NATO through the Russian frame

Changes in the framing of NATO in Russian foreign policy concepts

2000-2023

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Abstract

This paper examines how the framing of NATO has changed in Russian foreign policy in the 21st century. The Russian perception and portrayal of NATO is very much interconnected with Russian behavior on the international stage. For a greater understanding of Russian foreign policy, a content analysis of the Russian foreign policy concepts has been conducted with framing as a theoretical perspective. Analysis of five concepts from the years 2000, 2008, 2013, 2016 and 2023 has shown considerable changes in the framing of NATO. At the turn of the century NATO was first and foremost framed as an important cooperation partner for Russia, albeit with concerns being expressed towards NATO's aspirations and expansion. From then on, a successive shift took place throughout the concepts, with a decrease in the former message and increase in the latter, and by 2023 NATO was not considered a cooperation partner at all, but solely framed as a threat.

Keywords: Russia, NATO, framing, foreign policy,
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1 Introduction

Post-Soviet Russia emerged in the early 1990s as a diminished power on the global stage. The country initially leaned towards Westernization, which by the end of the century would compete with voices calling for Russia to stand on its own legs and reclaim its status as a great power. Vladimir Putin, who assumed the presidency in the year 2000, favored the latter, which is manifested in Russian foreign policy in the 21st century. Attempts to maintain and gain control over territories in the "Russian sphere of interest" resulted in foreign policy actions such as the Russo-Georgian war in 2008, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and the invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Russia in the 21st century has had a complicated relationship with the West at large, and with several individual actors within this broad term. One of the main ones is NATO. After the fall of the Soviet Union, NATO had to adapt and justify its existence, which it did by branding itself as a guarantor for Western civilization (Neumann & Williams, 2000, p. 361). It also expanded multiple times, particularly eastward, including several of Russia's neighboring countries, much to Russia's vexation. When talks of Ukraine joining NATO intensified, Putin disclosed the consequences of such a step in a closed NATO-meeting in Bucharest in 2008, stating that Ukraine will cease to exist as a state and its territory will be incorporated into Russia (Kragh, 2023, p. 128). The impact and significance NATO has in Russian foreign policy can hardly be overstated, which makes the question of how Russia's perception and portrayal – or *framing* – of the organization looks like, and how this has evolved over time, crucial for understanding Russian foreign policy.

State behavior is very much decided by their perception of social reality. How they view the world around them and the actors in them. A social reality can at the same time be constructed as a means to pursue geopolitical goals. A situation, someone or something can be framed in a certain way by emphasizing some aspects over others, or even leaving some things out, to legitimize certain goals. This paper examines how Russia frames NATO in their official foreign policy, more specifically their foreign policy concepts, which provides knowledge about how Russia perceives NATO and how their framing of NATO can be used, consciously or unconsciously, to justify foreign policy actions.

1.1 Purpose and research question

The purpose of this paper is to illuminate how NATO is framed in the Russian foreign policy concepts, and to find out if and how this has changed in the 21st century. This will contribute to a better understanding of the Russian perception and portrayal of NATO, and the implications this has had on Russian foreign policy and behavior on the international stage during this time. To answer this, the following research question has been formulated:

- *How has the framing of NATO changed in Russian foreign policy during the 21th century?*

1.2 Literature review

Literature on Russia-NATO relations and Russian-Western relations are utilized in this paper. Research about Russian-Western relations is used because NATO is often included within the term "global West", and is often involved in such research.

In the article "From alliance to security community: NATO, Russia, and the power of identity", Iver B. Neumann and Michael C. Williams examines the relationship between identities, institutions, and the structure of symbolic power from a constructivist viewpoint. They focus on the identity (re)constructions of NATO and Russia, the narrative structures and institutional contexts within which this took place, and how these factors shape adopted policies. Overall the article provides substantial insight into NATO-Russia relations in the context of NATO expanding, which is still relevant today and for this paper (Neumann & Williams, 2000, p. 385).

