" (Ferrari 2004, 58). As the Armenian-American historian Ronald Suny (1993, 33) observes, Ori's delegation appeared before the Tsarist authorities as "suppliant fellow Christians," presenting Armenians as "the victims of infidel oppressors asking to be assisted in their liberation."

From the seventeenth century to the early twentieth century, the image of Russia as a protector developed through two distinct yet interconnected pathways. One expanded into the Caucasus and Eastern Anatolia, where the Russian army engaged in prolonged conflicts with the Persian and Ottoman Empires. As will be shown, the Tsarist authorities acknowledged Christian Armenians as allies on the southern frontier, while also recognizing them as a vulnerable minority whom they felt a religious duty to protect from Muslim oppressors (Blauvelt and Berglund 2016, 70). The second trajectory took place within the Russian Empire, where numerous Armenians established themselves and made significant contributions across diverse domains such as the arts, industry, science, and the military (Suny 1993; Badalyan Riegg 2020).

The Russian-Armenian encounter undoubtedly contributed to an emerging Russian self-narrative in which protecting vulnerable Christian communities became a source of continuity and purpose. As Suny observed:

"For the Russians, it was important that they had been repeatedly invited to enter Transcaucasia. They saw themselves as both liberators and conquerors—liberators of Christian peoples no longer able to defend themselves and conquerors who had brought glory to the empire by defeating the Muslim" (Suny 1993: 35).¹⁸

After concluding peace with Sweden in 1721, Peter turned to a weakened Persia and launched the Caspian campaign of 1722, occupying important territories along its western and southern coasts. Although Russian ambitions temporarily coincided with Armenian hopes for liberation, in 1724, after the Ottoman Empire had invaded the eastern Caucasus, the Tsar reached an agreement with the Porte that left much of Armenia under its control (Suny 1993, 34-35). Russia later returned most of its Caspian conquests to Persia in the 1730s. Nevertheless, Peter continued to express compassion towards the Armenians at

¹⁸ In Russia, the South Caucasus is commonly designated as "Transcaucasia" or "Zakavaz'e" (Закавказье).

the discursive level. A particularly illustrative example can be found in a decree issued on 10 November 1724, in which he stated:

“Since the Armenian people have petitioned us to take them under our protection and to order that suitable places be allotted to them for settlement in our newly acquired Persian provinces, we hereby command you that, whenever any members of the Armenian people arrive at the Fortress of the Holy Cross, you shall immediately assign to them, in the vicinity of that fortress, along the rivers Sulak, Agrakhan, and Terek, such suitable, necessary, and sufficient lands as they themselves may choose, where they may establish their settlements. You shall furthermore render them every possible assistance, keep them under firm protection, and treat them in such a manner that they may have no cause whatsoever for complaint, since we have taken the Armenian people under our special imperial benevolence and protection” (Armmuseum 2022).

5.2.3. The Zenith of the Protector Image

After Peter the Great, Saint Petersburg largely ignored the Armenians, but the reign of Catherine II saw a notable resurgence in the fate of Christian communities in the South Caucasus and the Ottoman Empire (Bournoutian 2021, 91). With the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774, which ended the Russo-Turkish War of 1768–74, Catherine imposed on the Ottoman Empire the obligation to safeguard its Christian subjects and churches (Jakjimovska 2014). Since then, Russian emperors have called on Ottoman sultans to protect the material and spiritual cultures of their Christian minority, often using compassion for their fate as a pretext for possible military intervention (Badalyan Riegg 2020, 44-45).

Armenian appeals increasingly articulated expectations of protection through language of humility and deference toward the Russian sovereign. In his monograph “Nagorno-Karabakh in the International Law and World Politics, Documents and Commentary,” Soviet and later Russian-Armenian scholar Yuri Barsegov reports that, in 1781, the meliks appealed to Catherine II (1762-1796) with the request to save the Armenians of Karabakh by accepting them under the protection of Russia:

"We, from the Armenian nation, remaining military meliks and all local owners... humbly request from your humanity and mercy and maternal compassion to render us, Christians, assistance and salvation from our enemies, to deliver us through the victorious power of your weapons from our enemies and the villains of the cross of Christ, and to accept us under your high imperial protection" (Barsegov 2009, 34).

At the beginning of the 19th century, the Russian Empire responded to Armenian appeals in Persian territories. In 1783, under Catherine II, the kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti (eastern Georgia) became a Russian protectorate; her son Paul I formally annexed the territory in 1801. This event marked the beginning of a prolonged Russian presence in the South Caucasus and paved the way for a series of conflicts with the Persian (1805–

1813 and 1826–1828) and Ottoman (1807–1812 and 1828–1829) Empires, which ultimately led to Russia's conquest of the region. In addition to providing logistical support, guiding military expeditions, and gathering intelligence, some members of the Iranian and Ottoman Armenian communities actively fought alongside Russia's Caucasus Corps against their states (Badalyan Riegg 2020, 33–41).

The resurgence of interest in the so-called “Armenian question” among Tsarist authorities can be attributed to the influence of prominent Russian and Armenian figures. The first was Ivan Lazarev, one of the wealthiest tycoons in Catherinean Russia. His family, the Lazaryan/Lazarev, were Persian Armenians who relocated to Astrakhan in 1747 and to Moscow in 1749, achieving success in silk production and jewelry (Bournoutian 2021, 284). Before his death, he directed financial resources toward establishing an educational institution for Armenians in Moscow. A member of his family, Hovakim, opened the Lazarev Institute in 1815 (Bournoutian 2021, 284). This school played a fundamental role in the development of modern Armenian culture, as it formed a significant part of the national intelligentsia and advanced Oriental studies in the Russian Empire (Ferrari 2005, 143).

The second figure was Hovsep Argutinski, a member of the Argutinski-Dolgorukii noble family of Georgian-Armenian roots. In 1773, he was appointed the Prelate of the Armenians in Russia (Bournoutian 2021, 279). Argutinski strongly supported Russian expansion into the South Caucasus and advocated a Russian orientation among Russian Armenians (Badalyan Riegg 2020, 14). Atkin (1980, 29) contends that his plan envisioned a Christian protectorate encompassing all the khanates north of the Aras River, including those with small Christian populations. Argutinski's role became even more significant a decade later, when Russia sought to increase its influence in the election of the Armenian Catholicos. In 1800, Saint Petersburg successfully pushed for Argutinski's election. However, he died in Tiflis in 1801 while en route to Ejmiatsin to assume the position (Bournoutian 2021, 279). Despite this setback, Russia obtained recognition from the Ottoman Empire and Persia of its right to participate in and confirm the Catholicos, ultimately appointing its chosen candidate, Daniel, to the position in 1807 (Werth 2006, 206).

After she conflicted with the Ottomans, Catherine relocated the Armenian population of Crimea to a new settlement by the Don River in 1779. The following year, she tasked Argutinskii with building a town for these newcomers in what is now Rostov-on-Don, Nor-Nakhichevan. This episode again reveals the language of compassion that

increasingly accompanied Russia's self-representation as a Christian protector. In a decree signed on November 14, 1779, ordering the resettlement of Armenians from Crimea to the Azov Governorate, Empress Catherine II stated:

“By the grace and favor of God, We, Catherine II, Empress of All the Russias... to the entire community of Crimean Christians of the Armenian faith, of every rank and condition, collectively and each individually, Our gracious Imperial word. May the right hand of the Most High bless your well-intentioned common undertaking. Having considered the message sent to Us by you from Bakhchisarai on July 16 of last year, and your common petition, founded upon your own free will, requesting deliverance for all of you from the threatened yoke and calamity through acceptance into the perpetual allegiance of the Russian Empire, We are pleased not only to receive you all under Our most gracious protection and, as beloved children, to grant you security beneath it, providing you with a life as prosperous as mortal wishes and Our unceasing care can make possible” (Bagdykov 2024)

After defeating the Persians and securing the Treaty of Turkmenchay in 1828, Tsar Nicholas I established the Armenian Province (Armyanskaya Oblast'/Армянская область), which included the former Muslim khanates of Yerevan and Nakhichevan (Bournoutian 2021, 106). Although some areas claimed by Armenians, including Karabakh, were excluded and the province was abolished in 1840, Armenian leaders welcomed their new autonomy (Hovannisian 1971, 34). Furthermore, in 1836, the Russian Empire issued the “Polozhenie,” a decree that granted Armenians complete religious freedom, authority over their educational institutions, and official recognition of their organizational independence (Suny 1993, 40). Significantly, the decree once again articulated Russia's protective role in a language of benevolence, declaring that “the Armenian Gregorian Church in the Russian Empire, on an equal footing with the other non-Orthodox confessions, enjoys the most gracious protection of the Sovereign Emperor” (Luk'yanov and Udodov 2016, 168).

The emergence of the Armenian Question within the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century also shaped Russo-Armenian relations. Maintaining the protector image was pivotal to Tsarist policy, which sought to keep Armenians in a state of perpetual threat from their historical adversaries (Somakian 1993, 80). Saint Petersburg began championing the plight of Ottoman Armenians and their struggle for administrative reforms to secure its interests in the Middle East (Hovannisian 1997, 234). During the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, many Armenians, seeing the Tsar as a protector against destruction by local Turkish and Kurdish tribes, joined the Russian military forces led by Armenian generals Loris-Melikov and Lazarev (Payaslian 2007, 116). Aleksandr Pushkin, who traveled to the Caucasus and Eastern Turkey during the Russo-Turkish War

(1828–29), describes in his novel "Journey to Arzrum during the Campaign of 1829" how Armenians welcomed the Russian army as it entered Erzurum.

We entered a city that presented an amazing picture. The Turks looked at us gloomily from their flat roofs. Armenians crowded noisily in the cramped streets. Their boys ran in front of our horses, crossing themselves and repeating, "Christians! Christians!.." (Pushkin 1974, 557).

5.2.4. The Nadir of the Protector Image

Despite the successes at Kars, Bayazid, and Alashkert, which forced the Ottoman Empire to sign the Treaty of Santo Stefano (Payaslian 2007, 116), the Congress of Berlin, held after the war, significantly curtailed Russia's gains and crushed any hopes for an autonomous Western Armenia (Badalyan Riegg 2020, 168). This period also marked the decline of Armenian-Russian collaboration and the onset of increased Russian chauvinism against its minorities' aspirations (Suny 1993, 42).

Badalyan Riegg (2020, 199) argues that the carefully cultivated Russo-Armenian partnership of the nineteenth century gradually unraveled under the combined pressures of Russification, nationalism, revolutionary upheaval, and mounting instability within the Russian Empire. Growing bureaucratic interference in Armenian affairs, particularly in the ecclesiastical sphere, compounded by the often-authoritarian conduct of individual tsarist officials, increasingly strained relations and ultimately precipitated the most serious crisis in modern Russo-Armenian relations.

This deterioration was reflected in a series of increasingly restrictive measures. Armenian schools were closed in 1885, and Russian was imposed as the sole language of instruction. Anti-Armenian policies peaked in 1903 with the confiscation of the Armenian Gregorian Church's property (Mostashari 2017, 44). As Suny (1993, 32) observes, such measures further alienated Armenians from the Russian authorities while reinforcing official representations of Armenians as "conspiratorial."

The longstanding Russian policy of presenting itself as a protector of Christian Armenians underwent a decisive reversal in the aftermath of the Hamidian massacres of 1895–1896. When a group of Armenians in Europe appealed to Britain for assistance, the petition provoked considerable anger among Tsarist authorities in St. Petersburg (Suny 1993, 46-47). In response, they informed the Catholicos that Armenian schools within the Russian Empire would be closed as a punitive measure for what they regarded as an unacceptable appeal to a foreign power. The episode illustrates how closely Tsarist authorities monitored Armenian displays of deference and how they understood such deference as integral to Russia's role as protector. Therefore, the appeal to Britain was

perceived not simply as a diplomatic slight but as a challenge to Russia's privileged position as the Armenians' protector.

Interestingly, despite this significant nadir in political relations, many Armenians remained loyal to the tsar and continued to operate within the Russian political system, even as the imperial government had grown increasingly indifferent to their cause, in the hope that Russia might ultimately facilitate the liberation of Western Armenians from Ottoman rule (Badalyan Riegg 2020, 243). As Holquist (2011, 154) notes, after the Ottoman Empire initiated military actions against the Russian Empire in late October 1914, certain factions within the Russian government began to view Ottoman Armenians as potential allies.

Thus, the deterioration of Russo-Armenian relations did not erase compassion from Russian narratives about Armenians. Rather, these narratives grew increasingly ambivalent. On the one hand, the rise of Armenian nationalism fueled anger and suspicion, as Armenian political aspirations were seen as a challenge to imperial authority. On the other hand, Armenians were still portrayed as victims, particularly when attention turned to their condition within the Ottoman Empire. This compassionate narrative remained visible even as Russian policies toward Armenians shifted considerably. Thus, Emperor Nicholas II assured Catholicos Kevork V in October 1914 that "a most brilliant future awaits the Armenians" (Holquist 2011, 154). Similarly, in early 1915, Foreign Minister Sazonov declared before the State Duma that "at the conclusion of the war, this exceptional state [the peace negotiations] will be utilized by the Imperial government in a manner favorable to the Armenian population" (Holquist 2011, 154). Such statements do not, in themselves, demonstrate a corresponding policy of protection. Rather, they reveal the continued availability of a narrative in which Armenians could be represented as victims and Russia could present itself as attentive to their fate.

The ambivalence characterizing Russian policies and narratives toward Armenians persisted until the final years of the Russian Empire. Ultimately, St. Petersburg's limited geopolitical commitment to the Armenian cause and resulting inaction, combined with the Porte's portrayal of Armenians as a Russian fifth column, significantly shaped the dynamics that culminated in the Armenian Genocide (Holquist 2011; Badalyan Riegg 2020). Nonetheless, Russian official discourse continued to cast Armenians as victims deserving protection. As Holquist (2011, 154) notes, once the Russian government became aware of the systematic massacres of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, it

pressed its Allies to issue a joint declaration condemning the violence and warning that Ottoman officials would be held personally responsible for the atrocities. Issued on May 24, 1915, the declaration famously referred to the massacres as “crimes against humanity,” a formulation that, according to Holquist, had been introduced by the Russian government.



Figure 4: The Cover of the June 30, 1916, edition of "Excelsior" featured an illustration of a Russian soldier on horseback holding a refugee child. The image was labeled, "The Symbol of Russian Protection of the Armenians." (Source: Darbinyan, 2016)

5.2.5. The Survival of the Protector Image

Despite the disintegration of the Russian Empire and the protector narrative's religious origins, this image persisted through the distinct ideological characteristics of the Soviet era, becoming intricately interwoven with Russia's self-identity and collective memory. This is evident in Armenian-Soviet historiography, where the Russian conquest of the Caucasus was framed as the foundation of a "centuries-old friendship between the

Armenian and Russian peoples" or as a "union" (prisoedinenie/ присоединение in Russian, miac'um/միացում in Armenian) (Ferrari 2005, 140). For example, in his "Russia in the destinies of Armenians and Armenia," the Soviet-Armenian historian and academician Tsatur Pavlovic Aghayan wrote:

"The Russian orientation of the Armenian people is one of the most significant phenomena in the history of the Armenian nation over the last three centuries. It emerged and developed as an inevitable part of the liberation struggle of the Armenian people directed against Qajar Iran and Ottoman Turkey" (Aghayan 1994, 1).

The Armenian Apostolic Church also played a crucial role in sustaining the protector narrative after the Russian Empire's collapse. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the Armenian Church, under the authority of the Catholicos, served as a conduit through which Tsarist authorities projected influence along Russia's southern borders and extended power over neighboring states (Werth 2006, 204). Subsequently, it adapted to Soviet rule by integrating into the regime's bureaucratic structures and publicly endorsing it (Guroian 1992, 31). Dyatlov and Melkonian (2009, 33-34) argue that during the Soviet era, Armenians did not view the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) as a foreign state but as an integral part of a shared national identity. Alongside Armenian voluntary associations, the Church was instrumental in nurturing the Armenian diaspora in Russia, which emerged in response to national and religious persecution, genocide, and forced displacement from their homeland (Ziemer 2016, 43). In November 2022, President Vladimir Putin awarded Catholicos Garegin II a Russian state medal for his significant contribution to advancing cultural and humanitarian relations between Russia and Armenia. The image of Russia as a protector also resurfaced during the 2020 Second Karabakh War, when then-de facto President of Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh, Arayik Harutyunyan, addressed an open letter to Russian President Vladimir Putin, writing:

Dear Mr. President,

The Artsakh-Russia relations have a history of centuries. Russia is perceived in the historical memory of the Artsakh people as a brotherly country which has always assisted this part of Armenians at all difficult moments.

The Artsakh-Russia ties have been exercised in the most direct way especially during the flourishing period of the Artsakh principalities and melikdoms, of which there is a lot of factual evidence.

For more than a century (in the 19th century and in the 10s of the 20th century) Karabakh has been part of tsarist Russia. That historical period was marked for Karabakh by long-term peace, repatriation and economic development. The cultural life has also developed. It's noteworthy that in the second half of the 19th century Artsakh's administrative-political center Shushi has become one of the key spiritual, cultural and economic centers in the Caucasus (Armenpress 2020).

Conclusion

This chapter has laid the mnemonic foundations for the dissertation's empirical analysis by situating contemporary Russian–Armenian relations within both their post-Soviet trajectory and a much longer history of interaction. After 1991, Armenia's security and economic choices increasingly coalesced around structural dependence on Moscow. Russian military bases, border management, alliance mechanisms, and Armenia's integration into Russian-led security and economic frameworks created a post-Soviet environment in which the Kremlin emerged as Yerevan's principal security guarantor. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was particularly important in consolidating this dependence, reinforcing expectations that Moscow would assume responsibility for Armenian security.

However, these post-Soviet expectations cannot be understood solely as products of the institutional arrangements that emerged after 1991. They also draw on a much longer history of Russo-Armenian interaction. From the perspective of Russia's ontological security, Armenia has long occupied an important place in a longstanding Russian self-narrative centered on the protection of vulnerable Christian populations. While existing scholarship has primarily examined the significance of Russia's protector role in shaping Armenian political identity, this chapter has argued that protection was also important to Russian self-understanding during the Tsarist period.

Crucially, the protector role should not be understood as a coherent or consistent policy. Russian authorities repeatedly failed to intervene on behalf of Armenians and, at times, adopted openly repressive policies toward them. What persisted more consistently was the narrative that allowed Russia to imagine and present itself as their protector. Russian authorities placed considerable importance on Armenian recognition of Russia's protective position. Armenians were expected not only to seek Russian assistance but also to acknowledge Russia's privileged role as their protector.

In this respect, building on the insights of Suny (1993) and Somakian (1992), this chapter argues that Armenian appeals for protection also performed an ontological function for Tsarist Russia. Geopolitical calculations undoubtedly mattered, but Armenian appeals also allowed Russian rulers to affirm a particular self-understanding as benevolent, morally responsible protectors whose role those they claimed to defend recognized. Compassion toward Armenian suffering was important to this narrative because the representation of Armenians as vulnerable victims made the performance of the protector role possible.

Instead, when Armenians appeared to reject Russia's privileged position, Russian authorities could respond with anger. However, such anger did not necessarily erase the compassionate portrayal of Armenians as victims. The late imperial period instead reveals an increasingly ambivalent narrative in which hostility toward Armenian nationalism could coexist with compassion for Armenian suffering, particularly in the Ottoman Empire.

Overall, this narrative's foundations developed over centuries of interaction, from the petitions of the Karabakh meliks and Russia's claims to protect Christians in the Ottoman and Persian domains to the later Soviet discourse of "centuries-old friendship." As a result, the hero-protector narrative became embedded in Russian understandings of its relationship with Armenia.

6. RUSSIA'S POLITICS OF DEFERENCE

Introduction

With the theoretical, methodological, and contextual groundwork of my study on the post-Soviet Russian Self in place, this dissertation now advances to the empirical analysis of official and semi-official discourse. The current chapter is predicated on the assumption that Russia's (dis)engagement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict can be understood not only through the lens of its strategic interests and geopolitical stance in the South Caucasus but also as an effort to attain ontological security.

This effort reflected Russian actors' recollections of the region's Tsarist history. It took the form of a politics of deference toward Armenia, in which their perception of Armenia's recognition of Russia as a hero-protector reinforced a cohesive biographical narrative and reaffirmed a sense of honor that has historically been a core element of Russian identity (Tsygankov 2014; Kollmann 2016).

To trace how the politics of deference was expressed and adjusted at each critical juncture, I drew on the hero-protector narrative of Clément et al. (2017) and took an abductive approach to examine this framework in Russian official and semi-official discourse during critical junctures in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In analyzing 75 primary sources, I employed EDA to identify expressions of anger, compassion, and other emotions in relation to the narrative roles associated with the hero-protector framework, thereby tracing the emotional mechanisms through which Russia articulated its politics of deference. In this way, I plan to address the research question, which I restate here: How did concerns over ontological security shape Russia's discourse toward Armenia during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (2015–2024)?