Neumann has also provided more recent work on the matter, such as the second edition of his book *Russia and the idea of Europe*. The book does not, however, focus on Russian relations with NATO, as the article above does, but Russian relations with Europe, or more specifically, Russian identity formation in relation to Europe. Neumann illuminates the process of a European "Other", and that Russian discourse on what Europe is, is also a debate of what Russia is and

should be. For this paper, it is the additional chapter included in the second edition, bringing the discussion up to date, that is especially relevant (Neumann, 2017).

For literature on Russian discourse on NATO, three different time spans are used, one during the period before the invasion of Crimea, one after Crimea, and one both before and after. Estelle Petit analyzed the first four concepts in "A comprehensive perspective on EU-Russia relations: analysis of the concepts of Russian foreign policy from 1993 to 2013". The focus was on EU-Russian relations, but he also looked at NATO. He analyzed the changes in terms of both substance and tone in order to explain the evolution of Russian international affairs and its perception of its own role in this environment (Petit, 2016).

In "Russian certainty of NATO hostility: repercussions in the arctic", Julie Wilhelmsen and Anni Roth Hjermann investigate, through the lens of security dilemma, Russian official discourse on NATO engagement in Europe after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and its impact on security interaction in the Arctic. The effects of the changing representations of Self and Other in relations between Russia and NATO is identified, and they argue that uncertainty of NATO's hostile intentions have been replaced with certainty (Hjermann & Wilhelmsen, 2022, p. 114). This paper will extend the the time frames of these works, and they in turn give this paper a deeper insight in their respective time frames, contributing to a more nuanced picture of how NATO is presented by Russia, including other material and another, more specific context.

Finally, Carolina Vendil Pallin studied the Russian view of the West from a security policy perspective between 1991 and 2022, as shown in the article "Rysslands säkerhetspolitiska syn på Väst: vägen fram till kriget 2022". She studied Russia's relationship and view on the West in official foreign policy, using the Russian national security concepts/strategies and the yearly address to the Federal Assembly by the Russian president (Vendil Pallin, 2023, p. 65). Relevant observations are made regarding NATO, but with different material. The time period is very beneficial, as it almost covers the same as this paper, except after the invasion of Ukraine, which will bring the research up to date. The application of a different theoretical perspective in this paper will also illuminate and provide other insights which the previous research does not.

1.3 Theory

Framing theory

The origin of framing is commonly attributed to Erving Goffman and his 1974 work *Frame Analysis: an essay on the organization of experience*. Goffman conceptualized frames as organizing principles that guide individuals' understanding of social situations and experiences, and how they perceive social reality. The frames are the individuals' definition of the situation built on these principles and the subjective understanding of them (Goffman, 1974, p. 10). Framing, situated within the constructivist tradition, not only addresses the construction of meaning, but also the role of actors in such processes (Björnehed & Eriksson, 2018, p. 109). This paper mainly utilizes the definition of framing offered by Robert M. Entman. He suggests a precise and universal understanding of it, identifying common tendencies among the various uses of the term, such as, *frame*, *framing* and *framework*. The concept of framing, whatever its specific use may be, offers a way of showing the power of a communicating text. Entman provides the following definition of framing:

> Framing essentially involves *selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation* for the item described (Entman, 1993, p. 52)

Frames can thus be divided into four parts or functions: define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments and suggest remedies. The occurrence of these framing functions in a communicating text can vary. Framing in a single text may not necessarily include all four functions, while a single sentence may include more than one of them Entman also defines *salience*, which is to make a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences. To make a piece of information more salient will increase the probability that the receivers of the information will perceive the information, discern its meaning, process it and remember it (Entman, 1993, p. 51-52).

The communication process of frames consists of at least four locations: the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture. Communicators are the one or ones

sending the message, which they do, consciously or unconsciously, guided by their schemata, which is the framework or mental structures that organize knowledge, beliefs and expectations which affects how information is perceived and interpreted. The text is where the frames are contained, consisting of the presence or absence of certain keywords, stereotyped images, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments. To make bits of information more salient by placement and repetition, or by invoking culturally familiar symbols, affects how a text is understood and remembered, as well as how it is evaluated and responded to by receivers of the text (Entman, 1993, p. 53).