6.1. First Period (2015-2018)

This initial critical juncture can be considered a phase of “consolidation” for the hero-protector narrative. During this period, Russian actors consistently portrayed the Kremlin as the hero-protector and Armenia as a victim, explicitly linking the deeds of the Tsarist Empire to Moscow's security practices in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

For example, Armenians were often characterized as “defenseless” (беззащитные/bezashchitnye) and “peaceful people” (мирные люди/mirnye lyudi), who were “killed and mutilated” (убиты, искалечены/ubity, iskaleceny) and “driven from their homes” (изгнаны из родных домов/izgnany iz rodneykh domov). Their cultural

heritage suffered as “spiritual sanctities” (духовные святыни/*dukhovnye svyatyni*) and “priceless manuscripts” (бесценные рукописи/*bestsennye rukopisi*) were destroyed (Putin 2015).

Russian actors often expressed compassion toward them, articulating it through statements such as “we sincerely empathize with the Armenian people” (мы искренне сопереживаем армянскому народу/*My iskrenne soperezhivаем armyanksomu narodu*) or asserting that the events of 1915 “shook the entire world” (потрясли весь мир/*potrasli ves’ mir*) (Putin 2015), and that “in Russia they were perceived as own sorrow” (в России были восприняты как собственное горе/*v Rossii byli vosprinyaty kak sobstvennoe gore*) (Putin 2015). By framing Armenian suffering as Russia’s “own sorrow,” Russian actors incorporated Armenian victimhood into their self-understanding, revealing the extent to which perceptions of Armenia were intertwined with Russia’s sense of ontological security.

Russian discourse, particularly among semi-official actors, also expressed sympathy and respect for the victim, consistently recognizing Armenians’ rich historical legacy and strong morality. Examples of this dynamic appear in statements such as “Armenians are the most ancient state” (армяне—самое древнее государство/*armiane—samoe drevnee gosudarstvo*) (Zhirinovsky 2016) or “every Armenian feels responsible for a glorious history and belonging to a noble people” (каждый армянин чувствует в себе ответственность за великую историю и принадлежность к великому народу/*kazhdyy armyanin chuvstvet v sebe otvetstvennost’ za velikuyu istoriyu i prinadlezhnost’ k velikomu narodu*) (Solovyev 2013).

Expressions such as “(Armenian) women whose diligence and gentle care are so extraordinary that every man feels like a general in the Armenian army” (трудолюбие и заботливость которых настолько потрясающие, что каждый мужчина чувствует себя генералом в армянской армии/*trudolyubie i zabolivost’ kotorykh stol’ko potryasayushchie, chto kazhdyy muzhchina chuvstvet sebya generalom v armyanskoy armii*) and men who, when the moment of truth arrives, “become undefeated warriors” (становятся войнами непобедимыми/*stanovatsya voynami nepobedimymi*) are also indicative of that (Solovyev 2013). As we know from the theoretical chapter, female honor is rooted in purity and the ability to bear children, while male honor is grounded in the capacity to protect the homeland and women. The emphasis on these gendered attributes demonstrates the extent to which Russian actors perceived and assessed Armenians through the prism of honor.

In their self-identification with the role of hero-protector, Russian actors not only emphasized continuity between past and present, portraying the Russian state as an entity that had historically defended Armenia and continued to do so, but also expressed pride in fulfilling this role. Official discourse explicitly hailed the deeds of the Russian Empire, arguing that “it was Russian diplomacy that achieved international condemnation of the violence” (именно российская дипломатия добилась международного осуждения насилия/*imenno rossijskaja diplomatia dobilas’ mezhdunarodnogo osuzhdenija nasilija*) during the Armenian genocide and that “on the initiative of Foreign Minister Sergei Sazonov, [Russia] directly named what happened a crime against humanity and civilization” (по инициативе Министра иностранных дел Сергея Сазонова...прямо назвали произошедшее преступлением против человечности и цивилизации/*po iniciativie Ministra inostrannykh del Sergeja Sazonova...prjamo nazvali proizoshedshee prestupleniem protiv chelovechnosti i tsivilizatsii*) (Putin 2015). Expressions of compassion were also explicit, with semi-official discourse actors arguing that Russia always “saved and protected the Armenians” (спасали, защищали армян/*spasali, zashchishchali armyan*) (Zhirinovsky 2016).

Russian actors went beyond mere acknowledgment of historical events, articulating their interpretation of history in the context of contemporary developments. This was evident in their efforts to commemorate the Armenian genocide, as reflected in statements such as “in hundreds of Russian cities, over two thousand memorial events will be held” (в сотнях российских городов пройдут более двух тысяч поминальных мероприятий/*v sotnjakh rossijskikh gorodov proidut bolee dvukh tysjach pominal’nykh meroprijatij*) (Putin) or “Russia’s position has been and remains consistent” (позиция России была и остаётся последовательной/*pozitsija Rossii byla i ostajotsja posledovatel’noj*) (Putin 2015).

Furthermore, by framing their country’s involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a matter of “historical responsibility” (историческая ответственность/*istoricheskaya otvetstvennost’*) (Babayan 2018), Russian actors sought to construct a discourse that would resonate with Armenians and foster hope, echoing, as discussed in the previous chapter, the way Tsarist authorities had appealed to Armenians as early as the eighteenth century. Evidence of this intent appears in statements such as “only the president of Russia can make the final decision” (окончательное решение может принять только президент России/*okonchatel’noe reshenie mozhet prinyat’ tol’ko prezident Rossii*) and “to return the Armenian lands of Western Armenia to the

Armenians and then the Karabakh question will be solved” (вернуть армянские земли Западной Армении армянам и тогда автоматически как-то решится и вопрос с Карабахом/vernut’ armyanskie zemli Zapadnoy Armenii armyanam i togda avtomatichieski kak-to reshitsya i vopros s Karabakhom) (Zhirinovsky 2016). I argue that such claims served a dual function, reinforcing Russia’s self-understanding while seeking to secure Armenia’s loyalty, and can thus be interpreted as discursive attempts to elicit and sustain deference from Armenia.

The role of the aggressor, specifically the Ottoman Empire in the past and Azerbaijan and Turkey in the present, was treated differently in official and semi-official discourse. Although it officially denounced the conduct as unacceptable and inhumane, labeling it a "crime against civilization" (преступление против цивилизации/prestuplenie protiv tsivilisatsii), Russian official discourse did not explicitly identify the aggressors. The Kremlin’s silence can be interpreted in two distinct ways. First, although Moscow recognized the Armenian genocide, it may have sought to avoid exacerbating tensions with two significant regional powers, Baku and Ankara, which could have undermined its position as a peacemaker in the conflict. Second, this silence can be understood as a strategic withholding of recognition, through which Moscow sought to elicit greater deference from Armenia.

For the latter, loyalty to and respect for the hero-protector narrative became an essential instrument for securing Russia’s acknowledgment of its security threats. By contrast, semi-official entities explicitly identified Azerbaijan and Turkey as aggressors, dehumanizing their actions and identities. For example, some actors described them as “nomads who should return to Central Asia under Tashkent” (кочевники, которые должны вернуться в Среднюю Азию/kochevniki, kotorye dolzhny vernut’sya v Srednyuyu Aziyu) (Zhirinovsky 2016).

At this critical juncture, discussions about the role of the coward were rare, encompassing both past events and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. This dynamic can be partially explained by the persistence of the politics of deference, despite intermittent tensions in Russian-Armenian relations, without any acts of (mis)recognition from Armenia. Notable among these were an episode in January 2015, when a soldier from the Russian 102nd military base, deployed in Armenia, murdered an entire Armenian family in their sleep, and Russia’s sale of weapons to Azerbaijan, including the S-300 PMU-2 Favorit anti-aircraft missile systems (Grigoryan 2016).

In the first instance, the Armenian population responded to the tragedy with far

greater immediacy than either Armenian or Russian officials. On the day of the family's funeral, enraged crowds gathered outside the Russian consulate in Gyumri, demanding that the soldier be extradited to Armenian authorities. However, as De Waal (2015) observed, the protesters' anger was directed not only at Russia but also at President Serzh Sargsyan and the leader of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Karekin II, whom they accused of remaining silent about the incident.

Russian officials strongly condemned the murders. However, they also expressed resentment toward the protests, suggesting that there were ongoing "attempts to politicize this situation...to gain some geopolitical advantages" (попытки политизации этой ситуации...чтобы получить геополитические преимущества/Мы vidim popytki politizatsii etoy situatsii... chtoby poluchit' geopoliticheskie preimushchestva) (Lavrov 2015). The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs portrayed the protests in a way that could be interpreted as emblematic of a cowardly role, describing an actor whose actions are "disgusting" (отвратительно/otvratitel'no), "unacceptable" (недопустимо/nedopustimo), and "unworthy of the proud Armenian people" (недостойно гордого армянского народа/nedostoyno gordogo armyanskogo naroda) (Lavrov 2015).

Nevertheless, this actor's identity remained unclear. Lavrov might have been referring to specific Armenian political groups dissatisfied with the nation's current foreign policy direction, or to Western political actors. Some Russian actors in the semi-official discourse echoed this second tendency, offering their interpretations of Armenia's tentative potential engagement with Western nations based on historical events. For example, reflecting on other international mediation efforts during the events of 1915, Zhirinovsky affirmed that "the French will not resolve anything; the Americans do not even comprehend where this is" (французы ничего не решат, американцы, им вообще непонятно где это/frantsuzy nichego ne reshat, amerikantsy, im voobshche ne ponyatno gde eto) (Zhirinovsky 2016).

Nevertheless, Russian officials affirmed that the protests did not "come from the leadership of Armenia, nor from the leadership of Russia" (Они исходят не от руководства Армении, не от руководства России/Oni iskhodyat ne ot rukovodstva Armenii, ne ot rukovodstva Rossii) (Lavrov 2015). Moreover, after this incident, there was no further discussion of closing the Russian military base in Gyumri. In a March 2016 interview with Radio Svoboda, former President Kocharyan declared, "I believe that the presence of the Russian military base provides, if not actual stability, then at least

a sense of stability” (Radio Free Europe 2016).

Therefore, official Russian discourse did not adequately address the role of the coward within the hero-protector narrative at the first critical juncture, as Armenian politicians and elites firmly acknowledged the Kremlin's role as an indispensable security guarantor. In April 2016, during a state visit to Germany, Armenian President Sargsyan remarked, “It is inherently painful for us when Russia, along with other CSTO member states, supplies arms to Azerbaijan” (Grigoryan 2016). Nonetheless, he also expressed strong support for Russia's position on the Syrian conflict in a meeting with Putin, as well as for Russia's engagement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, praising his country's dedication to resolving the issue through peaceful means (TASS 2016). In fact, in August of the same month, he reiterated, “I have again thanked the President of Russia for Russia’s efforts [...], and for his significant personal contribution to the peace process.” (President of Russia 2016).

The hero-protector narrative persisted in this tone across both official and semi-official discourse until 2018, following Pashinyan’s rise to power amid street protests. As we already know, prior to taking office, Pashinyan had advocated for Armenia’s withdrawal from the EAEU and the CSTO. Nonetheless, Russia’s official discourse showed no genuine concern about this.

While Moscow publicly maintained a neutral stance regarding the 2018 Velvet Revolution, with Putin extending congratulations to Pashinyan upon his appointment (Terzyan 2023), semi-official discourse responded with anxiety and anger. In fact, these actors increasingly associated Armenia's new political situation with that of Ukraine, asserting that Pashinyan was a "carbon copy" of Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko (под копірку/pod kopirku) (Kentron.am 2018) or asking, “How is it that we lived in one country for 70 years, spoke the same language, had friends and relatives all around us, and then suddenly some Americans appear and yank one country after another out of Russia's historical sphere of responsibility?” (мы 70 лет жили в одной стране, говорили на одном языке, кругом у нас друзья и родственники, и потом вдруг появляются какие-то американцы и выдергивают одну страну за другой из зоны исторической ответственности России/my 70 let zhili v odnoi strane, govorili na odnom yazyke, krugom u nas druz'ya i rodstvenniki, i potom vdrug poyavlyayutsya kakie-to amerikantsy i vydyergivayut odnu stranu za drugoi iz zony istoricheskoi otvetstvennosti Rossii) (Babayan 2018).

During the Velvet Revolution, the Russian narrative for the first time expressed anger

toward the Armenian leadership, depicting it as unworthy of Russia's support and unrepresentative of the Armenian people. Pashinyan himself underscored the significance of these voices. In September 2018, during his visit to Moscow to meet with Putin, Pashinyan argued that “despite certain pessimism evident in both the Armenian and Russian media and in social networks, it is my belief that our relations are developing dynamically...I am sure that these issues will be resolved on the basis of our allied relations, which are anchored in mutual respect for our countries’ interests and sovereignty, and the principle of non-interference” (Prime Minister of Armenia 2018).

Pashinyan’s remarks underscore the importance of considering both official and semi-official discourse when analyzing Russian narratives. Although the relationship between these two discursive layers is not always explicit, they interact and inform one another, consistent with Koscūt’s account of intertextuality. Examining both is therefore necessary for a comprehensive understanding of Russian discourse. While official Russian rhetoric did not openly challenge Pashinyan, his remarks suggest that he perceived pressure emanating from semi-official Russian narratives.

6.2. Second Period (2020-2022)

As previously mentioned, this critical juncture coincided with significant events in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, including the July 2020 border clashes in the Tavush/Tovuz region between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as the 44-day war that took place from September to November of the same year. Russia played a crucial role by brokering the ceasefire agreement, which ultimately led to the deployment of Russian peacekeepers in the region.

During this critical juncture, Russian actors, in both formal and semi-formal discourse, vigorously promoted self-identification with the hero-protector/victim dichotomy. On the one hand, they portrayed a horrific scenario that allowed them to depict Russia as the hero-protector both in the past and during the 2020 war. Expressions such as “the most important achievement was stopping the bloodshed” (самым важным достижением стало прекращение кровопролития/samym vazhnym dostizheniem stalo prekrashchenie krovoprolitiya) (Putin 2020), “this is a tragedy that has befallen real people, real families” (это не кино. Это трагедия, которая постигла реальных людей, реальные семьи”/eto ne kino. Eto tragediya, kotoraya postigla real'nykh lyudey, real'nye semi”) (Putin 2020), and “the entire rest of Artsakh would have been cleared out. There would have been more victims, and even more refugees” (был бы зачищен и весь

остальной Арцах. Только жертв было бы ещё больше. И ещё больше — беженцев/byl by zachishchen i ves' ostal'noy Artsakh. Tol'ko zhertv bylo by eshe bol'she. I eshche bol'she — bezhentshev) (Kots 2020) were frequently used.

Russian actors once again relied on analogies with the past to sustain their narrative. References to the “Sumgait pogroms of 1988” and “the bitter legacy of the past, the tragic and bloody events... the genocide” (очень тяжёлое наследие прошлого... трагические и кровавые события... геноцид/ochen' tyazholoye naslediye proshlogo... tragicheskie i krovavye sobytiya... genotsid) (Putin 2020) served to provide Armenia's suffering with historical continuity and to promote Russia as a hero-protector. Not by chance, Russian officials reaffirmed their country's role in stopping the hostilities as a natural consequence of the fact that “Russia and Armenians have centuries-old relations that go back to a distant past. Our relations are based on cultural and religious affinity, and many things in history bind us together. This is even more important than relations between individuals. We remember this, we will never forget this, and this is what lies at the core of our interaction with Armenia” (Россию и армян связывают многовековые отношения, уходящие корнями далеко далеко в прошлое. В основе наших отношений культурная, религиозная близость, многое исторически нас связывает. И это важнее даже чем отношения между конкретными людьми. Мы помним об этом, никогда не забываем и это лежит в основе нашего взаимодействия с Арменией/Rossiyyu i armyan svyazyvayut mnogovekovyye otnosheniya, ukhodyashchiye korniyami daleko daleko v proshloye. V osnove nashikh otnosheniy kul'turnaya, religioznaya blizost', mnogoye istoricheskii nas svyazyvayet. I eto vazhnee dazhe chem otnosheniya mezhdu konkretnymi lyud'mi. My pomnim ob etom, nikogda ne zabываем i eto lezhit v osnove nashego vzaimodeystviya s Armeniyei) (Putin 2020).

The Kremlin's role in this narrative was celebrated in semi-official discourse through statements about Putin's actions, such as the Russian president “saved the remnants of Karabakh” (спас остатки Карабаха/spas ostatki Karabakha) and “stopped the bloody war” (остановил кровопролитную войну/ostanovil krovoprolitnuyu voy-nu) (Kots 2020). Furthermore, the peacekeepers emerged as the archetype of the hero-protector on the battlefield, as illustrated by phrases such as “the real safety of the people...This is the mission of the Russian peacekeepers” (реальную безопасность людей...Это миссия российских миротворцев/real'nyyu bezopasnost' lyudey. Eto missiya rossiyskikh mirotvortsev) (Putin 2020), or “our Russian soldiers are incredible people: just yesterday you were at home with your family, and today you receive orders to go to a mysterious

place with a romantic name—Nagorno-Karabakh" (Наши русские военные – удивительные люди: ещё вчера ты был дома с семьёй, а сегодня тебе дают приказ убыть в загадочное место под романтическим названием Нагорный Карабах/Nashi russkie voennye – udivitel'nye lyudi: eshchë vchera ty byl doma s sem'yei, a segodnya tebe dayut prikaz ubyt' v zagadochnoe mesto pod romanticheskim nazvaniem Nagorny Karabakh (Zhuravlyov 2020).

At the same time, Russian actors used the hero-protector narrative to solicit deference from Armenia. By contrasting Nagorno-Karabakh with Russia's prior interventions in South Ossetia, Russian officials declared that "after the criminal, beyond any doubt, actions of the former Georgian leadership, I mean the attacks on our peacekeepers in South Ossetia, Russia recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Some people may like this, some may not, but we did it in the interests of the people who live there, and we are not ashamed to speak about it openly. In relation to Karabakh, this was not done, and this, of course, had a significant impact on all the events taking place there" (после преступных, без всякого сомнения, действий бывшего грузинского руководства, имею в виду нанесение ударов по нашим миротворцам в Южной Осетии, Россия признала независимость Южной Осетии и Абхазии. Кому-то это может нравиться, кому-то не нравиться, но мы делали это в интересах тех людей, которые там проживают,...и мы не стесняемся об этом прямо говорить. В отношении Карабаха это сделано не было, и это существенным образом, конечно, оказывало влияние на все происходящие там события/posle prestupnykh, bez vsyakogo somneniya, deystviy byvshego gruzinskogo rukovodstva, imeyu v vidu navesenie udarov po nashim mirotvortsam v Yuzhnoy Osetii, Rossiya priznala nezavisimost Yuzhnoy Osetii i Abkhazii. Kому-to eto mozhet nraivit'sya, кому-to ne nraivit'sya, no my delali eto v interesakh tekhn lyudey, kotorye tam prozhivayut,...i my ne stesnyayemsya ob etom pryamo govorit'. V otnoshenii Karabakha eto sdelano ne bylo, i eto sushchestvennym obrazom, konechno, okazyvalo vliyaniye na vse proiskhodyashchiye tam sobytiya) (Putin 2020). By reminding its audience that Russia had both recognized and acted in other regions, the Kremlin sought to position itself as the sole authority capable of guaranteeing regional security, claiming that the outcome of the 44-day conflict stemmed from Armenia's earlier decision to deny Moscow full responsibility for the security of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Nonetheless, this critical juncture differs from the previous one because of growing scrutiny of Russia's role as a hero-protector. Particularly in 2020, questions arose about

why Russia did not intervene alongside Armenia from the outset to halt Azerbaijan's ambitions in Nagorno-Karabakh. Russian actors varied in their responses to anxieties about their failure to act as Armenia's allies from the very beginning of the conflict, for example, by not deploying troops to stop the Azerbaijani advance in the enclave. Although official discourse noted that Russia “was fully complying with its obligations in keeping with its obligations” (полностью выполняла все свои обязательства/polnost’iu vypolniala vse svoi obiazatel’sstva) (Putin 2020) and “thanks to active mediation efforts by the Russian Federation and the personal involvement of President V.V. Putin, the 44-day armed confrontation between Armenia and Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh was halted” (Благодаря активным посредническим усилиям Российской Федерации и личному участию Президента В.В.Путина удалось остановить 44-дневное вооруженное противостояние между Арменией и Азербайджаном в Нагорном Карабахе/Blagodaria aktivnym posrednicheskim usiliyam Rossiiskoi Federatsii i lichnomu uchastiiu Prezidenta V.V. Putina udalos’ ostanovit’ 44-dnevnoe vooruzhennoe protivostoianie mezhdru Armeniei i Azerbaidzhanom v Nagornom Karabakhe (Rudenko 2021), semi-official discourse responded by framing the Armenian government as the coward within the hero-protector narrative.