The omitting of some features in framing is worth emphasizing, as it is a big part of making some aspects of our multidimensional reality more noticeable than other aspects, which contributes to the powerful nature of frames (Kuypers, 2009, p. 181). Frame analysis often involves two key tasks, uncovering the construction of meaning within a framing process, and identifying the effects frames have on people, actors and political outcomes (Björnehed & Eriksson, 2018, pp. 110-111).

Framing is frequently used and applied within the field of journalism and media, but it is also used in other fields as well, such as within international relations. There are countless examples within international relations and foreign policy of individuals, groups, organizations and institutions attempting to frame situations, policies and the intentions and actions of others. It is very common for political leaders to create frames, by using information and rhetoric, as a means of political manipulation, influencing a wide variety of receivers, such as allies, adversaries, the public, the media, constituencies, voters and third parties. One flagrant example of this is the reference, made by former President Ronald Reagan, to the Soviet Union as the "evil empire" (Mintz & Redd, 2003, pp. 193-194). Within international relations, the most common target, not to be confused with the intended audience, of framing attempts is an opposing nation-state. Enemies and opponents will often be framed unfavorably in order to gain public support for foreign policy actions (Mintz & Redd, 2003, pp. 198-199). All of the above contributes to making framing as a theoretical framework relevant for this paper within the study of peace and conflict.

On this basis, the utilization of framing as a theoretical framework for studying Russian foreign policy regarding NATO is beneficial. Through this theoretical lens it is possible to illuminate Russia's framing of NATO, both intentional and unintentional. It can showcase how Russia perceives their social reality and the implications of this in their foreign policy actions, as well as how they construct it in order to legitimize their behavior. This is one of several reasons for using framing as a theoretical perspective. Another reason is that it is a unique choice in the research field, as I have not found any previous research that uses this theory within the context of Russian foreign policy and NATO. The utilization of some form of constructivist perspective was considered, but since constructivist viewpoints are included from other works, mainly through Neumann and Williams, and the fact that frames and framing are embedded within social constructionist processes (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 5), framing as a sole theoretical framework becomes sufficient.

1.4 Material and method

1.4.1 Material

The empirical basis for this paper are the Russian foreign policy concepts, published by the ministry of foreign affairs of the Russian Federation (MID). These concepts, henceforth referred to FPC's, are official strategic planning documents of Russian foreign policy where national interests, basic principles, strategic goals, major objectives and priority areas are outlined. They have been released on six occasions since the fall of the Soviet Union – 1993, 2000, 2008, 2013, 2016, and 2023. The first one, however, is not included in the analysis in order to narrow down the time frame, but also due to the lack of available English translation.

They all share similar structures, being divided into five segments, except the one from 2023 which has six. These segments differ slightly in phrasing, but they generally share the same content: general provisions; Russian foreign policy in the modern world; addressing and priorities concerning global problems; regional priorities; shaping, development and implementation of foreign policy. Given the absence of page numbers, references to the concepts are denoted by the Roman numerals that the segments are divided into. NATO is naturally given

attention and discussion in all of the concepts, making it a suitable material to analyze how NATO is framed in official foreign policy.

There are more official policy statements that could have been used, for example other official documents, speeches or interviews, which could have strengthened and nuanced my results. This sole focus on the FPC's is because of the limited scope of this paper. The reason to choose the FPC's above other materials is threefold. Firstly, the fact that the purpose and format of these concepts has stayed the same over time makes it a suitable material to examine change over time. Secondly, the release dates of them are also beneficial, covering almost the entire period of post-Soviet Russia, spanning important events and processes. Lastly, no previous research, to my knowledge, has dedicated an exclusive analysis of the concepts centering around NATO..

One problem with this material is the fact the texts were originally written in Russian, and as I am not fluent in the Russian language, english translations have been used. The problem then is that some things may be lost in translation. Certain words, phrases and sayings may take on a different meaning, and a more or less negative or positive description of someone or something than what was originally intended might be interpreted. Other than the fact that the documents are translated, they are primary sources. They come directly from the ministry of foreign affairs of the Russian Federation, and since it is their framing of NATO – their subjective description of NATO – that is under scrutiny, the texts become primary sources (Dulić, 2011, p. 36).

1.4.2 Method

Qualitative content analysis and comparative analysis have been utilized in the analysis. The former is an interpretive form of analysis used to uncover meanings, motives, norms, and purposes in textual content. It involves the systematic analysis of text, the format of which can be widespread, among them official documents, where it is possible to extract hidden or underlying meanings of interest to the researcher (Halperin & Heath, 2020, p. 365). The latter compares the results of the content analysis using a longitudinal research design. This explores change or trends over time by repeating the research using the same sample at more than one interval (Halperin & Heath, 2020, p. 165). Thus it is not a comparison of different things, rather a comparison of the same thing at different points in time. The intention of this is to illuminate

change over time. What has changed and what has stayed the same? Can any patterns, or breaking of patterns, be distinguished? This comparison is presented throughout the analysis by contrasting every concept, excluding the first one, to its predecessor.

Entman highlights the beneficial combination of content analysis with framing as a theoretical framework. He claims that to identify and describe frames should be the major task of determining textual meaning. To conduct content analysis informed by a theory of framing would prevent the tendency to regard all positive or negative terms or statements as equally salient and influential. This enables more accurate conclusions to be drawn (Entman, 1993, p. 57).

The content analysis is deductive rather than inductive, meaning that the analysis is conducted through the lens of predetermined hypotheses, principles or theories (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 9). The content analysis in this case is thus guided by framing, and is thematically coded based on its four functions – define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments and suggest remedies. The focus is on how the Russian framing of NATO fits into these four themes. The operationalization occurred as follows: I thoroughly read through all the concepts looking for segments where NATO was discussed. These segments then became the material of analysis, where the following questions were asked: how is NATO talked about? What words and tone are used? How do they talk about what NATO does, wants to do, and the impact of this? What is NATO on the global and Euro-Atlantic stage? What is it in relation to Russia? What is, and what is not salient? Is anything repeatedly brought up? Is anything left out? These guiding questions are used to illuminate the four functions of framing.

1.4.3 Limitations

Several limitations have had to be made in this study, and some things have had to be left out. The analysis is strictly centered around segments about NATO and where NATO is referred or alluded to. No focus is given to discussion on individual NATO-members, such as the USA, nor about the global West, a frequently touched upon subject in the concepts. NATO is, however, situated within and a part of the West, making it relevant in the topic, which is why Russian relationship with the West is incorporated through the literary field.

The reason for choosing NATO is partly because of personal interest, partly because less attention has been given to it in research on the FPC's. NATO's framing of Russia has also been excluded. This would very much have elevated the study and nuanced the results, as it affects how Russia frames NATO, and it would give a more comprehensive understanding of their relationship. Ideally this would be included, but it was left out simply because of the limited scope of the paper. For the same reason, the concrete effects and influence of the frames on audiences and receivers, such as the Russian civil population, have been excluded. This is also because the FPC's are not that far reaching outside political circuits. The intended effects and the impact it has on political outcomes are, however, included in the analysis.

1.5 Background

1.5.1 Post-Soviet Russia

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked a significant departure from the past. The Russian Federation was established, and it was no longer the center of an empire, its regional power was decreased, the Soviet system was replaced with liberal democracy and market economy, and Russians were free to speak and think (Karlsson, 2017, p. 1061). The early 1990s saw Russia leave behind socialism for nationalism on the path of becoming a modern Western state. This westernization, however, would stale and diminish through the second half of the decade. President Boris Yelstin was succeeded in 1999 by Vladimir Putin, who aspired to rebuild the great power that was the Soviet Union, but under a new name and new premises. He wanted to return to the Soviet roots, but the politics and economics were no longer rooted in marxism (Gerner, 2022, p. 285).

Russia's relationship with the West, however, had its complications, and NATO constituted a prominent one. Russian political leaders talked about a Russian sphere of interest, which includes areas close to Russia that are viewed as historically Russian. NATO expansion was seen as an intrusion of this sphere, such as in Georgia and Ukraine. In late 2003, the rose revolution took place where widespread protests favored western oriented reforms and joining EU and NATO. Russia felt that Georgia was leaving the Russian gravitational field and wanted to deter Georgia and others from doing the same. This would be the backdrop of the

Russo-Georgian war in 2008, where Russia intervened in the Georgian breakaway states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which constituted 20 percent of its territory, and declared them independent. In 2011, Dimitry Medvedev, Russian President between 2008 and 2012, and an ally of Putin, explained how the decision to intervene in Georgia was intrinsically linked with the NATO issue. He said that the war, to some of their partners, was a signal that geopolitical stability should be evaluated before decisions of an expansion of the alliance is made (Kragh, 2023, pp. 122, 127-128 & 153).