This dynamic became increasingly apparent after a series of events that eroded Armenia's confidence in Russia as a dependable security guarantor. During 2021 and 2022, especially after the Kremlin's comprehensive invasion of Ukraine, Azerbaijan progressively fortified its positions in Nagorno-Karabakh and launched assaults on the internationally recognized Armenian territory. The perceived inaction of Russia and the CSTO compelled Armenia to reevaluate its membership and examine the continued presence of Russian military installations within its territory (De Waal 2024). This phase culminated in 2022 with the Azerbaijani-enforced blockade, which, despite the presence of Russian peacekeepers, isolated Nagorno-Karabakh from Armenia, depriving the local population of essential goods such as food, medicine, and fuel. These developments ultimately precipitated the fall of the Republic of Artsakh in 2023.

During this period, Russian actors exhibited a range of content and emotional responses. On the one hand, they consistently upheld the hero-protector/victim dichotomy. Russian officials expressed that they were "certainly interested in making the South Caucasus a peaceful and steadily developing region” (безусловно, заинтересованы в том, чтобы Закавказье было спокойным и стабильно развивающимся регионом/ bezuslovno, zainteresovany v tom, chtoby Zakavkaz'e bylo

spokoynym i stabil'no razvivayushchimsya regionom) (Putin 2022), or "Russia is always ready to support the brotherly Armenian people and work together for the benefit of our shared interests" (Россия всегда готова подставить плечо братскому армянскому народу, вместе работать на благо общих интересов/Rossiiia vsегда gotova podstavit' plecho bratskomu armiianskomu narodu, vmeste rabotat' na blago obshchikh interesov) (Rudenko 2021), or Russia "has always supported our Armenian friends in ensuring the security of the Armenian people" (и поддерживала наших армянских друзей в обеспечении безопасности армянского народа/i podderzhivala nashikh armjanskh друзей v obespechenii bezopasnosti armjanskoho naroda) (Putin 2022). However, they also recognized that they found themselves in a difficult position, given that Russia was already embroiled in the Ukrainian battlefield (Putin 2022).

On the other hand, particularly within semi-official discourse, frustration and anger toward the Armenian government grew. Some actors described the political climate in Armenia as marked by "deep hopeless apathy" (глубокая безнадега /glubokaya beznadega) (Pegov 2021) and criticized Pashinyan for failing to "adequately answer even now even though he (and his government) should have done so long ago during the Second Karabakh War" (К нему масса вопросов по поводу Второй Карабахской войны, на которые ни он лично, ни его команда до сих пор внятно не ответили/К нему масса вопросов по поводу Vtoroy Karabakhskoy voyny, na kotorye ni on litsno, ni ego komanda do six por vnyatno ne otvetili) (Pegov 2021). They also criticized him for "misleading people about Russia's true role in stopping the bloody 44-day war" (людей вводят в заблуждение относительно истинной роли России в остановке кровопролитной 44-дневной войны/Lyudey vvodjat v zabljuzhdenie otnositel'no istinnoy roli Rossii v ostanovke krovoprolitnoy 44-dnevnoy voyny/ Lyudey vvodjat v zabljuzhdenie otnositel'no istinnoy roli Rossii v ostanovke krovoprolitnoy 44-dnevnoy voyny) (Abrahamyan 2021).

In this context, Russian actors in semi-official discourse reproduced a narrative dynamic already visible in the preceding section on the Tsarist–Armenian encounter. Anger toward the Armenian government did not displace compassion for the victim. Rather, they directed the two emotions at different subjects. This line of reasoning was exemplified by statements such as "if the Armenian government knows of countries and partners who want and can help at this critical moment for our country, and yet does not turn to them—that is, sorry, a crime against its own people" (Если правительство Армении знает страны и партнёров, которые хотят и могут помочь в этот

судьбоносный момент нашей стране и не обращается к ним – то это, извините, преступление перед своим народом/*Esli pravitel'stvo Armenii znaet strany i partnoryov, kotoryye khotyat i mogut pomoch' v etot sud'bo-nosnyy moment nashey strane i ne obrashchaysya k nim – to eto, izvinite, prestupleniye pered svoim narodom*) (Abrahamyan 2021).

In contrast to the initial critical juncture, this period was marked by heightened severity and anger-driven language, with numerous Russian figures commenting on the Armenian government's loss of Nagorno-Karabakh. Expressions such as “cut out their dirty tongue” (*вырежьте себе грязный язык/vyrezh'te sebe gryaznyy yazyk*) were used to refer to Pashinyan’s supporters (Simonyan 2020). The Armenian prime minister was labeled a “national traitor” (*национальный предатель/natsional'nyu predateľ*) and was said to have asserted that Russia “has the full moral right to spit on [them] and grind [them] into the dust” (*Россия имеет полное моральное право плюнуть на вас и растереть/Rossiia imeet polnoe moral'noe pravo pl'unut' na vas i rasteret*) (Simonyan 2020). These expressions indicate that, during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Russian actors ascribed to their country an aura of moral superiority, which is central to the politics of deference.

The persistence of official discourse, in contrast to semi-official discourse, in upholding its characteristic hero-protector roles without emphasizing the role of the coward depended on the perception that Armenian politicians were still deferring to Russia at the time. Russian officials emphasized that Armenian authorities “expressed gratitude on numerous occasions” (*руководство Армении... неоднократно выражало слова благодарности/rukovodstvo Armenii... neodnorazhno vyrazhalo slova blagodarnosti*). In a meeting in Sochi in November 2021, Pashinyan declared that: “It is evident that your personal role and the role of the Russian Federation in halting the war last year, and after November 9, the Russian peacekeeping forces have been deployed in Nagorno-Karabakh along the Lachin corridor. Clearly, Russian peacekeepers and the Russian Federation play a key role in stabilizing the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and the region.” On the sidelines of the 2022 Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum, Vahagn Khachaturyan, the fifth and current president of Armenia at the time of this writing, stated: “I believe the Armenian people appreciate your efforts in settling the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. I can assure you that what you did during the hostilities, your efforts, which stopped the war. I am not the only person who appreciates that. I know that the Armenian people also appreciate it (President of Russia 2022).”

Instead, semi-official actors displayed more organized and deeply ingrained anxiety about acknowledging the hero-protector role, again accompanied by frequent references to the past. For example, suggestions that Armenian authorities “read Narekatsi before bed” (почитайте на ночь Нарекаци/pochitajte na noch’ Narekatsi) should be interpreted as an invitation to regain lost moral clarity and reestablish an emotional relationship of deference toward Russia (Simonyan 2022). Grigor Narekatsi, a revered medieval Armenian monk and poet, wrote the Book of Lamentations and is buried at Narek Monastery in the Van region, now in eastern Turkey. However, the Armenian Genocide during the First World War inflicted massive suffering and displacement on the Armenian people. It sought to erase their cultural heritage by destroying many historic churches and monasteries in Turkey, including Narek Monastery (Adalyan 2010, 94). Recalling the Armenian suffering inflicted by the Ottoman Empire thus serves to emphasize how, regardless of the cowardice of the Armenian government, Russia is guided by benevolence and “will help again” (Поможет и в этот раз/Pomozhet i v etot raz) (Simonyan 2022). This combination of moral outrage and magnanimous restraint dramatizes the protector’s emotional stance: offended honor that nonetheless chooses to forgive.

6.3. Third Period (2023-2024)

At this critical juncture, Armenia increasingly questioned Russia's role as a hero-protector. The September 2023 events that led to the collapse of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, amid peacekeepers' inaction, marked a significant setback for the Russian narrative. As we already know, Pashinyan described reliance on Russia for security as a strategic mistake. Surveys revealed growing skepticism among the Armenian public about the Kremlin as a security partner (IRI 2024). This sentiment was further reflected in Armenia’s efforts to withdraw from the CSTO and to reduce the Russian military presence on its territory (De Waal 2024). In May 2024, Prime Minister Pashinyan implicitly accused Russia of supporting Azerbaijan’s preparations for the 2020 conflict.

To understand this dynamic in detail, it is important to recognize that, since mid-2023, Armenia’s Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has advocated a new political project for the nation's future that significantly diverges from the long-standing perspectives that have guided its politics since gaining independence in 1991. At the core of this approach is the idea that the Armenian population must distinguish between the current state, known as “Real Armenia,” and “Historical Armenia,” recognizing that the former's

success depends on moving beyond sentimental ties to the latter. Pashinyan emphasizes that, particularly after the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023, these two ideas have not only become incompatible but are often at odds (Hetq 2024; Zanatta 2025).

In April 2024, when addressing the National Assembly, he stated that holding on to the concept of Historical Armenia hampers Armenians from attaining genuine independence and keeps them reliant on “outside sponsors and saviors,” alluding to Armenia’s dependence on Russia for security assurances (Hetq 2024). Whether engaged in its war in Ukraine or distracted by other interests, we cannot definitively determine the exact reason why Russia chose not to halt Azerbaijan’s efforts to reclaim Nagorno-Karabakh. However, my analysis suggests that, emotionally, this critical juncture marked a moment of deep anxiety for Russia, as its policy of deference ultimately led to the loss of stability maintained through Armenia’s recognition.

This ontological wound triggered a discursive counter-movement in which both official and semi-official Russian actors intensified the romanticization of the hero-protector and the vilification of the coward, i.e., the Armenian government. In particular, while Russian officials continued to portray the country as a hero-protector, they openly depicted the Armenian government as a coward who betrayed its historical ally. Although this tendency was already present in semi-official discourse during the previous critical juncture, it only appeared in official statements starting in 2023.

Official discourse characterized Armenia’s reassessment of its relationship with Russia as a form of moral betrayal, echoing, as the historiography examined in the previous section shows, how Tsarist authorities came to perceive Armenians after the Berlin Congress. This framing was accompanied by emotionally charged rhetoric that conveyed anger and frustration toward the Armenian government. This stance was bolstered by assertions like “individuals representing a nation must be accountable for their statements” (Люди, которые представляют страну, должны отвечать за свои слова/Lyudi, kotorye predstavlyayut stranu, dolzhny otvechat’ za svoi slova) (Zakharova 2023), which characterized Yerevan’s critique as irresponsible and dishonorable.

The emotional tension was reflected in the rhetorical frustrations and anger directed at the Armenian government, which was accused of betraying the collective memory shared by the two nations, as illustrated by remarks like, “Do they not know how many Armenian citizens were saved thanks to Moscow’s actions? Is this not so? Do they not know this in Armenia?” (Неужели они не знают, какое количество граждан Армении удалось спасти в том числе благодаря действиям Москвы? Это не так? Об этом не

знают в Армении?/Neuzheli oni ne znayut, kakoye kolichestvo grazhdan Armenii udalos' spasti v tom chisle blagodarya deystviyam Moskvyy? Eto ne tak? Ob etom ne znayut v Armenii?) (Zakharova 2023), or “Why is this now consigned to oblivion?” (Так почему же это сейчас предается забвению?/Tak pochemu zhe eto seychas predayetsya zabveniyu?) (Zakharova 2023), or as “They want to rewrite history? It will not work.” (Они хотят переписать историю? Не выйдет/Oni hotyat perepisat' istoriyu? Ne vyidet) (Zakharova 2023).

Once again, Russian actors distinguished between the Armenian people, who remained victims and “are absolutely not guilty of Pashinyan’s betrayal. They themselves have been betrayed” (в предательстве Пашиняна совершенно не виноваты. Они сами преданы/v predateľ'stve Pashinyana sovershenno ne vinovaty. Oni sami predany), and the Armenian government (Zatulín 2023), affirming that the Armenian people “know their Armenia” and the “role of our country in the fate of the Armenian people” (народ хорошо знает свою Армению... и о роли нашей страны в судьбе армянского народа/narod khorosho znayet svoyu Armeniyu... i o roli nashey strany v sud'be armyanskogo naroda).

A controversy surrounding an Armenian eighth-grade history textbook in August 2024 further exemplified the importance of the memory factor in Russian ontological security. One chapter, titled “The Forceful Annexation of Eastern Armenia by Russia,” discussed events from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that had been thoroughly analyzed in earlier chapters, labeling them as “occupation” rather than the word “reunification” (воссоединение/vossoedinienie), which had been commonly employed in both academic and non-academic contexts until that point. Although the edit was altered a few days later in response to protests from the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, the incident showed that, regardless of Russia's physical capacity to assist Armenia, the hero-protector narrative remained essential for Russian actors.

Russian official statements condemned the chapter on the “forceful annexation of Eastern Armenia” as “a provocative title” (провокационное название/provokatsionnoe nazvanie) and accused Armenian authorities of attempting to “rewrite our shared history” (переписать нашу общую историю/perepisat' nashu obshchuyu istoriyu) (MFA 2024) and that “doubting the special role of the Russian Empire, and subsequently the Soviet Union and Russia, in shaping modern Armenia, is portrayed as contradicting well-known facts (Ставить под сомнение особую роль Российской империи, а впоследствии СССР и России в деле становления нынешней Армении означает идти против

общезвестных фактов/Stavit' pod somnenie osobuyu rol' Rossiyskoy imperii, a vposledstviy SSSR i Rossii v dele stanovleniya nyhesnoy Armenii oznachaet idti protiv obshcheizvestnykh faktov) (MFA 2024).

Russian officials' commitment to contrasting potential sources of ontological insecurity was highlighted in a 2023 report by the independent Russian news agency Meduza, which noted that during Azerbaijan's military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh, the presidential administration distributed a manual to employees of state-owned and Kremlin-aligned media outlining how to present the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis. The manual portrayed the Armenian government, aided by Western allies, as the primary instigator of the current situation and Russian peacekeepers as the sole security guarantors for Karabakh Armenians. In this respect, the framing closely recalled the Tsarist reaction to Armenian appeals to Britain discussed in the previous section, with the turn toward an alternative partner and the resulting challenge to Russia's privileged position as protector again emerging as a powerful trigger of anger.

Examples include highly emotional statements from individuals in semi-official discourse, arguing that Yerevan “merely handed Karabakh over, placing the onus for its future squarely on Russia” (Просто взял и продал, возложив ответственность за будущее Карабаха исключительно на Россию/Prosto vzyal i prodal, vozlozhiv otvetstvennost' za budushchee Karabakha iskluchitel'no na Rossiyu) (Kots 2023) and that Pashinyan was “the destroyer of the Armenian people” (он просто губитель армянского народа/on prosto gubitel' armyanskogo naroda) (Simonyan 2023). The coward was also described with derisive language, such as “дурь” (dur') and “пещерный тупизм” (peshchernyi tupizm) (Bagdasarov 2023).

These guidelines advise media representatives to highlight the inconsistency in Pashinyan's rhetoric on Nagorno-Karabakh. Although Armenia itself has never recognized the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh or its belonging to Armenia, in August 2019, Pashinyan declared that “Artsakh is Armenia, and that's it” (Kucera 2021). Furthermore, in May 2020, an inauguration ceremony was held in Shusha for the leader of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (Kucera 2021).

These actions increased tensions with Baku. However, after the Second Karabakh War in 2020, Pashinyan's position changed dramatically. The territorial losses and the return of surrounding regions to Azerbaijan made the goal of an independent Nagorno-Karabakh increasingly unfeasible (Huseynov and Mammadova 2023). Throughout 2022, discourse continued to shift, particularly during Brussels-brokered peace talks. Following

a meeting in Prague in October 2022, Aliyev and Pashinyan reaffirmed the two countries' commitment to the principles of the UN Charter and the 1991 Almaty Declaration, emphasizing mutual recognition of each other's territorial integrity (Huseynov and Mammadova 2023). This marked a departure from the earlier focus on historical claims. Aside from one exception in early 2023, Pashinyan also changed his terminology, no longer referring to the region as Artsakh, which implied independence, and now calls it Nagorno-Karabakh (Krikorian 2023).

Furthermore, the West's role in this context warrants careful analysis. While it might be tempting to view the portrayal of Pashinyan as a Western puppet simply as a reflection of Russia's geopolitical confrontation with the West, the reality is more complex. The OSCE Minsk Group continued to recognize Russian mediation efforts in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which remained one of the few remaining areas of cooperation between the Kremlin, the US, and France. In contrast, only after the events of September 2023 did Western officials begin to question Russia's capacity to effectively protect Armenia. For instance, the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, declared in October 2023 that "Russia's failure to ensure peace and security in the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh is a betrayal of the Armenian people" (Euronews 2023).

Overall, at both the initial stage and this third critical juncture, Russia frequently portrayed the West as an additional "coward" within the hero-protector narrative, thereby positioning itself as the genuine guardian of Armenians, despite its own limitations in fulfilling this role and in ensuring its ontological security. Within this framework, the Armenian government was depicted as cowardly, turning its geopolitical ambitions toward the West and thereby betraying the fate of the Armenian people, who were still portrayed as the genuine victims and to whom Russia continues to express emotional attachment. One example is the statement issued by the Russian Foreign Ministry in response to Armenian Prime Minister N.V. Pashinyan's address and the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023.

“...It is an obvious attempt to shirk responsibility for failures in domestic and foreign policy, shifting the blame to Moscow. The latest statements by N.V. Pashinyan [...] inspired by the West and spurred on by official Yerevan, are not episodic, but have a systemic character...trying to destroy the multifaceted and centuries-old ties between Armenia and Russia and making the country a hostage to the West's geopolitical games...” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2023).

Nonetheless, particularly during this third period, it became clear that the normative

framework Russia used to interpret the West did not influence Russian actors' attacks on the Armenian government. The perceived undermining of Armenia's hero-protector role within Russian collective memory and honor, specifically the politics of deference, provoked such reactions. This is evident in statements such as “all that remains (for Armenia) is to admit that there was no genocide, to deprive everything, to start teaching this in schools; then it only remains to say that Russia is the enemy — after 300 years, after the Russo-Persian wars, the Russo-Turkish wars, so much blood was shed by both Russians and Armenian martyrs. This is very difficult” (Остается признать, что не было геноцида, лишит' всего, начат' преподават' это в школах, остаётся ещё сказать, что Россия враг, это после 300 лет, после русско-персидских войн, русско-турецких, столько крови было пролито и русскими, и армянскими мучениками, это оchen' tyazhelo/Ostaetsya priznat', что не было геноцида, лишит' всего, начат' преподават' это в школах, остаётся ещё сказать, что Россия враг, это после 300 лет, после русско-персидских войн, русско-турецких, столько крови было пролито и русскими, и армянскими мучениками, это оchen' tyazhelo) (Narochnitskaya 2024), or “the Armenian prime minister is trying to renounce the centuries-old historical ties with Russia, even though it was precisely Russia that saved a significant part of the Armenian people from extermination and preserved their statehood” (армянский премьер пытается отказаться от многовековых исторических связей с Россией, хотя именно Россия спасла значительную часть армянского народа от истребления и сохранила ему государственность/armyanskiy prem'er pytaetsya otkazat'sya ot mnogovekovykh istoricheskikh svyazey s Rossiyey, khotya imenno Rossiya spasla znachitel'nuyu chast' armyanskogo naroda ot istrebleniya i sokhranila emu gosudarstvennost').

Even at this critical juncture, Russian actors did not abandon the hero-protector narrative, underscoring how deeply it remains embedded in Russia's sense of Self. Despite attempts by the Armenian government to shame Russia over its capacity to protect Karabakh Armenians, Russian commentators continued to reproduce the familiar sequences of this narrative framework. For instance, if the coward refuses to seek redemption, their actions may not only allow the tragedy to continue but also risk exacerbating it. Examples include statements such as: “What will happen next? Azerbaijan's ambitions could grow. And if the government in Armenia remains led by someone who envisions the country's future without Russia, the scenario becomes quite predictable. Anti-Russian protests, pushing out the Russian military base from Gyumri, exiting the CSTO... Then what would stop Baku from trying to force a corridor into its

enclave – Nakhchivan, which is currently cut off from the rest of Azerbaijan by the Syunik Province of Armenia?” (Что будет потом? Ну, аппетиты Азербайджана, мне кажется, вполне могут вырасти, и если у власти в Армении будет оставаться человек, который свое будущее видит без России, то в принципе алгоритм известный и предсказуемый. Это русофобские митинги (они уже пошли), это процесс (я думаю, скоро его запустят) выдавливания российской военной базы из Гюмри, это выход из ОДКБ,...ничего не остановит Баку от желания пробить свой коридор сухопутный в свой анклав, в Нахичевань, который сейчас, я напомним, отрезан от остального Азербайджана Сюникской областью Армении/ Chto budet potom? Nu, appetity Azerbaydzhana, mne kazhetsya, vpolne mogut vyrasti, i esli u vlasti v Armenii budet ostavat'sya chelovek, kotoryy svoye budushcheye vidit bez Rossii, to v printsipe algoritm izvestnyy i predskazuemyy. Eto rusofobskie mitingi (oni uzhe poshli), eto protsess (ya dumayu, skoro ego zapustyat) vydavlivaniya rossiyskoy voennoy bazy iz Gyumri, eto vykhod iz ODKB...nichego ne ostanovit Baku ot zhelaniya probit' svoj koridor sukhoputnyy v svoj anklav, v Nakhichevan', kotoryy seychas, ya napomnyu, otrezan ot ostal'nogo Azerbaydzhana Syunikskoy oblast'yu Armenii. Yesli my na karte posmotrim, to Armeniya vot takim appendiksom vrezayetsya v Azerbaydzhana, osnovnaya chast' yego s etoy storony, Nakhichevan' – s etoy. Kak, dopustim, nash Kaliningrad, u nas net s nim nazemnogo soobshcheniya, tol'ko cherez Yevrosoyuz. (Kots 2023).