Similar to Georgia, Ukraine saw domestic voices calling for Westernization in the orange revolution of 2005. The election of Russian friendly candidate Viktor Yanukovych, who was accused of election fraud, was protested and consequently replaced with the western oriented Viktor Yushchenko. A decade later, in 2013, protests against Yanukovych, who became president after a fair election in 2010, became nationwide when he turned down a major association agreement with the EU. The protests, called Euromaidan, became a question of national identity and political belonging. Russia responded to this with a military intervention in Crimea. Putin motivated this by talking about forces of neo-nazism, nationalism, and antisemitism in Ukraine, and that the situation in Ukraine was nothing more than the Western powers' attempt to weaken Russia. This sent a message to other post-Soviet states discouraging similar "color revolutions" or likewise to take place (Kragh, 2023, pp. 188, 193 & 196-199).

Eight years later, on 24 February 2022, the Russian Federation initiated the military attack on the sovereign state of Ukraine, and the territories of Luhansk and Donetsk were recognized as independent states. Putin has stated several reasons for the invasion similar to the ones before Crimea, but heavy emphasis was also placed on the potential admission of Ukraine into NATO (Gerner, 2022, pp. 341-343). Military infrastructure being moved to Ukrainian territory, controlled by NATO headquarters and the USA, needed to be prevented.

1.5.2 NATO

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization – NATO – is an intergovernmental military alliance created after the second world war against the backdrop of a perceived military threat consisting of the Soviet Union and its allies. In 1949 the North Atlantic Treaty, also known as the Washington Treaty, was signed by ten European states, Canada and the USA (Landguiden,

2024). By 1991, NATO could no longer build its identity around the shared military threat posed by the Soviet Union. Instead it built its identity as a military guarantor for Western civilisation, protecting Western values, culture and democracy (Neumann & Williams, 2000, p. 361). NATO no longer viewed the former Eastern bloc states as threats, and several of them showed interest in joining NATO. Despite opposition from Russia, measures were taken to enable discussion, such as the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (1992), Partnership for Peace (1994), Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security (1997) and the NATO-Russia Council (2002) (Lindahl & Winnerstig, 2024). The latter was intended to be a platform for consultation, consensus-building, cooperation, joint decision making and joint action (NATO, 2022).

Several sources of friction were at the same time present. The NATO bombing campaign in 1999 against Serbian targets in the provenance of Kosovo, without approval from the UN Security Council, was disapproved of by Russia who regarded it an attack against an ally. NATO's involvement in the "war on terror" launched by the USA, overtaking the main responsibility over the international military intervention in Afghanistan in 2003, was met differently by Russia, who experienced terrorism on its home soil (Lindahl & Winnerstig, 2024). Between 2001 and 2007 it is estimated that approximately 2200 people died in 91 terrorist attacks, although several of these occurred in the context of the Chechen war (Kragh, 2023, pp. 105-106).

The main source of friction was the expansion of NATO. In 1997 the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland became NATO-members, which from the Russian side was regarded as a betrayal of previous agreements that NATO would not expand in the eastern bloc. The frustration, however, was less rooted in breaches of agreements, and more about mentality rooted in identity and history (Kragh, 2023, pp. 95-97 & 147). The biggest expansion came in 2004 when NATO admitted Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. NATO then accessed a big part of Eastern Europe, and even bordering Russia through the Baltic states. Further enlargements were to follow with Albania and Croatia joining in 2009, North Macedonia in 2020, and Finland and Sweden in 2023 and 2024 respectively (Lindahl & Winnerstig, 2024). Georgia and Ukraine are, as previously mentioned, still aspiring to join as of 2024.