By articulating the situation this way, Russian actors reaffirmed that the hero-protector can still intervene, grounded in what they portray as a moral commitment to defenseless victims. Hence, the claim that “if suddenly a responsible leader appears in Armenia, he must understand that Armenia has no future without Russia. And the future as an alternative to an American base would be a Russian base in Syunik, which could guarantee the territorial integrity of Armenia” (если вдруг в Армении появится ответственный руководитель, он должен понимать, что будущего у Армении без России нет. А будущее – как альтернатива американской базе российская база в Сюнике, которая могла бы гарантировать целостность Армении/esli vdruk v Armenii poyavitsya otvetstvennyy rukovoditel', on dolzhen ponimat', chto budushchego u Armenii bez Rossii net. A budushcheye – kak al'ternativa amerikanskoy baze rossiyskaya baza v Syunike, kotoraya mogla by garantirivat' tselostnost' Armenii) was a recurring feature of semi-official discourse I observed across numerous Telegram channels, as well as in the broader discursive material of the actors previously examined. In this way, Russia

maintained its attachment to the victim and continued to insist that it seeks to protect it, even though the Armenian government increasingly refused to accept its role as hero-protector.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the hero-protector narrative served as the central framework through which Russia articulated and maintained its politics of deference and pursuit of ontological security during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Throughout the three critical junctures analyzed, the roles of hero-protector, victim, aggressor, and coward manifested, evolved, and interacted in ways that elucidate both Russian self-perception and its expectations of deference from Armenia. Concerns about acknowledging its protective role, rooted in the legacy of the Russian Empire, significantly shaped Russian actors' perceptions of recognition or misrecognition of the hero-protector role during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

From 2015 to 2018, Russian actors actively advanced the hero-protector/victim dichotomy at both official and semi-official levels. Russian actors emphasized the continuity between the symbolic security guarantees that the Russian Empire provided to Armenians and Russia's current involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, consistently portraying their nation as the hero-protector. This role promoted self-worth closely tied to notions of honor and ontological security, while also invoking compassion, empathy, and moral responsibility. This dynamic justified the asymmetric relationship between Russia and Armenia as a benevolent act of protection.

In this context, Azerbaijan and Turkey were portrayed as malevolent aggressors whose actions were dehumanized and characterized as genocidal. Although official discourse refrained from explicitly identifying the aggressors, possibly to prevent polarization between Baku and Ankara or to demonstrate deference to Yerevan, semi-official discourse did so. Semi-official efforts aimed to uphold the compassion framework regarding the victim's role while cultivating fear within Armenia to induce deference, reminiscent of strategies the Russian Empire used to secure Armenian endorsement as a security guarantor. Based on their tone, a lack of deference could expose Yerevan to the risk of renewed atrocities by its longstanding adversaries.

At this critical juncture, the role that appeared to hold limited importance was that of the coward. I propose that this dynamic is closely connected to the substantial deference Armenian officials showed Russia during that period. Subtle references were made to

episodes of intermittent tensions between the two countries in 2015 and 2016, mainly involving Western and Armenian individuals voicing discontent with their nation's foreign policy direction. The hero-protector narrative encountered significant tensions in 2018, aligning with the Velvet Revolution that brought Pashinyan to power. Although official actors seemed to disregard this important event, the semi-official discourse responded with evident apprehension and anxiety regarding the new Armenian leadership and its perception of Russia. These actors expressed this discomfort through numerous commentaries and statements, conveying frustration and anger toward Pashinyan and calling on him to show proper deference to the protector.

The second period, which encompassed the 44-day war in 2020 and the ensuing escalations between Armenia and Azerbaijan leading up to Azerbaijan's blockade enforcement in Nagorno-Karabakh, highlighted a significant transformation in these roles. While Russia maintained its self-image as a hero-protector, semi-official discourse amplified frustration and anger over Armenia's political choices and perceived failures to honor its relationship with Russia. The aggressor role, previously embodied by Azerbaijan, gradually receded. It was replaced by the depiction of Armenia's leadership as cowardly. This shift reflected anxiety over Russia's inability to rely fully on its partner and complicated the moral hierarchy of protection.

The concluding phase, marked by the disintegration of the Republic of Artsakh in 2023 and the effective cessation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, revealed that, while the hero-protector narrative was under considerable strain, Russian actors continued to promote it. Within this new setting, Russia continued to position itself as a hero-protector, sustaining its moral authority despite limitations in its capacity for material intervention caused by the war in Ukraine. Anxiety not only endured but also escalated, driven by perceptions of Armenia's misrecognition of its role as a hero-protector. In this context, both official and semi-official narratives unequivocally attributed cowardice to Armenia's government, undermining the hero-protector's effort and betraying their collective memory.

At this point, the aggressor's role nearly vanished as the narrative turned introspective, highlighting Armenia's moral and strategic shortcomings rather than external threats. These discussions emphasized Yerevan's betrayals of collective memory and its endeavors to reinterpret the past, attributing responsibility to Moscow for its inability to prevent the Azerbaijani offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh. Collectively, the transformation of these roles and sequences within the hero-protector narrative illustrated

that this framework was neither static nor unchanging. It was fluid and relational, with shifts that mirrored Russian actors' emotional responses to evolving Armenian policies, as well as their attempts to avoid ontological insecurity.

7. CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter concludes my examination of Russia's (dis)engagement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict within the framework of its relationship with Armenia. I contend that this process can be understood more fully through Russia's pursuit of ontological security, which emerged from the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the existential uncertainty stemming from the disruption of established perceptions of the Russian Self.

In the case examined in this dissertation, efforts to restore and sustain a coherent Self became intertwined with mnemonic interpretations of the Tsarist past in the Caucasus and, more specifically, with reproducing a historically rooted self-image as Armenia's protector. I conceptualize this dynamic as a politics of deference: discursive practices aimed at reproducing a hierarchical relationship in which Russian official and semi-official actors not only sought to enact their country's self-ascribed role as Armenia's protector but also to secure Armenian recognition of the moral authority and honor associated with that role. To operationalize the politics of deference, I used the hero-protector narrative as an analytical framework and EDA to examine how this narrative's roles, sequences, and emotional dynamics were articulated and reconfigured in Russian discourse toward Armenia.

This final chapter consists of four main parts. First, I briefly summarize the key findings from the empirical chapters and discuss them in relation to the theoretical concepts introduced in Chapter 2 and the literature reviewed in Chapter 3. Most importantly, I address the research question using insights from the empirical analysis. Second, I discuss the thesis's main contributions. Third, I identify potential avenues for further research. Finally, I reflect on the study's main shortcomings and limitations.

7.1. Short Summary of Findings

My empirical analysis indicates that, across each of the three critical junctures of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict examined in this dissertation, Russian official and semi-official discourse consistently drew on core elements of the hero-protector narrative to sustain a politics of deference toward Armenia. As shown throughout the empirical chapters, Russia's hero-protector representation was rooted in the legacy of the Russian Empire and, more specifically, in Tsarist representations of both Russia's relationship

with Armenians and Armenians themselves. These representations endured through the Soviet period, with Russia's image shifting from a morally superior Christian power to an elder brother more closely aligned with Soviet state ideology. In the contemporary period, official and semi-official actors continued to draw on this historical legacy, rearticulating the protector role through Russia's position as Armenia's ally and security provider during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, with expressions of compassion and anger varying according to whether their expectations of deference from Armenia were met or frustrated. In this sense, Russia's politics of deference toward Armenia can be understood as a form of neo-imperialist discourse, insofar as it reproduced a historically rooted hierarchical relationship in which Yerevan's agency was portrayed as contingent upon Russia's benevolence. This finding resonates with Abushov's (2019, 86) analysis of Russian discourse, which similarly rests on the assumption that Armenia "would not exist without Russia's protection."

Russian actors used the hero-protector narrative framework during the Armenian-Azerbaijani dispute not only to legitimize the Kremlin's involvement in the security affairs of the South Caucasus and establish a tangible physical, economic, and military presence in Armenia, but also to imbue its engagement with significance for the Russian post-Soviet Self. In this context, the revival of the Tsarist Empire's legacy strengthened a perception of moral hierarchy and honor regarding the former periphery, now independent nations.

As I contended, Russia's politics of deference resembled the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, whereby the master's identity is contingent upon recognition from the servant, even as the latter influences and shapes the former. In a similar vein, Russia's self-perception as a protector was contingent upon the recognition of a protected Other, specifically Armenia, which allowed it to affirm its moral authority. Thus, since Putin's 2015 address at the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide in Yerevan, Russian actors have consistently depicted Russia as a virtuous and benevolent hero-protector and an honest intermediary committed to preventing bloodshed in the conflict. Armenia and the Armenian people were portrayed as vulnerable victims whose historical suffering was acknowledged as tragic and whose survival and destiny consistently relied on Russian protection.

The subsequent table delineates the character archetypes within the hero-protector narrative, the actions prompting Russian actors to align with these roles, and the emotional categories evident in Russian discourse.

ROLES	ACTORS	ACTIONS	EMOTION-SIGNIFYING WORDS
Hero-Protector	Russia Russian Empire President Vladimir Putin	Providing Security and Stability Providing Shelter	Moral Duty Pride Care Compassion Empathy Sympathy
Victim	Armenia Armenian People; Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh	Impossibility of defending itself Loyalty to a benevolent protector to pursue survival	Chaos Grief Pain Survival Fear Gratitude
Perverse Aggressor	“Ottoman Empire,” “Undefined enemy”, “Turkey”; “Azerbaijan”,	Destroying Armenia	Dark Death Envy Hatred
Coward	Armenian Government West	Betrayal Revisionism (Condemnation of Old and New policies) Moral Corruption	Dishonesty Distrust Anger Hypocrisy Injustice

Table 2: Roles within the Hero-Protector Framework (Source: the Author).

The initial narrative stage transpired when the hero-protector acknowledged the tragedy suffered by the victim, emphasizing the gravity of the aggressor’s actions and employing expressions related to death and suffering. On one hand, the hero-protector projected empathy, compassion, and sympathy towards the victim. Discursively, this sentiment was reflected in Russia’s perception of Armenian suffering as its own pain. On the other hand, the hero-protector mobilized history to evoke pride, linking the past’s legacy to Russia’s moral obligation to bring peace to Nagorno-Karabakh and, more broadly, the South Caucasus. This connection ultimately reinforced Russia’s Self, imparting a sense of exceptionalism and moral superiority.

Russian actors could not fully express their emotional attachment to the victim without the presence of a malevolent aggressor. In this sense, they relied on Armenian identity narratives that unequivocally assign this role to Turkey and Azerbaijan, often portrayed as a "Turkic threat" (Hovannisian 1971; Suny 1993; Shnirelman 2001;

Libaridian 2007; Payaslian 2007). Nevertheless, Russian discourse did not consistently name the aggressor, especially among official actors. This intentional exclusion may have aimed to safeguard Russia's diplomatic ties with Turkey and Azerbaijan. However, depending on the text's emotional tone and the prevailing state of Russian–Armenian relations during the discourse, I argue that this choice also served as a strategy by which Russian actors encouraged Armenia to show greater deference and conformity to the hero-protector/victim dichotomy.

In contrast, semi-official sources tended to be more direct, often naming the Ottoman Empire, Turkey, and Azerbaijan as the aggressors. Notably, these actors included not only members of the Armenian diaspora in Russia, who considered themselves primary custodians of the hero-protector legacy, but also ethnic Russians and non-Armenians within the Russian information sphere who consistently expressed substantial support for the Armenian side in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. They expressed substantial support for the Armenian faction in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. They categorically identified these actors as aggressors and explicitly asserted that Russia, with its lineage originating from the Russian Empire, was committed to protecting the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh from a new potential genocide.

The coward's role was attributed to the actor who, despite having the capacity to help the hero-protector support the victims, chose not to do so or even worked against their efforts. As the previous chapter showed, Russian actors did not always perceive individuals in this category uniformly. The West occasionally assumed this role in Russian discourse, having historically failed to offer significant support to Armenia. Moreover, Russian actors assigned this role to the Armenian government, particularly when they felt Yerevan failed to demonstrate the required respect towards Russia.

My analysis indicates that the primary distinction between these critical junctures lies in how Russian actors delineated the characters' roles within the narrative, particularly as they sought to alleviate ontological insecurity. During a phase of seemingly unchallenged acceptance of the hero-protector paradigm, Russian narratives consistently upheld a stable evaluation of the hero-protector/victim dichotomy and aggressor framework. However, the responses of Armenian elites to the difficulties in Russian-Armenian relations amid the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which led them to repudiate Russia's role as a hero-protector, profoundly affected Russian perceptions of Armenia, engendering anxiety and prompting a shift in the narrative.

Initially, only semi-official Russian actors engaged discursively to protect Russia

from ontological insecurity, distinguishing between the Armenian people, portrayed as honorable victims, and the Armenian government, characterized as a cowardly and ungrateful beneficiary of Russian assistance that also sought to engage in historical revisionism. This is evident in how, during crises in Russian-Armenian relations, displays of compassion, empathy, and sympathy toward the victim shifted to expressions of anger, reminding Armenia that its survival relied on the intervention of the hero-protector and that its nation's future was contingent on it. Subsequently, Russian officials openly adopted this narrative shift. Nevertheless, it should not be assumed that Russian semi-official discourse impacted the Kremlin's decision to adopt this narrative shift. Russian officials issued directives on how to interpret the events of September 2023, as mentioned in the preceding chapter.

This shift in the hero-protector narrative is particularly important for answering this dissertation's research question, as it shows how concerns over ontological security shaped Russian discourse toward Armenia. The politics of deference rested on the expectation that Armenia would recognize Russia's self-ascribed role as its hero-protector. When this expectation was perceived to be met, Russian actors reproduced the familiar representation of Armenians as defenseless victims deserving compassion and Russian protection.

Nonetheless, when deference was perceived to be withheld, Russian actors adjusted the narrative to accommodate the deteriorating relationship while preserving ontological security. Rather than constructing a new representation of Armenia, they drew on an alternative image embedded in the Tsarist mnemonic repertoire, which portrayed Armenians as unreliable and conspiratorial when they challenged Russian moral authority. Within the hero-protector narrative, this familiar representation repositioned the Armenian government as a coward and made anger an intelligible response to its perceived lack of deference.

Therefore, the narrative adjustment enabled Russian actors to make sense of Armenia's growing estrangement, as well as Russia's inability to fulfill its security commitments to Yerevan, through representations that remained familiar to the Russian Self. Ontological security was sustained not by preserving the hero-protector narrative unchanged, but by adapting it in ways that accommodated change while maintaining continuity with Russia's autobiographical narrative.

7.2. Contributions

The overarching aim of this dissertation was to contribute to the literature on Russia's role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by moving beyond analyses primarily centered on strategic interests and policy outcomes. I adopted an interpretivist, socio-psychological perspective to examine Armenia's and the Caucasus' place in Russian collective memory and to explore how Russia came to invest its (dis)engagement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with existential meaning. In doing so, the dissertation makes empirical, theoretical, and methodological contributions.

Empirically, this dissertation has made two principal contributions. First, it has broadened existing understandings of how post-Soviet Russia pursues ontological security by re-orienting the analytical focus from its horizontal relations with the West to vertical hierarchical relationships with its former imperial subjects.

If the constructivist scholarship on Russian foreign policy largely conceives Russia's relations with its former imperial periphery as a byproduct of its horizontal relationship with the West, this dissertation has demonstrated that the Kremlin's vertical relationships with states and communities on its former imperial periphery are as constitutive of a coherent sense of Self as its horizontal interactions with the West and other great powers.

In fact, focusing solely on the dynamics of "othering" between Russia and the West overlooks two important dimensions. First, although the emergence of a Europe-centered normative order transformed Russia's position within international society, the Russian State had previously regarded itself as a self-legitimizing normative authority founded on the superiority of the Russian Self (Zarakol 2011, 10). The second concerns the country's sense of honor, which is closely tied to its self-image as a security guarantor and sustained through the protection of what Tsygankov (2014, 133) terms "cultural allies."

The second empirical contribution is an in-depth case study that advances debates on Russian neo-imperialism by showing that the imperial legacy should not be understood merely as an aspiration to restore either the Soviet Union or the Russian Empire as territorial entities.

Over the past two decades, the Kremlin's increasingly assertive foreign policy in the post-Soviet space, combined with Vladimir Putin's repeated appeals to the imperial legacy, has fueled concerns among policymakers that Moscow seeks to restore the former Soviet Union in a new shape (Sagramoso 2000, x; MacKay 2026, 575). These concerns have only intensified since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In June 2026, more than four years after the outbreak of the war, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated

that "Putin will be in the Kremlin until his death, and he has one goal: the restoration of the Soviet Union. Without Ukraine, this is impossible, which is why it is so difficult for us" (The New Voice of Ukraine 2026).

While existing scholarship has primarily examined either the scope and objectives of Russian neo-imperialism or the historical claims through which Moscow has sought to legitimize its assertive foreign policy (MacKay 2026, 562), this dissertation has approached the question from a different angle. Rather than adopting an instrumentalist understanding of collective memory, in which political actors strategically invoke and manipulate the past for political purposes, it has adopted a culturalist perspective, treating memory of the imperial legacy as a cognitive framework through which political actors interpret the world (Hopf 2002; Minarova-Banjac 2018). Just as recent scholarship has shown that, prior to February 2022, official and semi-official discourse in Russia consistently portrayed Ukraine as incapable of exercising sovereignty independently, presenting its statehood as contingent upon its relationship with Russia (Kolodii 2026, 2), my study demonstrates that the construction of Armenia as historically dependent upon Russian protection likewise reproduces a hierarchical relationship constitutive of neo-imperial discourse.

Theoretically, this dissertation has advanced the concept of the politics of deference by bringing together insights from the literatures on ontological security, collective memory, and honor. The politics of deference captures how the Tsarist legacy operates as a mnemonic framework that enables post-Soviet Russia to reproduce a stable sense of Self through the discursive constitution of hierarchical relationships with its former imperial subjects. In Russian-Armenian relations during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, this process was articulated through the hero-protector narrative, in which Russian actors positioned their country as Armenia's benevolent protector while assigning the latter the complementary role of the defenseless victim whose survival was portrayed as contingent on Russian protection. Moreover, they sought Armenia's recognition of this self-ascribed moral authority, continually reconfiguring the narrative's relational positions in response to their interpretation of how far Yerevan affirmed or contested this hierarchy.

Although the findings of this dissertation are grounded in the Russian case and are not intended to generate a theory applicable beyond it, the concept of the politics of deference carries broader implications for scholarship at the intersection of ontological security, collective memory, and hierarchy (Pratt 2017; Bilgic and Pilcher 2022; Subotić and Zarakol 2020; Koschut and Ross 2026). More specifically, it has contributed to this

research agenda by demonstrating that mnemonic interpretations of the Tsarist legacy are reproduced not only through explicit appeals to history, but also through the emotional dynamics embedded in the hero-protector narrative, and that these dynamics, in turn, enabled post-Soviet Russia to reproduce a stable sense of Self.

Methodologically, the dissertation offers a comprehensive corpus of 75 Russian-language primary sources, compiled through a systematic search and careful selection of official and semi-official discourse. In doing so, it has responded to recent calls for greater engagement with Russian semi-official discourse (Kazharski 2019; Farbman 2023; Strycharz 2024; Puleri and Fasola 2025), which contend that Russian foreign policy emerges from a more diverse and fragmented set of actors than is often acknowledged, and that its analysis should extend beyond the elite-tier alone.

7.3. Avenue for Future Research

This dissertation provides conceptual and empirical pathways for future research on Russia's ontological security and Moscow's policies in the South Caucasus.

As outlined in the literature review, existing studies have largely examined Russia's search for ontological security through its quest for horizontal relations with the West, which has failed to acknowledge Moscow as a great power. This focus has overshadowed the significance of vertical dimensions of selfhood that are central to Russia's identity, particularly those related to hierarchy, honor, and practices of deference. These vertical elements are not simply by-products of horizontal engagements; rather, they form part of the foundational structure through which Russia interprets its role in the post-Soviet space.