2 Analysis

2.2 Foreign policy concept 2000

The discussion about NATO in the concept from 2000 is initiated by a clear desire of cooperation from Russia. It is stated that Russia, with the importance of cooperation, and interest in maintaining security and stability in the continent in mind, is open to constructive interaction (MID, 2000, IV). The problem presented is the maintenance of security and stability on the continent, to which the cooperation with NATO is a solution. NATO is framed as a beneficial collaboration partner, something worth striving towards from a Russian perspective, and a valuable entity that can be relied upon when combating security related issues. This indicates a recognition of NATO's influence in the region as an important actor in the military and political sphere, and an acknowledgement of its status and significance in Europe.

This emphasis on cooperation and dialogue is not surprising considering the measures taken the previous decade to enable collaboration, such as in 1992, 1994 and 1997. Vendil Pallin found the same attitude around the same time from Russia towards the broader context of the West (Vendil Pallin, 2023, p. 65). The "Founding act" from 1997 is brought up in the concept as a basis for this constructive interaction. It is declared that the intensity of cooperation will depend on NATO's compliance with the act "[...] primarily those concerning non-use or threat of force, and non-deployment of conventional armed forces groupings, nuclear weapons and their delivery vehicles in the territories of the new members." (MID, 2000, IV). So, Russia places a lot of responsibility for the cooperation on how NATO complies with the agreement, making NATO accountable for the success of the partnership.

While NATO is framed as a solution to problems, it is simultaneously framed as a problem. They say that NATO's present political and military guidelines do not coincide with the security interests of the Russian Federation, and that it occasionally directly contradicts them. In this regard, NATO is framed as an opposing, incompatible counterpart to Russia, that NATO's military and political interest counteracts Russian security interests. It is specified that this primarily concerns use-of-force operations, without the sanction of the UN security council,

outside of the zone of application of the Washington Treaty (MID, 2000, IV). The mention of use-of-force operations without the sanction of the UN Security Council alludes to the NATO bombing campaign in Kosovo against Serbian targets in 1999. The deteriorating effects this had on Russian-Western relations is highlighted by Petit, who claims that Russia felt that their input and security interests were overlooked at the expense of Western interest (Petit, 2016, p. 24). These feelings are evident in this FPC.

Concerns are also expressed that NATO is acting outside of their bounds, such as the case above. In conjunction with this, it is stated that "Russia retains its negative attitude towards the expansion of NATO" (MID, 2000, IV). NATO did expand only one year earlier, with Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic all joining in 1999, enlarging NATO significantly in eastern Europe (NATO, 2024). Petit also comments on this, claiming that Russia felt that NATO intruded in the Russian "sphere of influence", leading to a more Eurasianist favoring in Russian foreign policy (Petit, 2016, p. 87). However, while Russia does express its negative view on this expansion, this sentence is the end of it. They merely state, with a clearcut, matter-of-factly tone, that they do not want it to expand. This outlook is, though critical, rather contains geopolitical considerations than direct moral judgements. According to Entman, not all texts include all functions of framing, which is the case here.

They are very scarce with its criticisms and do not give any reasons for why they find the expansion negative. They do not explicitly connect issues of Russian security to this, or that it is regarded as a danger to Russia. NATO is thus framed as a problem, but not as a threat to Russia. In other platforms however, according to Vendil Pallin, more explicit concerns are expressed. In the security concept from the year 2000 it is stated that NATO military bases coming closer to Russian borders is a security threat, and that it would weaken Russian influence (Vendil Pallin, 2023, p. 51). This suggests that the concerns are there, but not so pressing that it needs emphasis in the FPC, and that they are sidelined in favor of constructive dialogue. This is also manifested by the fact that the discussion both begins and ends with this sentiment.

Still, the dual framing of NATO as both a solution and a problem can be understood through the Russian schemata at the time. Neumann and Williams, who assume the constructivist viewpoint that identity and action are linked, claim that Russian national identity at the time was in transition and unclear, and debate over foreign policy and security policy became a debate over national identity. In regards to NATO, the Russian leadership was forced to choose between

two roles for the Russian foreign policy regarding NATO expansion. As NATO had adapted an identity as a protector of Western civilisation, they could either strive towards joining Western civilisation, thus welcoming NATO enlargement, or they could oppose it, becoming a counter-civilisational force. (Neumann & Williams, 2000, p. 361).