Therefore, future research should investigate how these hierarchical relationships shape Russian foreign policy, both within the South Caucasus and in other arenas where Moscow seeks recognition of its status and historical role. A particularly valuable direction for further inquiry involves comparing conflicts in the post-Soviet space where Russia has established and maintained protectorate-like arrangements. The cases of Transnistria, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia offer important opportunities to explore how Russia reproduces practices of protection and moral authority. Extending the analysis to places where such relations existed during the Russian Empire, such as Georgia, would further illuminate how longer historical trajectories and ideas about regional guardianship shape contemporary foreign policy. The 2008 war provides a particularly instructive example, as it highlights how different actors relate to Russia's self-understanding as a

hero-protector. While South Ossetia and Abkhazia largely affirmed this identity and recognized Moscow's authority within a hierarchical framework, Georgia rejected it and instead portrayed Russia as an aggressor. This divergence in recognition highlights the value of examining how Russia responds when some actors validate its protector role while others deny it, and how these conflicting relational expectations shape its subsequent discourse, policy choices, and efforts to maintain ontological security.

Future research may also benefit from a stronger engagement with the conceptual and analytical framework developed in this dissertation to examine broader patron–client relationships in international politics. This endeavor would allow scholars to examine how affective expectations, symbolic obligations, and identity-affirming narratives help maintain asymmetrical ties.

This dissertation examined Russia's pursuit of ontological security by analyzing both official state discourse and semi-official discourse from various actors, using clearly defined criteria presented throughout the study. I believe this range of actors could also be considered in other studies of Russian discourse, as it presents potent emotional narratives that strengthen official discourse.

7.3. Limitations

All research projects encounter limitations and possible sources of interference, and this study is no different. I outline four primary constraints below.

The first limitation pertains to the nature of my data, specifically the emotions intertwined with the hero-protector narrative, as well as the analytical approach I employ to substantiate my findings. Research on emotions in IR continues to grapple with significant challenges. Although scholars have begun to address methodological concerns systematically, a notable gap remains in ongoing dialogue about the ontological, epistemological, and theoretical underpinnings of emotion research in the field (Clément et al. 2017; Koschut 2022). Clément et al. (2017) assert that definitions of emotion are often contested and may lack precision or clarity. While there is general consensus that social, cultural, and historical contexts influence emotions, researchers often choose methods based on personal preference rather than a shared understanding of what constitutes emotions within the discipline (Hutchison and Bleiker 2014).

The second notable limitation pertains to the case study itself. This dissertation primarily examines the Armenian context and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. While this focused approach enables thorough analysis, it also limits the immediate applicability of

the findings to other situations. Russia's role as a protector may change in other post-Soviet conflicts, such as those in Georgia, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, or Transnistria, depending on how relevant the patterns identified here are across different regional contexts.

The third limitation pertains to the temporal scope of this dissertation. My study has analyzed Russian discourse from 2015 to 2024. Although this period captures significant developments following the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, it does not comprehensively address the long-term historical evolution of Russia's hero-protector image during the preceding years, specifically from 1988 to 2014. Certain dynamics may only become apparent over longer historical periods, particularly in light of the presidencies of Boris Yeltsin and Dmitri Medvedev. At the same time, although the 2023 military operation effectively brought the territorial dimension of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to an end, Armenia and Azerbaijan had not yet signed a definitive peace treaty at the time of writing. As a result, it will be interesting to examine how Russia will continue to pursue its politics of deference towards Armenia in the future.

The fourth and final limitation of this study relates to the selection of Russian discourse actors, who were chosen because of my ongoing interest in Russian foreign policy in the South Caucasus and my frequent monitoring of Russian-Armenian relations. While these sources are crucial for understanding the construction of the hero-protector narrative, they may not fully encompass informal, internal, or dissenting viewpoints within Russian policymaking circles or semi-official environments. Consequently, some nuances of the hero-protector narrative may remain underexplored, potentially including perspectives from pro-Azerbaijani voices.

Conclusion

This final chapter provides an overarching synthesis of the thesis, integrating its theoretical, methodological, and empirical dimensions and consolidating the arguments and findings developed throughout the preceding chapters. In light of the key findings, the chapter brought these components together to answer the research question and show how Russia's politics of deference toward Armenia were articulated and reconfigured through the hero-protector narrative in response to changing relational dynamics. In particular, it showed that Russia's pursuit of ontological security depended not on preserving an unchanged narrative, but on its capacity to adapt historically familiar

representations in response to Armenia's perceived recognition or rejection of Russia's moral authority.

The chapter also discussed the thesis's principal empirical, theoretical, and methodological contributions. Empirically, it showed the importance of Russia's vertical, hierarchical relationships with its former imperial subjects in reproducing ontological security and advanced an understanding of Russian neo-imperialism centered on historically rooted relations of protection, dependence, and moral authority. Theoretically, it developed the concept of the politics of deference by bringing together insights from ontological security, collective memory, hierarchy, and honor. Methodologically, it demonstrated the value of examining official and semi-official Russian discourse together, drawing on a systematically constructed corpus of Russian-language primary sources.

The chapter further acknowledged several limitations, including the methodological challenges involved in interpreting emotions in political discourse, the focus on the single case of Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the restriction of the analysis to the period between 2015 and 2024, and the purposive selection of Russian discourse actors, which may have left some perspectives underexplored. Finally, it identified avenues for further research, particularly comparative investigations of Russia's protector relationships in other post-Soviet contexts, including Transnistria, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Georgia, as well as applying the politics of deference framework to broader patron–client and hierarchical relationships in international politics.

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9. SUPPLEMENTARY DOCUMENTS: ANNEX

Year	Author	Actor Type	Source Type	Text
2013	Vladimir Solovyev	Semi-official media figure	Public speech	Меня часто спрашивают, почему ты любишь Армению. Армению сложно не любить. Потрясающая природа, удивительное небо, плодородная земля. Мужчины, которые своей жизнью доказали своё право называться гордыми преемниками великой истории. Женщины, трудолюбие и заботливость которых настолько потрясающие, что каждый мужчина чувствует себя генералом в армянской армии. Женщины добрые и красивые. Мужчины, которые землепашцы и строители. Великие писатели и замечательные музыканты. Но когда наступает момент истины, они становятся войнами. И становятся войнами непобедимыми. И женщины, которые по-прежнему ждут их рядом. И когда мужчины возвращаются домой с войны и отправляются зарабатывать деньги, женщины воспитывают детей. И воспитывают их в традиции, когда, глядя на армянскую семью, хочется сказать, вот это настоящая семья. И когда видишь отношения, то испытываешь чувство гордости за этих людей. Поэтому Армения не только фрукты, не только виды на гору Арарат, которые до сих пор почему-то не наши. Не только воспоминания о прекрасном Ереване и непокорившемся Степанакерте. Это не только гордость за то, что и в Риме есть карты, по которым ясно, где была Великая Армения, когда все соседи еще нервно переживали. Но самое важное, за что чувство гордости всегда переполняет, самое важное – это армянское сердце. Самое важное – это то, что каждый армянин чувствует в себе ответственность за великую историю и принадлежность к великому народу. Поэтому, когда ты встречаешь армянина, и он твой друг, Ты знаешь, что каждый армянин, живущий на этой земле, тоже частичка тебя и частичка этой великой дружбы. В моей жизни я видел множество подступков, которые наполняли мое сердце чувством гордости, и у меня выступали слезы. Мои друзья приходили мне на помощь, когда мне было тяжело, и в радости они были рядом. Я всегда знал, что есть телефон, по которому я могу позвонить. И есть люди, которые появятся, не спрашивая, что случилось, а просто потому, что они должны быть рядом. Это настоящие друзья. Это армяне.
2015	Vladimir Putin	Official	Public speech	Дорогие друзья! Уважаемые дамы и господа! Признателен Президенту Армении Сержу Азатовичу Саргсяну за приглашение принять участие в сегодняшних траурных мероприятиях. Мы искренне сопереживаем армянскому народу, испытывавшему одну из самых страшных трагедий в истории человечества. Более полутора миллионов мирных людей были убиты, искалечены, а свыше шестисот тысяч – изгнаны из родных домов, подверглись массовым репрессиям. Были разрушены многие бесценные памятники архитектуры и духовные святыни, сожжены древние книги и бесценные рукописи. События 1915 года потрясли весь мир, а в России были восприняты как собственное горе. Сотни тысяч беззащитных и потерявших кров армян, миллионы получили убежище на территории России и были спасены. Именно российская дипломатия добилась международного осуждения насилия над армянским народом. По инициативе Министра иностранных дел Сергея Дмитриевича Сазонова Россия, Франция и Великобритания – Президент Франции сейчас вспоминал об этом – в совместном заявлении прямо назвали происшедшее преступлением против человечества и цивилизации. Отмечу, что отношения братских народов России и Армении всегда отличались особой духовной близостью и взаимной поддержкой. Так было и в ходе драматических событий столетней давности, и в годы Великой Отечественной войны, и во время разрушительного Спитакского землетрясения. И сегодня мы скорбим вместе с армянским народом. В сотнях российских городов, хочу это подчеркнуть, дорогие друзья, – в сотнях российских городов пройдут более двух тысяч поминальных мероприятий. В них примут участие не только представители многочисленной армянской общины России,

				насчитывающей около трёх миллионов человек, но и десятки тысяч людей других национальностей. Позиция России была и остаётся последовательной: мы считаем, что массовому убийству людей нет и не может быть никаких оправданий. Россия является участницей и инициатором целого ряда международно-правовых актов, заложивших основу современному международному уголовному праву, в том числе Конвенции о предупреждении преступлений геноцида. Мировое сообщество обязано делать всё, чтобы трагические события прошлого никогда не повторялись, чтобы все народы могли жить в мире и согласии, не зная ужасов, к которым приводят разжигание религиозной вражды, агрессивный национализм и ксенофобия. К сожалению, сейчас во многих регионах мира вновь поднимает голову и неонацизм, к власти рвутся радикальные националисты, набирает силу и антисемитизм, мы видим и проявления русофобии. Нужно задаться вопросом, почему это происходит и что является этому причиной. И при любом действии в критически важных регионах мира нужно прежде всего подумать о том, что будет дальше, подумать о последствиях. Между тем, вспоминая трагические события прошлых лет, дорогие друзья, мы должны с оптимизмом смотреть вперёд, верить в идеалы дружбы, добрососедства и взаимовыручки, учиться доброте и согласию, уменью уважать друг друга, уважать интересы друг друга. Только так можно сделать мир лучше, стабильнее и безопаснее. Мы с вами, дорогие друзья. Спасибо вам за внимание.
2015	Sergey Lavrov	Official	MFA interview	Во-первых, в очередной раз хочу подтвердить наши глубочайшие соболезнования по поводу ужасного преступления, совершённого в отношении семьи Аветисян. Погибли абсолютно невинные люди. Вчера скончался и шестимесячный Серёжа. По этому поводу я специально позвонил моему коллеге Э.А.Налбандяну и ещё раз выразил в наши чувства. Важно, что обвиняемый задержан, он уже дал признательные показания. Состоялся телефонный контакт между президентами наших стран, глава Следственного комитета России А.И.Бастрыкин выехал в Ереван и вчера встречался с Президентом Армении С.А.Саргсяном. Мы подтверждаем, что совместное, максимально открытое судебное разбирательство будет осуществляться на территории Армении. Уверен, что суд быстро вынесет объективный вердикт, адекватный этому ужасному преступлению. Что касается общего контекста наших отношений, то скажу так – «в семье не без урода». Именно такое отношение сейчас проявляют и демонстрируют все военнослужащие и командование российской военной базы в Армении. Не буду приводить примеры, когда люди сходят с ума по совершенно непонятным причинам и творят невообразимое. В других ситуациях и странах таких примеров множество. Мы видим попытки политизации этой ситуации, которые исходят не от руководства Армении и России. Немало желающих использовать эту трагедию, чтобы получить какие-то геополитические преимущества. Это отвратительно, недопустимо и недостойно гордого армянского народа, который, я знаю, никогда не поведётся на подобного рода провокации. Мы скорбим вместе с Арменией и сделаем всё, чтобы это преступление не осталось безнаказанным, виновный понёс самое суровое наказание и чтобы подобное впредь не происходило. Естественно, застраховаться на сто процентов от любых трудновообразимых эксцессов невозможно, но всё необходимое будет сделано. Убежден, что союзнические российско-армянские отношения стратегического партнёрства не пострадают.
2016	Vladimir Zhirinovsky	Semi-official political figure	Interview	Если взять исторический аспект, то естественно армяне - самое древнее государство, народ, там проживающий, но последние 1000 лет, 100 лет все менялось. Менялись флаги, границы по всей Европе, по всему миру. Это ошибка большевиков, если бы они не стали менять то территориальное деление, которое было при царе, то проблем бы не было. Как только пришла советская власть, сразу начались конфликты между Арменией и Азербайджаном", - сказал Жириновский. Он отметил, что вражда также связана с резней в Турции. "Естественно такое отношение не может быть решено на двусторонней основе и МГ ОБСЕ ничего не решит – ни французы, ни американцы. Надо, чтобы стороны встретились в Москве, окончательное решение может принять только президент России. Ни Женева, не Минск, ни французы, они здесь ничего не смогут сделать, потому что мы всегда там воевали, и с персами и с турками, спасали, защищали армян ", - добавил российский депутат. Он отметил, что в случае, если Москва примет решение отдать Карабах Армении, Азербайджан заключит военное соглашение с Турцией, которая установит свои военные базы под Дагестаном. "Что мы получим, получим продолжение Турции на север, а где Дагестан, там и весь Северный Кавказ. В этом же проблема, если бы не было Турции, то вопрос был бы решен. Но Турция и так представляет угрозу. Поэтому здесь нужно не дать возможность Турции повернуть Азербайджан в свою сторону", - добавил Жириновский. По его словам, несмотря на двусторонние соглашения и контакты с Турцией, сейчас Азербайджан выдерживает самостоятельную линию. "Если же мы поможем Армении воссоединиться с Карабахом, то тогда Азербайджан будет стоять на пути воссоединения с Турцией. А Турция НАТО-вская страна, все ее ненавидят, у нее все враги –русские, болгары, греки, армяне, курды, сирийцы и иракцы, все ее ненавидят. Она всем мешает и является здесь чужой. Это кочевники, которые

				должны вернуться в Среднюю Азию. Нам нужно поддержать создание независимого государства Курдистан и вернуть Западную Армению армянам, и тогда автоматически как-то решится вопрос с Карабахом. Это задача на середину 21 века
2018	Roman Babayan	Semi-official media figure	Interview	Россия уступает американцам по эффективности работы с обществами постсоветских стран. Такое мнение выразил Sputnik Армения известный российский тележурналист Роман Бабалян, который участвовал в Ереване на заседании армяно-российского Лазаревского клуба. "Американские фонды по "защите демократии" активно работают в Армении. Это и USAID, и "Национальный фонд демократии" (NED). И мы видим, что в Армении из года в год уменьшается число граждан, выступающих за дальнейшее укрепление союзнических отношений с Россией", - сказал он. При этом Бабалян считает, что проблема в данном случае не в новой власти Армении, ибо тенденции отрыва союзников от России были заложены гораздо раньше. По его словам, одновременно Россия не прилагает достаточных усилий для укрепления своего присутствия в постсоветских странах. "Россия буксует, причем буксует давно. Я на всех площадках говорил: как так получается, что мы 70 лет жили в одной стране, говорили на одном языке, кругом у нас друзья и родственники, и потом вдруг появляются какие-то американцы и выдергивают одну страну за другой из зоны исторической ответственности России. Они работают системно, а мы ничего не делаем", - добавил наш собеседник. Комментируя отсутствие представителей новой власти на заседании клуба, Бабалян сказал, что весьма удивлен и огорчен этим. Лазаревский клуб собрал за одним столом солидных экспертов, мэтров своего дела, почти весь цвет российского экспертного сообщества, но нет практически никого из команды Пашиняна. "Это была бы хорошая дополнительная площадка для того, чтобы слышать друг друга. И то, что здесь нет представителей власти, меня это огорчает. Пашинян ведь на каждом шагу говорит, что Россия – друг и стратегический партнер Армении. Но никто из его представителей здесь не присутствует", - сказал Бабалян. Журналисту самому было бы очень интересно пообщаться с и.о. премьер-министра. Бабалян сейчас снимает фильм о трагических событиях 1 марта 2008 года в Армении, и несколько раз безуспешно пытался взять интервью у Пашиняна, который был в гуще тех событий. Но последний отказался. "Роберт Кочарян идет на интервью со мной. Ему не нравятся многие вопросы, которые я задавал, но он все равно согласился ответить. Мы также записали интервью с родственниками погибших. Но ни Пашинян, ни Левон Тер-Петросян на контакт не захотели идти", - посетовал журналист. Напомним, 1-2 марта 2008 года, после президентских выборов в Армении начались митинги. Для их разгона власти применили силу. В ходе операции погибли 10 человек.
2020	Margarita Simonyan	Semi-official media figure	Telegram post	Я обращаюсь к армянской власти. Именно к власти, а не к народу, частью которого я являюсь. Обращаюсь только потому, что ваши интернет-войска унавозили мои соцсети требованиями (в хамской и агрессивной форме) 'выразить свою позицию'. Просили — выражаю. Посмотрите на себя со стороны. Посмотрите, что вы творите. Как вы себя ведете. Какие же вы армяне? Армяне — честный, благородный и благодарный народ. Всегда таким был. А вы ведете себя, как (ЗАПРЕЩЕНО РОСКОМНАДЗОРОМ). В ответ на многолетнее добро и защиту, которые вы получали от России, вы не признали Крым. Потому что это внутреннее дело Армении. Исключительно из политической мести вы посадили Роберта Кочаряна — неизменного союзника России. Посадили специально, демонстративно, плюнув прямо в лицо своим 'русским друзьям'. Потому что это внутреннее дело Армении. Вы наводнили страну антироссийскими НКО, которые на вашей территории обучают молодежь, как свергать власть в России. Вы стали плацдармом антироссийских сил на Кавказе. Потому что это внутреннее дело Армении. Вы выгнали российских бизнесменов-армян. Вы не хотите у себя ничего, что связано с Россией. Потому что это внутреннее дело Армении. Ваши медиа и соцсети ежечасно поливают помоями Россию, Путина, всех, кто поддерживает Путина, — особенно русских армян (например, меня). Вы разделили несчастный, и без того исчезающий армянский народ на врагов — русских армян — и 'настоящих' — тех, кто поддерживает вашу сиюминутную власть. Потому что это внутреннее дело Армении. А теперь, когда на вашей границе война, когда само существование вашего режима под угрозой, когда армяне всего мира уже видят ожившие призраки янычар с кривыми ножами, которыми резали наших предков, вы вспомнили, что Россия снова должна вас спасать. Разве это не внутреннее дело Армении? После всего зла и захлебывающегося презрения, которое вы проявляли к России в последние годы, ваши информационные войска и вы сами считаете себя вправе ждать помощи? На самом деле, после всего, что вы сделали, Россия имеет полное моральное право плюнуть на вас и растереть. Но она так не поступит. Я уверена. Поможет и в этот раз. Потому что Россия — такая. Великодушная и благородная, Родина моя, ненаглядная. А вы — просто горстка вопящих политиканов, предавших интересы великого армянского народа ради минуты власти и мелкой личной мести. Почитайте на ночь Нарекаци. Может, проснутся у вас остатки знаменитой армянской совестливости и умения ценить добро. Если нет у

				вас Нарекаци — так я передам. У меня на тумбочке лежит. А по поводу войны обеим сторонам я скажу только одно: остановитесь! Хуже войны нет ничего. Я это на своей шкуре знаю. Просто остановитесь, пока не поздно.
2020	Vladimir Putin	Official	Press conference	Вопрос: Владимир Владимирович, вот уже неделя прошла с момента подписания важнейшего заявления между Азербайджаном, Арменией и Россией. Как Вы сейчас оцениваете ход его выполнения? Что успешно? В чём может быть проблема? Но самое главное – позволит ли, на Ваш взгляд, это соглашение разубить тот очень тугой узел, столь давний и очень тяжёлый вопрос, когда, как Вы сами говорили, у каждой стороны своя правда? В.Путин: Самое главное, что удалось сделать, – это прекратить кровопролитие. Я уже говорил, свыше четырёх тысяч человек погибло, только по официальным данным. На самом деле, я думаю, больше. Десятки тысяч ранены, искалечены. Послушайте, это же не кино. Это трагедия, которая происходит в жизни с конкретными людьми, с конкретными семьями. Поэтому прекращение кровопролития – это главный результат. Но для того, чтобы понять, что происходит, нам придётся всё-таки вернуться назад, в историю, буквально в двух словах. Я вынужден напомнить, что всё это началось уже в далёком 1988 году, когда произошли столкновения на этнической почве в азербайджанском городе Сумгаите. Тогда пострадало гражданское население, армянское, потом эти события перекинулись на Нагорный Карабах. И поскольку тогдашнее руководство Советского Союза не отреагировало должным образом на происходящие события... Повторю ещё раз: это вещи тонкие, здесь я не хочу занимать чью-то сторону, кто там прав, кто виноват, сейчас вообще невозможно сказать, но навести порядок нужно было, защитить людей надо было, гражданское население. Этого сделано не было. И тогда армяне сами взялись за оружие, и начался этот затяжной, по сути дела, многолетний конфликт, который привёл к тому, что в 1991 году Карабах объявил о своей независимости, суверенитете, самостоятельности, а в 1994 году были подписаны бишкекские соглашения, бишкекский меморандум, который прекратил боевые действия на тот момент времени. А что было в результате? В результате Карабах объявил о своей независимости, как я уже сказал, и ещё семь прилегающих к нему районов перешли под контроль армян, по сути, под контроль Армении. Вот, собственно говоря, это то, что досталось нам из прошлого, и то, что надо было решить. На мой взгляд, то, что прекратились боевые действия и, что очень важно, договорились о разблокировании всех транспортных коммуникаций, восстановлении экономических связей, – на мой взгляд, это чрезвычайно важно и это создаёт хорошую базу для нормализации отношений на длительную перспективу.Реплика: Возвращаясь к истории: ведь и статус Карабаха тогда никто не признал. В.Путин: Это правда: ни тогда, ни позже никто не признал. Кстати говоря, не признала и сама Армения. Вопрос: Сейчас вообще существует ли проблема статуса Карабаха? В.Путин: Да, такая проблема существует, окончательный статус Карабаха не урегулирован. Мы договорились о том, что мы сохраняем статус-кво, на сегодняшний день существующее положение. Что будет дальше – это предстоит решить в будущем или будущим руководителям, будущим участникам этого процесса. Но, на мой взгляд, если будут созданы условия для нормальной жизни, для восстановления отношений между Арменией и Азербайджаном, между людьми на бытовом уровне, особенно в зоне конфликта, то это создаст условия и для определения статуса Карабаха. Что касается признания-непризнания Карабаха в качестве независимого, самостоятельного государства, здесь можно по-разному это оценивать, но это, без всяких сомнений, было существенным фактором, в том числе и в ходе только что, надеюсь, завершённого кровопролитного конфликта. Потому что сам факт непризнания Карабаха, в том числе со стороны Армении, существенным образом накладывал отпечаток на ход событий и на его восприятие.Здесь надо прямо говорить: в своё время после преступных, без всякого сомнения, действий бывшего грузинского руководства, имею в виду нанесение ударов по нашим миротворцам в Южной Осетии, Россия признала независимость Южной Осетии и Абхазии. Мы признали справедливым волеизъявление народа, проживающего в Крыму, и стремление людей, проживающих там, воссоединиться с Россией, мы пошли навстречу людям, мы сделали это открыто. Кому-то это может нравиться, кому-то не нравится, но мы делали это в интересах тех людей, которые там проживают, и в интересах всей России, и мы не стесняемся об этом прямо говорить. В отношении Карабаха это сделано не было, и это существенным образом, конечно, оказывало влияние на все происходящие там события. Вопрос: Армяне, которые покидали Карабах во время боестолкновений, сейчас возвращаются в свои дома. Насколько, на Ваш взгляд, это вообще безопасно? В.Путин: Это очень важный вопрос,

			это очень чувствительный вопрос. Как раз с целью обеспечения безопасности этих людей и размещается российский миротворческий контингент. Как Вы видите, под этим документом стоит подпись и Премьер-министра Армении, и Президента Азербайджана, и моя подпись стоит. Мы все прекрасно понимаем, отдаём себе отчёт в том, что, исходя из тяжести этого конфликта, исходя из того, что раны ещё, конечно, не затянулись, очень свежи, очень много потерь, как я уже сказал, беда пришла во многие дома, во многие семьи, и, кстати говоря, и в Азербайджане, и в Армении. Поэтому нужно время, для того чтобы всё успокоилось, улеглось и чтобы люди действительно почувствовали, что мирная жизнь вернулась в их сердце, в их душу, вот что самое главное. Ну а до этого, конечно, следует подумать о реальной безопасности людей, в том числе беженцев, возвращающихся, кстати говоря, с обеих сторон. И эта миссия возложена на российских миротворцев. Вопрос: В ту ночь, сразу после подписания этого соглашения, мы стали свидетелями, как буквально в течение часа начали идти сообщения из Еревана о том, что там забурилась ситуация. И мы видим, что она бурлит и сейчас. Оппозиция обвиняет Премьера Пашиняна чуть ли не в измене, в предательстве Родины. В свою очередь Пашинян вот буквально накануне сказал следующее: армянская сторона могла избежать войны, если бы согласилась передать Азербайджану семь районов, а также город Шуша, но мы не хотели соглашаться на это, приняли вызов и боролись до конца. Действительно ли в ходе переговоров так тоже ставился вопрос? В.Путин: Вопрос о возвращении Азербайджану пяти, а затем двух районов, которые находились под контролем (фактически под контролем Армении, надо прямо об этом сказать), ставился на протяжении длительного времени. В 2013 году в рамках Минской группы ОБСЕ Россия сформулировала условия, которые, на наш взгляд, могли бы положить начало мирному процессу. И с этим, кстати говоря, все участники этого минского процесса, Минской группы ОБСЕ, включая сопредседателей (а это, напомним, Россия, Франция и Соединённые Штаты Америки), все с этим согласились и поддержали. Что лежало в основе этих предложений? Возвращение на первом этапе пяти контролируемых Арменией районов, а затем и двух районов дополнительно, создание коридора, который соединял бы Карабах и Армению в зоне Лачинского района Азербайджана (потому что он условно получил название Лачинский коридор) и признание статус-кво самого Карабаха, не закрепляя его окончательного статуса. Действительно, это я всё время говорил нашим армянским друзьям и азербайджанским тоже, на мой взгляд, это было бы решением вопроса. Но, к сожалению, мы подходили несколько раз к окончательному решению на этой базе... Да, кстати говоря, ещё обязательное условие было – возвращение беженцев, причём с обеих сторон, как азербайджанских беженцев, так и армянских беженцев к своим родным очагам. И это является безусловным требованием международного гуманитарного права. На мой взгляд, если бы это нам удалось сделать, удалось бы достигнуть договорённостей на этой базе, и войны бы не было, это правда. Я и сейчас в этом абсолютно убеждён. К сожалению, когда мы подходили, вот-вот казалось, уже совсем близко были к решению вопроса на этой базе, то с одной, то с другой стороны возникали препятствия, которые мы так и не смогли преодолеть. В конечном итоге дело вылилось в такой кровавый, прямо скажем, вооружённый конфликт, свидетелями которого мы все были только что. Что касается города Шуша, то о передаче Шуши вопрос никогда не ставился. Повторяю, статус окончательный Карабаха передавался на будущее время, и все должны были договориться о том, что сохраняется статус-кво как непризнанного государства. Что касается города Шуша, то этот вопрос возник в ходе этого конфликта, в ходе этого кризиса. Действительно, это было, но было в каком контексте? 19–20 октября у меня состоялась серия телефонных переговоров как с Президентом Алиевым, так и с Премьер-министром Пашиняном. И тогда вооружённые силы Азербайджана вернули себе контроль над незначительной частью, южной частью Карабаха. В целом мне удалось убедить Президента Алиева в том, что можно прекратить боевые действия, но обязательным условием с его стороны было возвращение беженцев, в том числе в город Шуша. Неожиданно для меня позиция наших армянских партнёров была сформулирована таким образом, что это для них неприемлемо. И Премьер Пашинян мне прямо сказал, что видит в этом угрозу для интересов Армении и Карабаха. Мне сейчас не очень понятно, в чём эта угроза была бы, имею в виду, что предполагалось возвращение мирных граждан при сохранении контроля с армянской стороны над этой частью территории Карабаха, включая Шушу, и имея в виду наличие наших миротворцев, о чём мы уже тогда договаривались и с Арменией, и с Азербайджаном. И мне Премьер тогда сказал: «Нет, мы не можем на это пойти. Мы будем бороться. Будем воевать». Поэтому и обвинения в его адрес о каком-то предательстве не имеют под собой никаких оснований. Другое дело – правильно это было или неправильно, это другой вопрос, но здесь и речи быть не может ни о каком предательстве. Вопрос: Вы упомянули уже о Минской группе ОБСЕ. И накануне Франция и США как сопредседатели этой группы призвали Россию дать разъяснения о роли Турции в карабахском урегулировании. И вообще много возникает очень вопросов по поводу центра с Турцией по контролю за прекращением огня. Президент Эрдоган и глава
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				МИД Турции заявляли о том, что турки будут принимать участие в миротворческой миссии на совместной основе с Россией. Действительно ли это так? И чем будет этот центр заниматься? И самое интересное, где он всё-таки будет в итоге дислоцироваться? В.Путин: Что касается Турции, роли Турции, об этом хорошо известно, об этом прямо говорили неоднократно в Азербайджане, да и турецкая сторона этого никогда не скрывала, они поддерживали в одностороннем порядке Азербайджан. Но что я могу Вам сказать? Это геополитические последствия развала Советского Союза. Мы всё время говорим об этом как-то в общем и целом. Здесь не в общем и целом, здесь совершенно конкретные события, которые мы сейчас наблюдаем, свидетелями которых мы являемся. Что я имею в виду? Азербайджан – это независимое суверенное государство. Азербайджан вправе выбирать себе союзников так, как он считает нужным. Кто же ему в этом может отказать? Это первое. И второе. Я уже сказал, что никто, даже Армения не признала независимость Карабаха. Что это означает с точки зрения международного права? Что Азербайджан возвращал территории, которые он считал (Азербайджан), но и всё мировое сообщество считало азербайджанской территорией. И в этой связи он имел право выбрать любого союзника, кто оказывает ему в этом известную помощь. Кстати говоря, Турция изначально была членом Минской группы ОБСЕ по карабахскому урегулированию. Так что она находилась внутри и международного института, международного механизма урегулирования. Она не была в качестве сопредседателя. Было три сопредседателя у нас: Франция, Россия и США. Турция в число сопредседателей не входила, тем не менее она входила в эту группу, всего там 11 государств. Можно какие угодно давать оценки действиям Турции, но трудно обвинить Турцию в нарушении международного права. Там вкусовые оценки могут быть какие угодно, но тем не менее дело обстоит именно так, как я сейчас об этом сказал. Что касается миротворческой миссии, то да, действительно, и Азербайджан, и Турция всегда говорили о возможности участия Турции в миротворческих операциях. Мне всё-таки, кажется, удалось убедить и наших турецких партнёров, и наших коллег в Азербайджане в том, что не надо создавать условия или предпосылки для разрушения наших договорённостей, такие условия, которые бы провоцировали одну из договаривающихся сторон на какие-то крайние меры и крайние действия. Что я имею в виду? Имею в виду очень тяжёлое наследие прошлых лет и то, что связано с трагическими, кровавыми событиями времён Первой мировой войны, с геноцидом. Это фактор, который можно признавать, можно не признавать, кто-то признаёт, а кто-то в мире не признаёт. Для России здесь проблем нет, мы давно это всё признали. Но зачем же провоцировать армянскую сторону наличием турецких солдат на линии соприкосновения? Мне кажется, что и Президент Эрдоган это прекрасно понимал и понял. Здесь не было у нас никаких проблем. Мы договорились о том, что Турция по просьбе Азербайджана будет принимать участие в контроле за соблюдением прекращения огня. Мы сделаем это совместно с Турцией, имею в виду, что у нас есть очень хороший опыт взаимодействия на Ближнем Востоке, в том числе в Сирии, где мы и в Идлибской зоне, и на границе между Сирией и Турцией вместе организуем совместное патрулирование, конвой. Здесь такого рода взаимодействие не требуется, но мы договорились о том, что мы создадим совместный центр, который будет использовать беспилотные летательные аппараты, вместе будем контролировать ситуацию вдоль линии разграничения с помощью этих летательных аппаратов, вместе будем получать информацию и вместе её анализировать и, соответственно, делать выводы из того, что происходит в действительности, в жизни в режиме онлайн, в режиме текущего времени. Где он будет размещаться – это другой вопрос. Очевидно, что он будет на суверенной территории Азербайджана находиться, и Азербайджан вправе принять решение самостоятельно, где он посчитает целесообразным его разместить. Вопрос: По поводу вкусовых оценок. Всё-таки очень много, конечно, говорят и рассуждают о роли Турции в этом регионе. Как Вы в целом оцениваете её роль во всём произошедшем в последние месяцы? В.Путин: Я думаю, что это не входит в мои обязанности – оценивать роль Турции. Разные люди, разные страны оценивают по-разному. На данный момент времени по-разному у различных государств складываются отношения с Турцией. Мы знаем предысторию, и подчас драматическую предысторию отношений между Турцией и Россией на протяжении веков. Но я хочу знать на что обратить внимание? На то, что, скажем, не менее тяжёлая и трагическая история была у многих европейских народов в отношениях друг с другом. Например, та же Франция и Германия. Сколько раз они воевали между собой? Сейчас они в рамках НАТО вместе осуществляют свои функции по обороне и безопасности, так, как они считают нужным это сделать, сотрудничают в рамках Европейского экономического сообщества. Они преодолели всё это, перешагнули и в интересах будущего своих народов двигаются дальше. Почему мы здесь, в регионе Чёрного моря, не можем сделать то же самое? Да, у нас далеко не всегда и не во всём совпадают позиции и точки зрения, они иногда и диаметрально расходятся. Но в том и заключается искусство дипломатии – в том, чтобы найти компромисс. А компромисс основан на уважении к партнёру. Вопрос: Со стороны Франции и США сквозит уже чуть ли не обида, что их-то вот не позвали
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				поучаствовать в этом соглашении. Вообще, у этого формата – Минской группы ОБСЕ – есть будущее? В.Путин: Ну, я не знаю по поводу обид. Когда вопросы решаются, обсуждаются на таком уровне и в таком контексте, когда речь идёт о здоровье и о жизни, о судьбе миллионов людей на длительную историческую перспективу, здесь не до обид, не до того, чтобы губы надувать. Здесь совершенно другие категории учитываются. И я думаю, что на самом деле это гипербола, такое художественное преувеличение, что кто-то на кого-то обиделся. Что касается роли Франции и Соединённых Штатов, я очень высоко их оцениваю, роль и Франции, и Соединённых Штатов, потому что они всегда были в материале, всегда искали пути решения этой проблемы. Я уже сказал, начиная с 2013 года, когда Россия предложила основу формата будущего урегулирования, и Франция, и США в целом поддержали наше предложение и вместе солидарно работали. Вопрос в том, как и возможно ли было учитывать до деталей мнение каждого из наших партнёров при подготовке итогового документа, который лёг в основу нашего трёхстороннего заявления, в основу прекращения огня, но это вопрос чисто технического характера, ведь это не подрывает базы нашей общей позиции по принципам урегулирования. Заявление, которое мы сделали, полностью основано на трёхсторонней позиции. Что касается самого подписания, подписантов, ведь, обратите внимание, я уже сказал, что 19– 20 числа у меня была серия телефонных переговоров и с Президентом Алиевым, и с Премьером Пашиняном, и в целом, как мне казалось, мы уже почти достигли договорённостей о прекращении боевых действий. Но не сложилось, не срослось, к сожалению. И ситуация начала складываться таким образом, что, в общем, произошло то, что можно было предвидеть, а именно, вооружённые силы Республики Азербайджан взяли под контроль Шушу. И, как абсолютно справедливо и по-честному, обращаясь к своему народу, сказал Премьер-министр Пашинян, по-моему, вчера. Он сказал, что ситуация сложилась критическая для армянской стороны. Счёт шёл на часы. И возможно было взять и Степанакерт, и дальнейшее движение. Поэтому в этих условиях, если уж сказать прямо, в интересах армянской стороны было немедленно прекратить боевые действия. Где уж здесь проводить дополнительные консультации в рамках Минской группы ОБСЕ? Это просто нереалистично. Надо исходить из реалий, которые сложились на поле боя в данный момент времени. Мы так и сделали в интересах как азербайджанского, так и армянского народов. Вопрос: Вы сказали об этом, да и широко известно, никто не скрывал, что Азербайджан поддерживала Турция. Было достаточно много информации о переброске в зону конфликта боевиков с Ближнего Востока. А Армению поддерживали, она чувствовала помощь? Как известно, Армения – член ОДКБ. В.Путин: Я хочу вернуть Вас к той части, о которой я говорил в начале. Армения же не признала независимость и суверенитет Нагорного Карабаха. Это означало с точки зрения международного права, и Нагорный Карабах, и все прилегающие к нему районы являлись, являются неотъемлемой частью территории Азербайджанской Республики. Договор ОДКБ (о коллективной безопасности) предусматривает взаимную помощь в случае агрессии в отношении территории страны – участницы этого договора. На территорию Армянской Республики никто не покушался. И это не давало нам никакого права принять прямое участие в этих боевых действиях. Что касается того, не чувствовала ли себя Армения в одиночестве, – уверяю вас, что Российская Федерация в рамках и многосторонних, и двусторонних обязательств, в том числе в сфере военно-технического сотрудничества, полностью выполняла все свои обязательства, за что руководство Армении, в том числе в лице Премьер-министра Пашиняна, неоднократно выражало слова благодарности и подчёркивало, что Россия в полном соответствии со своими обязательствами выполняет все обязательства (прошу прощения за тавтологию) в этой сфере. Мы, кстати говоря, исходили и из того (Вы сейчас упомянули о роли Турции, о неформальных вооружённых формированиях), мы исходили из того, что даже в ходе таких серьёзных событий должен быть соблюден баланс сил. И уверяю вас в том, что Армения не чувствовала себя брошенной, забытой. И Россия сделала всё, чтобы этого не было. Но так сложилась ситуация на поле боя, именно так, как она сложилась, о чём и сказал откровенно и честно Премьерминистр Пашинян в своём обращении к нации, во вчерашнем своём заявлении. Вопрос: Возвращаясь к внутривнутриполитической обстановке в Армении, очень остро там ситуация складывается, Президент Армении уже требует назначить парламентские выборы и передать власть правительству национального согласия. Ну, бурлит, действительно, ситуация. Нет ли опасности в том, что в итоге к власти в Армении придут люди, которые попросту откажутся выполнять всё то, что подписано. В.Путин: Это было бы самоубийством. Я ещё раз повторяю, Премьер Пашинян – ему, конечно, тяжело, но он сказал, обрисовал истинную картину, истинное положение дел, так, как оно есть, так оно было на момент подписания нашего трёхстороннего заявления, и так, как оно есть сегодня. Мне добавить нечего. Он сказал всю правду, правдиво, честно абсолютно, здесь, я повторяю, нечего добавить. Поэтому это, конечно, дело каждой стороны, соблюдать или не соблюдать достигнутые договорённости, но, повторяю ещё раз, это было бы огромной ошибкой. Надеюсь, что этого не случится. Это первое. Второе. Что касается внутривнутриполитической
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				ситуации, это не наше дело, это дело Армении. Армения – независимое, суверенное государство. Это государство вправе решать свои внутренние дела так, как считает нужным. Но если Вы хотите моей оценки, то воюющая или находящаяся в опасности возобновления боевых действий, как это всегда было на протяжении предыдущих лет, страна всё-таки не может позволить себе вести себя таким образом, в том числе в сфере организации власти, чтобы раскалывать общество изнутри. Мне кажется, это абсолютно недопустимо, контрпродуктивно и в высшей степени опасно. На мой взгляд, мы являемся как раз свидетелями, отчасти хотя бы, но свидетелями того, что происходило в последнее время. Вопрос: После соглашения стремительно в зону конфликта были переброшены российские миротворцы. Того числа, которое там есть, его достаточно для выполнения поставленных задач? И важный вопрос: получат ли наши военнослужащие так называемые боевые за такую службу? В.Путин: У нас есть нормативная база. Отрегулировано это в соответствующих указах Президента, которые были приняты раньше. Военнослужащие, которые выполняют миротворческие функции, выполняют эту миссию, получают дополнительные выплаты, но не боевые, а именно за выполнение своих миротворческих функций за рубежом. Что касается того, хватает или не хватает, то этот вопрос должен решаться из реальных требований жизни, которые возникают, конечно, каждый день. В принципе мы исходим из того, что этого достаточно. Но если что-то можно и нужно будет менять, то это можно будет делать только по согласованию сторон. Вопрос: Вы уже несколько раз сказали, что в ходе всего этого конфликта многократно разговаривали как с Премьером Армении, так и с Президентом Азербайджана, и раньше Вы об этом тоже говорили. Если вернуться в ту ночь, в какой момент всё-таки, когда и как документ стал таким, каким мы все его увидели? В.Путин: Вы знаете, это был сложный, я бы сказал, энергозатратный процесс, я думаю, что со всех сторон. И происходило это в результате трёхсторонних консультаций. По сути, мне пришлось взять на себя роль посредника, когда я разговаривал с одним и со вторым лидером, выслушивал их требования, претензии к тексту, вносил какие-то изменения, связывался с другой стороной, выслушивал их пожелания и требования, потом консультировался с первой по поводу приемлемости этих положений для других партнёров. Но фактически это была равноправная, равноценная, трёхсторонняя работа. Вопрос: Это всё произошло именно в этот день или ранее уже были какие-то намётки? В.Путин: Именно в этот день. Да, я возвращаюсь к тому, что было сказано Премьером Пашиняном. Просто сложилась такая ситуация в зоне боевых действий, когда, прямо скажем, Армения подошла к такой черте, когда нужно было принимать решение. Но надо отдать должное, и в этих условиях, конечно, всё-таки борьба шла с обеих сторон за каждую фразу, за каждый пункт, можно сказать, за каждую запятую. Вопрос: В ту ночь мы все были свидетелями, у Вас состоялся телемост с Алиевым. Пашиняна не было в этом телемосте. Почему? В.Путин: Это его надо спросить. Он просто не посчитал возможным, нужным. Важна же была не картинка, а суть наших договорённостей. Вопрос: Из Армении и от российских армян даже сейчас можно часто слышать упрёк, что довольно своеобразная, мягко скажем, позиция руководства Армении в отношении в том числе и России, в общем-то, и привела к тому, чем всё завершилось. Как Вы такие оценки оцениваете? В.Путин: Я не понимаю, что имеется в виду. Никаких особенностей в наших взаимоотношениях с Арменией за последнее время, в том числе за время, когда у власти находился Премьер Пашинян, я не отмечаю. Да, я уже говорил применительно к сегодняшнему дню, но я и к ситуации нескольких лет до этого считал и считаю, что страна, которая находится в достаточно сложном положении, на грани боевых действий, не может себе позволить организацию внутренней политической жизни и власти с помощью улиц. До хорошего этого не доводит. Раскол общества не ведёт ни к чему хорошему. Консолидировать надо общество, а не разваливать. Но мою позицию все знают, я говорю об этом открыто, здесь я, не стесняясь, сейчас говорю об этом публично. Но это никак не повлияло на наши отношения. Да, у меня были добрые отношения с прежним руководством, я этого никогда не скрывал и не прятал эти отношения никогда. Но это никак не отразилось на межгосударственных наших связях. Потому что, во-первых, у нас и личные отношения сложились достаточно доверительные и конструктивные. Поэтому мне эти намёки не очень понятны. Первое. А второе и очень важное. Кроме лиц, облечённых определённым доверием в своей собственной стране, есть народ этой страны. И если Вы говорите об армянском народе, то Россию и армян связывают многовековые отношения, уходящие корнями далеко-далеко в прошлое. В основе наших отношений – культурная, религиозная близость, многое исторически нас связывает. И это важнее даже, чем отношения между конкретными людьми. Мы помним об этом, никогда не забываем, и это лежит в основе нашего взаимодействия с Арменией.
2020	Aleksandr Kots	Semi-official/war correspondent	Newspaper article	Многим моим подписчикам, конечно, не понравится то, что я сейчас напишу, но это надо четко проговорить. Давайте говорить честно. Путин, как ни крути, спас остатки Карабаха. Потому что вслед за Шуши, которую взяли под контроль азербайджанские войска, неминуемо пал бы и Степанакерт. До него оставалось

				несколько километров! А за ним - за считанные дни - был бы зачищен и весь остальной Арцах. Только жертв было бы еще больше. И еще больше — беженцев. Примечательно, что соглашение было заключено без участия Турции. Москва в очередной раз подтвердила свое влияние в Закавказье, остановив кровопролитную войну. Но давайте и констатировать непреложный факт: Азербайджан почти 30 лет готовился к реваншу после проигранной в начале 90-х войны за Карабах. Он закупался новейшей военной техникой, осваивал новые технологии, наблюдал за наработками сильнейших армий, в том числе – России и Турции, небольшими обострениями прощупывал оборону Карабаха... А Армения, к ее нынешнему сожалению, почивала на лаврах прошлой победы, заигрывала в «многовекторность», чуть ли не требуя уже вывести российскую базу из Гюмри. Так и хочется спросить сегодня у Никола Пашиняна: «Господин президент, помогли вам ваши янки? Или может быть Макрон посильно поучаствовал в судьбе Карабаха?» Я смотрю на новостную хронику и, скрипя зубами, недоумеваю – тысячи здоровых мужиков в Ереване громят здание правительства, избивают политиков, рыдают на площадях, маршируют по улицам. И вспоминаю по-настоящему героических защитников Арцаха - в окопах на передовой, на артиллерийских позициях, которые в любой момент могут накрыть с воздуха беспилотники, в госпиталях со страшнейшими ранениями и злостью в глазах. Они честно сражались за свою землю, пока в глубоком тылу шли диванные битвы «офисных Рэмбо». «Мы записались добровольцами, но это политика Пашиняна, он специально не отправлял нас». Тогда почему добровольцы, к примеру, из Абхазии благополучно добирались до фронта в Карабахе, а тысячи молодых и здоровых мужиков оставались в Ереване? Этот вопрос, кстати, сегодня задают и бойцы из Арцаха: «Почему вы там, на площадях призываете продолжить войну? Встаньте рядом с нами, в окопах». Впрочем, вряд ли массовое добровольчество смогло бы кардинально переломить ситуацию. Потому что одним боевым духом (который у армянских отрядов на передовой действительно зашкаливал) беспилотники на высоте 8 километров не сбиваются. Пашиняну нужно было обеспечивать паритет в воздухе, перекидывать в регион современные системы ПВО, использовать авиацию... Для этого нужно политическое мужество, которого премьеру Армении не хватило. И нынешнее соглашение, разумеется, воспримут как его личное поражение, которое может поставить крест на его карьере.
2020	Rostislav Zhuravlyov	Semi-official/war correspondent	Newspaper Article	Наши русские военные – удивительные люди: ещё вчера ты был дома с семьёй, а сегодня тебе дают приказ убыть в загадочное место под романтическим названием Нагорный Карабах или Арцах, как его называют сами армяне. В переводе с тюркского, кстати, эта земля называется «чёрный сад». По преданиям, персидские войска шаха Аббаса, в XVII веке пришедшие завоевать эту землю, увидели сожжённые равнины: при отступлении в горы армяне сожгли их. Те же самые картины я наблюдаю и сейчас: в районах, которые должны быть переданы «той» стороне, хозяева сжигают свои дома, выкапывают могилы своих предков, расстреливают домашних животных, спиливают яблони. Выжженная земля, которая горит под ногами. Все войны разные, но всегда есть что-то общее. Непременные спутники конфликта – всегда собаки. Здесь, в брошенных сёлах, они ждут возвращения своих родных двуногих, которые почему-то пропали и бросили их. Этим голодным, но верным созданиям ещё невдомёк, что вернуться сюда к ним уже чужие люди. Один из таких псов прибил к нам по пути. Добрая, воспитанная и человеческая овчарка вопросительно смотрела в глаза и общалась с нами на русском языке. «Сидеть, дай лапу, а другую», – выполняла покорно. Покормили беднягу. – Спасибо вам, наши спасители, – говорят люди на улицах, видя русские лица. – Да мы-то что, – как-то неудобно вторим. Местные видят, что мы работаем с нашими родными миротворцами и передвигаемся пока по дорогам только под специальной синей символикой «МС» и российским флагом. Ездим по-военному в кузове армейского КамАЗа, в котором на кондовой деревянной скамье ощущаешь каждую кочку или воронку от попадания. Впрочем, после нескольких часов тряски и глотания пыли начинаешь привыкать к песку на зубах и отбитой наглухо «пятой точке». Сидя у «трупоталкивателя» – борта грузовика, каждые две минуты отдаёшь людям приветствие, отвечая в ответ на громкие крики «спасибо» или сигнал автомобиля. Русские «вежливые» в цифровом камуфляже здесь, на горных дорогах в густом молочном тумане, выглядят как римляне – этаким арцахский легион Третьего Рима на марше: в доспехах «ратник» и с новыми автоматами АК-12 в «космических» обвесах. Собранные и молчаливые, принёсшие русский мир на эту очарованную землю. Болевой нерв На азербайджанском блокпосту у уже знаменитого ключевого города Шуши, не скрываясь, развевается турецкий красный флаг с полумесяцем. За какими-то фанерками у перекрёстка спуют солдаты под знаменем Баку. Смотрят на нас, русских, с удивлением. Видно их грузовик с необычной надписью: «Nə oldu Paşınyan». Непонятно первое слово, но второе явно не «молодец»... Переводчик говорит, что надпись означает: «Что случилось, Пашинян?». Это крылатая фраза Алиева. В одном из своих обращений он произнёс её примерно следующим образом: «Что случилось, Пашинян, ты ведь дорогу в Джабраил строил. Танцевал (Пашинян пьяным танцевал в Шуши). Что стало со статусом

				[Нагорного Карабаха]? К чёрту полетел статус! Нет статуса и не будет! Пока я президент, не будет, – объясняет он. А мы как раз инспектируем эти самые двадцать километров Лисогора до Шуши – «дорогу смерти». Не знаю... Этично ли говорить, а уж тем более снимать, но вдоль её обочин – куртки, окровавленные бронежилеты, части и куски тел, ящики из боеприпасов. Этим фаршем усеяно всё на протяжении нескольких километров.
2021	Andrey Rudenko	Official	MFA interview	Отношения между Россией и Арменией – многогранные и взаимодополняющие и не ограничиваются только взаимодействием по нагорнокарабахской проблематике. В этом контексте придаем большое значение приближающейся дате 29-летия установления дипотношений между Россией и Арменией. 3 апреля 1992 г. наши страны открыли новую страницу в истории многовековых дружественных взаимовыгодных связей. За эти годы российско-армянское сотрудничество приобрело подлинно союзнический характер, отличается высокой интенсивностью политического диалога, широким набором сфер взаимной кооперации, разветвленной договорно-правовой базой. Важную роль играет подписанный 29 августа 1997 г. Договор о дружбе, сотрудничестве и взаимной помощи между Российской Федерацией и Республикой Армения, в соответствии с которым Россия и Армения обязываются оказывать друг другу необходимое содействие, в том числе военное, в случае вооруженного нападения на одну из них в порядке осуществления права на коллективную самооборону в соответствии со статьей 51 Устава ООН. Благодаря активным посредническим усилиям Российской Федерации и личному участию Президента В.В.Путина удалось остановить 44-дневное вооруженное противостояние между Арменией и Азербайджаном в Нагорном Карабахе. 9 ноября 2020 г. было принято заявление лидеров трех государств, которое позволило остановить кровопролитие и начать движение к миру. Как Вы правильно отметили, сегодня дислоцированные в регионе российский миротворческий контингент и центр гуманитарного реагирования являются гарантами безопасности и стабильности, выполняют жизненно значимые для местного населения задачи. Прямая финансовая помощь Российской Федерации на содействие пострадавшим в Нагорном Карабахе составляет на сегодняшний день около 15 млн долл. США. В результате активной работы по линии трехсторонней Рабочей группы под председательством вице-премьеров Азербайджана, Армении и России, занимающейся вопросами разблокирования экономических и транспортных коммуникаций в регионе (состоялось пять заседаний), создаются условия для восстановления нормальной жизни на Южном Кавказе, превращения его в территорию взаимного доверия, безопасности и процветания. Все это убедительно свидетельствует, что Россия всегда готова подставить плечо братскому армянскому народу, вместе работать на благо общих интересов.
2021	Ara Abrahamyan	Semi-official figure	Public speech	Народ не должен более верить демагогическим речам о якобы принесённом в регион мире. Оставив нерешённым вопрос о статусе Арцаха и, при этом, уступив противнику большую часть исторических армянских земель, Пашинян не только не приблизил нас к миру, но, наоборот, создал условия для новой войны и агрессии со стороны Азербайджана. Его уступчивость и беззубость не утихомирили, а наоборот, лишь ещё больше раззадорили агрессивное воображение Алиева, окрылённого поддержкой Турции и ближневосточных террористических группировок. И акты агрессии со стороны Баку будут продолжаться, пока это правительство у власти в Армении. Потому что оно, спустя год после окончания Второй карабахской войны, не сделало ничего для укрепления армии и боевого духа солдат и офицеров, для укрепления границ и обеспечения безопасности граждан страны. То, что Пашинян называет «миром», является унижением для армянского народа и армянского солдата. Сам Пашинян, как глава государства, давно обесценен в глазах мирового сообщества, его серьёзно нигде не воспринимают, и он делает всё, чтобы наподобие себя обесценить всех остальных армян – не только проживающих в Армении, но и в других странах мира. Сегодня команда Пашиняна занята целенаправленным внедрением русофобских настроений в армянском обществе, людей вводят в заблуждение относительно истинной роли России в остановке кровопролитной 44-дневной войны и сохранении послевоенного мира. Устами секретаря Совбеза и провластных депутатов пытаются шантажировать Россию тем, что если она не поможет Армении, то последняя обратится к другим партнёрам. Хотелось бы спросить: а что мешало год назад или мешает сегодня правительству Армении обратиться к разным странам и международным организациям с просьбой о помощи? Россия? Нет, конечно же. Союзнические отношения с Россией никак не препятствуют этому, и никогда Россия не была против того, чтобы Армения сотрудничала с другими странами или обращалась к ним за помощью. Если правительство Армении знает страны и партнёров, которые хотят и могут помочь в этот судьбоносный момент нашей стране и не обращается к ним – то это, извините, преступление перед своим народом. Подобного рода заявления – всего лишь подмена понятий и ширма, прикрывающая истинные намерения и деяния их авторов, ведущих к искусственному разжиганию антироссийских настроений в обществе. Что ещё должен сделать Пашинян, чтобы наш народ осознал, ЧТО мы теряем в результате его политики? Я понимаю, что

				простым людям, думающим о хлебе насущном, оплакивающим своих погибших детей, сложно думать о чём-то другом и правильно оценивать реальность. Но все те, кто осознаёт, что творится сегодня, и при этом молчит и делает вид, что его это не касается - является соучастником происходящего. У меня душа болит за нашу Родину, за этих молодых солдат, которые из-за некомпетентности руководства, попадают в плен к азербайджанцам. Мы все знаем, в том числе и по кадрам, которые сами азербайджанцы выкладывают, какое зверское, фашистское отношение к этим ребятам там. Это же юнцы, они ещё жизни не видели, многие ещё вчера сидели за школьной партией, ещё даже девушку за руку не держали, - а их сегодня ведут на закланье. При этом, премьер-министр фактически угрожает пленённым солдатам расследованием! Дело властей - освобождать пленных, а не запугивать расследованиями и преследованиями. А в расследовании давно уже нуждается деятельность правительства Пашиняна: как во время 44-дневной войны, так и после неё.
2022	Margarita Simonyan	Semi-official/ media figure	Telegram post	Я обращаюсь к армянской власти. Именно к власти, а не к народу, частью которого я являюсь. _Обращаюсь только потому, что ваши интернет-войска унавозили мои соцсети требованиями (в хамской и агрессивной форме) 'выразить свою позицию'. Просили — выражаю. Посмотрите на себя со стороны. Посмотрите, что вы творите. Как вы себя ведете. Какие же вы армяне? Армяне — честный, благородный и благодарный народ. Всегда таким был. А вы ведете себя, как (ЗАПРЕЩЕНО РОСКОМНАДЗОРОМ). В ответ на многолетнее добро и защиту, которые вы получали от России, вы не признали Крым. Потому что это внутреннее дело Армении. Исключительно из политической мести вы посадили Роберта Кочаряна — неизменного союзника России. Посадили специально, демонстративно, плюнув прямо в лицо своим 'российским друзьям'. Потому что это внутреннее дело Армении. Вы наводнили страну антироссийскими НКО, которые на вашей территории обучают молодежь, как свергать власть в России. Вы стали плацдармом антироссийских сил на Кавказе. Потому что это внутреннее дело Армении. Вы выгнали российских бизнесменов-армян. Вы не хотите у себя ничего, что связано с Россией. Потому что это внутреннее дело Армении. Ваши медиа и соцсети ежечасно поливают помоями Россию, Путина, всех, кто поддерживает Путина, — особенно русских армян (например, меня). Вы разделили несчастный, и без того исчезающий армянский народ на врагов — русских армян — и 'настоящих' — тех, кто поддерживает вашу сиюминутную власть. Потому что это внутреннее дело Армении. А теперь, когда на вашей границе война, когда само существование вашего режима под угрозой, когда армяне всего мира уже видят ожившие призраки янычар с кривыми ножами, которыми резали наших предков, вы вспомнили, что Россия снова должна вас спасать. Разве это не внутреннее дело Армении? После всего зла и захлебывающегося презрения, которое вы проявляли к России в последние годы, ваши информационные войска и вы сами считаете себя вправе ждать помощи? На самом деле, после всего, что вы сделали, Россия имеет полное моральное право плюнуть на вас и растереть. Но она так не поступит. Я уверена. Поможет и в этот раз. Потому что Россия — такая. Великодушная и благородная, Родина моя, ненаглядная. А вы — просто горстка вопящих политиканов, предавших интересы великого армянского народа ради минуты власти и мелкой личной мести. Почитайте на ночь Нарекаци. Может, проснутся у вас остатки знаменитой армянской совестливости и умения ценить добро. Если нет у вас Нарекаци — так я передам. У меня на тумбочке лежит. А по поводу войны обеим сторонам я скажу только одно: остановитесь! Хуже войны нет ничего. Я это на своей шкуре знаю. Просто остановитесь, пока не поздно
2022	Konstantin Zatulin	Semi-official/ political figure	Public speech	Уважаемые друзья, жизнь и смерть идут рядом. И, действительно, в этом году День памяти жертв геноцида армян Османской Турции совпал со Светлым православным Пасхальным Воскресением. Вы знаете, я должен отдать должное Союзу армян. Он никогда не забывал собирать нас и приглашать 24 апреля на поминальные мероприятия. Не всегда я мог, по тем или иным причинам, принять участие. Но сегодня считал своим долгом быть здесь и сказать то, что должен. Потому, что армяне под угрозой на Кавказе. Сегодня выводы которые мы делаем из событий 100-летней давности, как никогда более актуальны для армян, Армении и Нагорного Карабаха – Арцаха. Я думаю, все мы прекрасно понимаем какие угрозы нависли над армянским населением Нагорного Карабаха, которых сегодня защищает российский миротворческий контингент. Я знаю прекрасно тревоги, которые испытывают многие – не только те, кто живут там, на земле Арцаха, но и во всем мире, – о будущем, об армянском населении этой непризнанной Республики. То, что она не признана, не умаляет того факта, что на протяжении всех этих уже десятков лет рождались, входили в жизнь, уходили из жизни люди, которые верили в будущее этой земли, верили в то, что права армянского народа на исторической родине будут соблюдены. И вспоминая сегодня о геноцида, соболезнуя, склоняя голову, как и все мы, перед памятью жертв этого геноцида, я меньше всего хотел бы каких-либо

				повторений. В больших или маленьких масштабах, не важно. Я считаю, что армяне, живущие в России, вправе беспокоиться и добиваться того, чтобы мы все вместе в России, взяв на себя ответственность за судьбу армянского населения в Нагорном Карабахе, и дальше продолжали нести эту ответственность. Я не хочу сейчас политизировать свое выступление, раздавать оценки. У меня есть свое мнение о том, что происходит в Армении, как стало возможным в этой ситуации обсуждать – нужен статус Нагорному Карабаху или нет. Я считаю, что точка зрения России о необходимости такого статуса остается прежней. Существует Минская группа, в которой мы выражали эту точку зрения. Если по причинам, далеким от Кавказа и событий в этом регионе, из-за Украины мы сегодня находимся в жесткой конфронтации со странами, которые входят в эту Минскую группу – Францией, Соединенными Штатами, – это не значит, что слово, которое мы дали, не должно быть сдержано. Я привык уважать свое правительство, свою страну, гордиться ею. И считаю, что справедливость – это самое высокое и самое главное, что во всех случаях руководит действиями русских людей, где бы они не жили. Ради справедливости они жертвуют сегодня, в том числе в ходе этой специальной военной операции на Украине. Потому что исходят из того, что справедливость оказалась под угрозой. И кто бы что не говорил, кто бы каким образом себя не вел, я считаю, что мы должны, прежде всего, помнить о прошлом, помнить о трагедии геноцида, сделать так, чтобы в будущем, еще раз повторю, в каких бы то ни было масштабах, все это не повторилось. Я считаю, что мы должны обратить сегодня главное внимание на поддержку Армении и, прежде всего, я бы сказал, армян, которые живут сегодня под дамокловым мечом, но под охраной российского миротворческого контингента в Нагорном Карабахе. Потому что это осколок того, что произошло в 1915 году, если вдуматься. Еще раз хочу выразить свои самые искренние чувства по поводу даты, 24 апреля 1915 года.
2022	Vladimir Putin	Official	Interview at TASS	Россия делает все возможное для комплексного урегулирования отношений между Арменией и Азербайджаном, вил президент РФ Владимир Путин, выступая в ницу на внеочередной сессии Совета лективной безопасности ОДКБ. о касается армяно-азербайджанского гулирования, мы и сегодня делаем все возможное для достижения комплексной и объемлющей нормализации отношений между у и Ереваном", - отметил российский лидер, зав на то, что РФ, Азербайджан и Армения в авнем прошлом входили в состав одного ударства. ссия традиционно, если заглянуть в орическую составляющую, всегда уделяла мание стабильности на этом направлении и держивала наших армянских друзей в спечении безопасности армянского народа", - ентировал внимание Путин. подчеркнул, что у Москвы огромное количество зей и с Ереваном, и с Баку. "Не учитывать это сто невозможно. Мы, безусловно, все мы в таточно сложном положении. Но мы, конечно, можем оставаться в стороне от проблем и тиворечий между близкими для России
2023	Konstantin Zatulin	Semi-official/ political figure	Interview reposted on Telegram	Баку стремится «выдавить» всех армян из Нагорного Карабаха, это целенаправленный план, отметил в эфире НСН депутат Константин Затулин. Операция Азербайджана в Нагорном Карабахе является элементом геноцида по отношению к армянскому населению, а также прологом к дальнейшему выдавливанию РФ из Кавказа, заявил первый зампред комитета Госдумы по делам СНГ Константин Затулин в интервью НСН. Ранее глава пресс-службы Минобороны Азербайджана Анар Эйвазов сообщил, что в ходе операции свыше 60 боевых позиций Вооруженных сил Армении перешли под контроль азербайджанских военных. Он отметил, что армия нейтрализовала до 20 боевых машин, свыше 40 артиллерийских установок и 30 минометов. Затулин считает, что премьер-министр Армении Пашинян хочет, чтобы армяне не вмешивались в происходящее. «Мы видим, что правительство Армении бросило своих соотечественников и подготовило почву со своей стороны для того, чтобы операция азербайджанских войск в Карабахе выглядела как внутреннее дело... Не требующее вмешательства со стороны Армении. Лично Пашинян пытается заразить армян в Армении трусостью, чтобы они, думая о самих себе, ни в коем случае не вмешивались в происходящие события. То, что происходит, является не только элементом геноцида по отношению к армянскому населению Нагорного Карабаха, но и, совершенно очевидно, является прологом к дальнейшему выдавливанию РФ из Кавказа», - сказал Затулин. Он отметил, что Азербайджан стреляет в Карабахе, однако «попадает в Москву». По словам Затулина, у Армении теперь появились основания для обвинения России в бездействии. «Азербайджан стреляет в Карабахе, но попадает в Москву в политическом смысле. Потому что действия Азербайджана в условиях присутствия в Карабахе миротворцев РФ не только угрожают жизни солдат и офицеров этого контингента... Но и становятся основанием для обвинения России в бездействии», - указал собеседник НСН. Кроме того, депутат заявил, что от возобновления военных действий в Карабахе у России «нет и не может быть» выгоды. Он подчеркнул, что дальнейшее развитие ситуации в Карабахе будет зависеть от давления, которое Москва должна оказать на Баку. «Прежде всего, не в наших интересах возобновление военных действий. Никакой выгоды в том, что Азербайджан перешел к военным действиям, у РФ нет и быть не

				может. Люди в России, которые утверждают обратное, либо глупые, либо предатели по отношению к собственной стране. Что касается дальнейшего... То все будет зависеть от степени настойчивости российской стороны и того давления, которое мы должны оказать на Азербайджан, чтобы он прекратил военные действия. К сожалению, впечатление, что Азербайджан взорвался. И это не просто вспышка в зоне бывших военных действий, а целенаправленный план по выдавливанию армян из Карабаха вообще», - резюмировал Затулин.
2023	Maria Zakharova	Official	MFA briefing	Мы слышим эти заявления со стороны Еревана, что какая-то зависимость от Москвы или от России не даёт возможность обеспечить безопасность. Всё-таки люди, которые представляют страну, должны ответственно относиться к тем заявлениям, которые делают. Неужели они не знают, какое количество граждан Армении удалось спасти в том числе благодаря действиям Москвы? Разве это не так? Об этом не знают в Армении? Конечно знают. Так почему же это сейчас предается забвению? Всё это было на протяжении десятилетий. Какое количество действительно вспыхнувших обострений в регионе удалось потушить именно и только благодаря действиям Москвы и непосредственно Президента России В.В.Путина. Неужели этого никто не знает в Ереване? Знают. Так почему же они допускают и позволяют себе подобные заявления? Они хотят переписать историю? Не получится, потому что народ хорошо знает свою Армению новейшую и многовековую историю, и о роли нашей страны в судьбе армянского народа и Армении. Выражаем сожаление в связи с гибелью армянских военнослужащих в селе Сотк. Призываем стороны воздерживаться от действий, влекущих эскалацию напряженности и тем более человеческие жертвы. Данный трагический инцидент лишний раз подтвердил невысокую эффективность расквартированной в Армении миссии Евросоюза. Считаем востребованным проведение регулярной и ритмичной работы по делимитации и демаркации армяно-азербайджанской границы при российском консультативном содействии с одновременной реализацией комплекса мер по укреплению доверия. Выступаем также за размещение в приграничье миссии ОДКБ: здесь «мяч на стороне» Еревана – все остальные страны-члены Организации выразили готовность к этому шагу.
2023	Aleksandr Kots	Semi-official/ war correspondent	Telegram post	риветствую. Я сегодня опять в дороге. Неделя была довольно насыщенная на события. Основное событие этой недели – Закавказье. Это первая программа, которую мы начинаем не с новостей из зоны СВО. Сегодня мы поговорим о том, что произошло в Нагорном Карабахе, чем это чревато, в том числе и для Российской Федерации. На этой неделе Баку официально объявил о начале локальной контртеррористической операции на территории Нагорного Карабаха, на территории, которую контролирует армия обороны Арцаха, как здесь называют этот регион. Когда была объявлена эта операция, лично у меня не было никаких иллюзий по поводу границ этой операции. Я почему-то сразу понял, что это конец Карабаха как непризнанного государства, которое варится само в себе. Три года назад я освещал события второй карабахской войны, когда азербайджанским силам удалось занять значительные территории, которые контролировали армяне. Я видел армянскую армию, которая фактически бежала, отступала, в бой вступали в основном силы ополчения и армия обороны Арцаха. Но в итоге азербайджанцам удалось дойти до города Шуши, это город-спутник Степанакерта – столицы Арцаха, который возвышается фактически над Степанакертом. Когда этот город был занят, мне почему-то еще три года назад показалось, что падение полностью всего Карабаха – это вопрос времени. Азербайджан тридцать лет последовательно шел к достижению своей цели и достиг ее. И это стало возможно не только благодаря военному превосходству Азербайджана. Хотя не без этого, безусловно. Потому что после 1992 года, когда армяне победили, они почивали на лаврах, они обсуждали этот героический эпос, как они надавали лещей азербайджанцам. Азербайджанцы все эти годы готовились отвоевывать территории. Совершенствовались в плане тактики, в плане стратегии, закупили вооружения. Три года назад, например, азербайджанцы в Карабахе показали применение ударных беспилотников. Это были в основном израильские Нагор, тем не менее, они показали свою эффективность. Тогда же применялись турки Baugraktar, довольно быстро была выбита система ПВО Карабаха. И дальше уже расстреливали как в тире. Нынешний конфликт суточный произошел почему? Повод для военных действий был номинальный. Азербайджан обвинил Армению в том, что они укрепляют свои позиции, подвозят боеприпасы, увеличивают количество техники, минируют территорию перед собой, в результате чего страдают гражданские и военные. Это стало достаточным поводом для того, чтобы объявить операцию. Причем Баку заявил, что Россия была заблаговременно проинформирована об этой операции. Но на самом деле информирование произошло за несколько минут до ее начала. Никого предупредить мы уже не успевали. И в течение суток Баку просто наносил точечные удары по объектам армии обороны Нагорного Карабаха. С безопасного расстояния методично выбивая системы ПВО, РЭБ, артиллерию, укрепления. В итоге к исходу вторника азербайджанцы уже явно обозначили

				переход к наземной фазе своих локальных мероприятий. На этом фоне была очень показательной реакция официального Еревана, который очень долго молчал, собирался с мыслями. А в итоге сказал, что никакого желания участвовать в этом конфликте у Армении нет. Это Пашинян заявлял. Собственно, когда нет сообщения с большой Арменией, а его нет, потому что азербайджанцы перекрыли Лачинский коридор, когда у страны нет желания защищать это маленькое непризнанное государство, никаких шансов у Карабаха не было. Местные бойцы, конечно, могли драться до последней капли крови. Это настоящие воины, я подтверждаю, зная их. Видел их в деле. И подозреваю, что некоторые подразделения армии обороны Арцаха не захотят подчиняться договоренностям и будут еще биться до конца. Мы еще станем свидетелями таких трагических историй. Мне кажется, это вполне возможно. Но без помощи извне это была бы бойня. И именно поэтому при содействии российских миротворцев, не Блинкена и не Макрона, которого так боготворит Пашинян, было достигнуто соглашение о прекращении огня. При этом понятно, что Степанакерту пришлось пойти на условия, которые можно назвать капитуляцией. Это и вывод техники, и полное разоружение. По факту Карабах полностью переходит под контроль и юрисдикцию Азербайджана в качестве одного из него регионов. Почему так произошло? Тут сейчас звучат голоса, которые обвиняют Российскую Федерацию в случившемся, хотя это не регион, граничащий с Россией. Это произошло, потому что нынешние власти Армении решили, судя по всему, пожертвовать Арцахом ради своего нового западного пути. Причем пожертвовали они Арцахом не сейчас, а еще год назад, когда премьер Армении Никол Пашинян во время своего визита в Прагу в присутствии представителей Франции и Евросоюза подписался под тем, что признает границы Азербайджана 1991 года. Все 86 тысяч квадратных километров. А это значит, вместе с Карабахом. То есть он сам признал Карабах частью Азербайджана. Он не стал торговаться. Он мог потребовать для региона хотя бы автономии в пределах Азербайджана. Или хотя бы культурной автономии. Просто взял и продал, возложив ответственность за будущее этого многострадального региона, на Россию. Потому что там российские миротворцы, значит, пусть Россия теперь и занимается проблемой карабахских армян. И тут он вдруг удивляется, что с ним не согласовывают дальнейшую судьбу этого региона. Мне кажется, неуместны сейчас претензии к Москве, когда возмущенные армяне проводят акции около российского посольства. Вы у посольства Франции проводите свои акции, у представительства Евросоюза, которые еще год назад подтолкнули Пашиняна к этому решению. Может быть, даже и пообещали чего-то, но потом в итоге кинули. Я напомним, что три года назад, когда армяне проиграли азербайджанцам 44-дневную войну, как раз Москва и остановила бойню и усадила все противоборствующие стороны за стол переговоров. Пашинян тогда никакого отрешения от Арцаха не подписывал. А потом поехал почему-то в Европу и там подписал и отрекся. Что там ему пообещали, я не знаю. Но по факту получается, что Азербайджан за эти сутки провел операцию на своей земле, даже не с точки зрения алма-атинских соглашений 1991 года, а с точки зрения официального Еревана, который сам сдал Арцах вместе с его жителями. А жителей сегодня эвакуируют, размещают, кормят российские миротворцы. Не американские, не французские, не миротворцы из Евросоюза, а российские. Но это, к сожалению, очень немного, что мы можем сделать в этой ситуации. Я солидарен абсолютно с этим эмоциональным вопросом. Мне тоже хочется задать такой же эмоциональный вопрос, только я не знаю – куда. Может быть, в пустоту? Потому что убийство наших миротворцев не первое. В 2020 году, напомним, азербайджанскими силами был сбит российский вертолет. Тогда тоже они извинились, они тоже тогда сказали, что они заплатят какую-то там компенсацию родственникам. И осудят тех, кто это совершил. Во-первых, я бы сейчас хотел увидеть и узнать, в какой колонии сидят те, кто сбил российский вертолет в 2020 году? Сколько лет им дали? И как они себя чувствуют? Во-вторых, я сегодня хотел бы видеть тех, кто расстрелял российских граждан – миротворцев, в том числе зам. командира нашего контингента там, капитана 1-го ранга, человека, который является подводником, зам. командира Подводных сил Северного флота по военно-политической работе. И меня поражает вот эта восточная базарная привычка откупаться. Что это такое – он компенсирует, какие-то деньги даст родственникам наших погибших бойцов, офицеров? Там офицеры были. Можно убить, извиниться, заплатить – и все забыли? Нет, не забыли. Мы не забыли погибших летчиков того вертолета. И это какая-то странная тенденция, когда можно натворить бед, а потом сказать: извините, вот вам денег. Так не должно быть. Мы не торгуем жизнями наших бойцов. Мы вполне можем сами обеспечить родственников погибших. Но вот эта ситуация, конечно, неприемлема, когда азербайджанская сторона вот так просто и беспринципно убивает наших людей. Еще надо разобраться, почему их убили. Был не только расстрел уазика «Патриот», в котором ехали пять человек. Они еще из танков расстреляли наш наблюдательный пункт, разобрав его полностью. И чем это пункт был – они не могли не знать. Они не могли не знать, что там дислоцируются российские миротворцы. И я не знаю, были ли жертвы в ходе этого обстрела. Официальных данных об этом нет, есть неофициальные. Но поскольку
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				они не подтверждены, я их озвучивать не буду. Это говорит об отношении азербайджанских военных к российской миротворческой миссии, мандат которой в регионе, я напомним, истекает в ноябре 2025 года. Еще по мандату нам два года с небольшим надо сосуществовать. Что будет дальше, предположить сложно.
2024	Semyen Bagdasarov	Semi-official/ media figure	Public comment reposted on Telegram	Что касается странной информации, которая распространяется о якобы проводимом в армянских школах исследовании, утверждающем, что Россия «оккупирует Восточную Армению». Я понимаю, что это полная чепуха, но не в такой крайности. Напомню: до 1828 года — до Туркманчайского договора между Ираном и Российской империей — территория современной Восточной Армении входила в состав Ирана. Более того, во времена шаха Аббаса I, примерно за 200 лет до событий, о которых часто упоминают, большинство армян было переселено со своей исторической родины. На их место Аббас переселил курдов и тюркские племена. Эти племена и курды создали на этих землях собственное квази-государственное образование в рамках Ирана — не полностью независимое государство, но некую административную единицу, наподобие так называемого Армянского ханства при Иране. К сожалению, армяне потеряли государственность ещё за несколько веков до этого. Позже, после прихода России, армяне «вернулись» на свои исторические земли, в основном на территории Ирана. Этот процесс частично курировал российский посол Грибоедов, за что он и пострадал. В итоге было создано так называемое Армянское областное образование и так далее. Позднее эти территории вошли в состав Кавказского наместничества. Фактически, армянский народ «вернулся» на свою историческую родину — Восточную Армению. Западная Армения, однако, с тех пор находится под властью турок, во многом благодаря историческому влиянию России. Что означает, когда люди продвигают идеи, оправдывающие такие нарративы? Это сродни оправданию пропаганды. Соседняя страна, Азербайджан, утверждает, что армяне должны восстановить границы, существовавшие до Российской империи и Эриванского ханства. Они фактически предлагают снова переселить армян, как это сделал шах Аббас столетия назад. Разве это правильно? Это крайне опрометчивое мышление. Армяне всегда отвечали на вызовы с умом и стойкостью. Но то, что некоторые делают сейчас, выглядит как примитивная глупость — иначе не назовёшь. Людям стоит изучать собственную историю. Когда армяне потеряли свою независимость? Что было на этих землях до прихода Российской империи? Где находился армянский народ? К сожалению, в то время независимого армянского государства не существовало. И сейчас некоторые называют эту землю «чужой». Там жили дикие племена, которые создавали собственные ханства. По крайней мере, стоит об этом подумать. Или вы уже готовите население к тому, что эти земли могут стать «Западным Азербайджаном»? Если да, то это многое объясняет. Существует разница между предательством и тем, что я могу назвать суперапредательством — нынешняя глупость является как раз формой этого. Те, кто пишет и продвигает эти идеи, сейчас демонстрируют именно эту нелепость. Более того, во времена шаха Аббаса, за 200 лет до описываемых событий, большинство армян было изгнано с исторической родины, а вместо них Аббас поселил курдов и тюркские племена. Эти народы создали собственные государства в рамках Ирана, или, точнее, некое административное квази-государственное образование, включая так называемое Эриванское ханство. К сожалению, армянский народ потерял государственность за несколько веков до этого. После прихода России армяне вернулись на свои исторические земли в Иране, частично благодаря действиям российского посла Грибоедова, за что он пострадал. Позднее была образована так называемая Армянская область и так далее. Все эти территории затем вошли в состав Кавказского наместничества. Фактически, армяне вернулись на свою историческую родину — Восточную Армению. Западная Армения, однако, с тех пор находится под властью турок, во многом благодаря России. Когда такие идеи продвигаются, что вы делаете? Фактически вы оправдываете пропагандистов. Соседняя страна, Азербайджан, утверждает, что армяне должны восстановить границы, существовавшие до Российской империи и Эриванского ханства. Разве армяне должны снова переселять, как это сделал шах Аббас? Это ли идея? Нужно тщательно об этом подумать. Но армяне всегда отвечали с высоким интеллектом. То, что происходит сейчас, — это нечто вроде каменного века глупости. Иначе это не описать. Изучайте историю собственного народа. Когда армяне потеряли государственность? Что было на этих землях до прихода Российской империи? Где находились армяне? К сожалению, армянского государства не было. Эти земли считаются «чужими». Там жили дикие племена, которые создавали свои ханства. По крайней мере, подумайте об этом. Или вы уже готовите население к тому, что эти территории будут называться «Западным Азербайджаном»? Тогда все становится ясно. Но знаете: есть предательство, а есть — не знаю, как назвать — суперапредательство. Именно это происходит сейчас, исходя из этой глупости. Вот что те, кто пишет и продвигает такие идеи, демонстрируют в настоящий момент.

2024	Natalya Narochnitskaya	Semi-official/ intellectual elite	Public Speech	Можно потерять экономические блага, но это все наживное, а вот потерять душу, верность к своей нации, истории, это очень страшно. Мой отец (академик А.Л.Нарочницкий, академик, один из корифеев советской исторической науки – ред.) всегда говорил, любовь к своему — это не ненависть к новому. Тот, кто любит и ценит своё и почитает достояние, только тот способен с таким же чувством почитания и уважения отнестись к другим. К сожалению, история никого не учит, но очень наказывает за эгоизм и её незнание. Вот это мне кажется сейчас происходит. Армения очень дорога моему сердцу, это огромная трагедия, лишение национальной жизни огромной части народа и фактически её изгнание, причем даже необязательно насильственное, а изгнание через создание невозможных условий для жизни. Это тоже уничтожение народа. Остается признать, что не было геноцида, лишитъ всего, начать преподавать это в школах, остается еще сказать, что Россия враг, это после 300 лет, после русско-персидских войн, русско-турецких, столько крови было пролито и русскими, и армянскими мучениками, это очень тяжело. Но это не меняет моего отношение, и я всегда буду вместе с этим многострадальным народом! Вот это уничтожение — это, конечно, настоящий геноцид. И память об этом всегда должна быть в ваших и наших сердцах!
2024	Russia MFA	Official	Press Release	Обратили внимание на крайне сомнительное содержание учебника по истории для 8 класса армянских школ, текст которого опубликован на официальном сайте подведомственной структуры Министерства образования, науки, культуры и спорта Республики Армения. Цифровая версия книги размещена для изучения и формирования заказа на 2024/2025 учебный год. В одной из глав нового пособия под провокационным названием «Насильственное присоединение Восточной Армении к России» в искажённом виде изложены события на Южном Кавказе конца XVIII – начала XIX веков. В частности, ревизии подверглись оценки итогов Русско-персидской войны 1826-1828 годов. Туркманчайский мир назван не иначе как «аннексией» Восточной Армении. Такая подача способна вызвать оторопь у любого историка. Если почитать серьёзные источники, в т.ч. армянские, можно увидеть совершенно другие подходы к мирному договору 1828 года. До последнего времени в республиканских учебниках он оценивался как имеющий «колоссальное значение для будущего восстановления армянской государственности». Ставить под сомнение особую роль Российской империи, а впоследствии СССР и России в деле становления нынешней Армении означает идти против общеизвестных фактов. Речь об очередной беззастенчивой попытке переписать нашу общую историю. В лучших традициях западной пропаганды и политического инжиниринга белое называется чёрным с «лёгкой руки» отдельных армянских деятелей, особо рьяно старающихся выслужиться перед своими спонсорами. Внедрение подобных формулировок прямо противоречит обязательствам в сфере сохранения исторической памяти, взятым на себя армянским руководством. Так, в Совместном заявлении Президента Российской Федерации В.В.Путина и Премьер-министра Республики Армения Н.В.Пашиняна от 19 апреля 2022 года сказано: «стороны, сохраняя единые подходы к общему прошлому, выразили намерение продолжить борьбу с пересмотром итогов Второй мировой войны и фальсификацией истории». Рассчитываем, что армянские власти не допустят передачи подобного учебника в школы, а также впредь не будут «смотреть сквозь пальцы» на такого рода бесцеремонные попытки исказить наше общее прошлое.