As we see in the concept, favoring of both directions can be discerned. But merely falling in line with NATO, taking a step back as a player on the international stage did not fit with desires of rebuilding Russia as a great power, which became more prevalent with Putin becoming president around this time. The result is that the framing of NATO in this FPC becomes contradicting, being both a solution to problems and a problem in itself, however, with a heavier salience on the former.

Some remedies for this situation are suggested, or rather, some requirements. Russia stresses that substantive and constructive cooperation is only possible if both sides respect the interests of the other and unconditionally fulfill mutual obligations (MID, 2000, IV). Again, it is brought up that NATO needs to respect Russian interests, repeating and sementing this requirement. NATO adapting its behavior is thus framed as the most important factor in Russia-NATO relations. It is not, however, framed as solely responsible. It also includes an obligation for Russia to fulfill their part. But as it is clearly outlined that NATO contradicts Russian interests, and the other way around is not mentioned at all, the impression given is that NATO needs to change their behavior, not Russia.

2.3 Foreign policy concept 2008

The discussion around NATO in the FPC from 2008 begins with "[...] Russia deems it important to ensure progressive development of interaction within the format of the Russia-NATO Council in the interests of ensuring predictability and stability in the Euro-Atlantic Region [...]" (MID, 2008, IV). NATO, like in the previous FPC, is framed as an influential regional actor whose cooperation is worth pursuing, only now through the NATO-Russia council created in 2002. There is also a slight difference in what will be accomplished by this, instead of maintaining security and stability, it is now ensuring predictability and stability. The security aspect is not missing as it is brought up later, but the predictability aspect is added.

The security aspect which NATO can contribute to is even further developed in this FPC. It is stated that they want to utilize the existing potential of this council for political dialogue and practical cooperation in "[...] resolving issues relating to common threats, including terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional crises, drug trafficking, natural and man-made disasters." (MID, 2008, IV). This list of problems is now concrete and they are framed as "common threats", effectively placing NATO on Russia's "side" by sharing the same challenges and enemies. They could find common ground in countering the very tangible threat of terrorism, for example, which Russia did experience the years before this concept, and NATO who was involved in "the war on terror". Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, is mentioned in the previous FPC, but drug trafficking and natural and man-made disasters are added. This paints a picture where Russia and NATO share common ground on a lot more issues and that Russia can get more out of being partners with NATO than before. NATO becomes an even more important ally which can help defend Russia and the Euro-Atlantic region from a wide range of threats, which affirms NATO's role as a maintainer of security and stability. It induces the view of NATO as, in these instances, something that can help Russia overcome threats, rather than being the threat.

At the same time, as with the previous FPC, a lot of responsibility on the proceeding of this cooperation was laid upon NATO, even more so. Is is declared that Russia's relationship with NATO is dependent on the latters readiness for equal partnership, compliance with the principles and standards of international law, and that all NATO members, according to framework of the Russia-NATO council, not ensure one's security at the expense of the security of the Russian Federation, as well as showcasing military restraint (MID, 2008, IV). Again a frame is constructed where the cooperation between Russia and NATO is dependent on NATO, but it is developed more and the responsibility of the Russian side to uphold the same standards are not mentioned. NATO is thus more accountable for the success of the partnership.

Similar to the preceding FPC, NATO is simultaneously considered a problem, with a clearer and more emphasized focus on NATO expansion. The clearcut, matter-of-fact wording and tone remains, as well as the lack of moral judgements, stating that "Russia maintains its negative attitude towards the expansion of NATO [...]", however, this is developed further:

[...] notably to the plans of admitting Ukraine and Georgia to the membership in the alliance, as well as to bringing the NATO military infrastructure closer to the Russian borders on the whole, which violates the principle of equal security, leads to new dividing lines in Europe and runs counter to the tasks of increasing the effectiveness of joint work in search for responses to real challenges of our time (MID, 2008, IV).

NATO's expansion, and its implications, are concretized and more salient. This is not surprising, given that NATO did expand significantly in 2004, admitting seven eastern European countries in 2004, including the Baltic states bordering Russia, which was perceived as an intrusion of the Russian sphere of interest. Talks had also begun on admitting Georgia and Ukraine, hence the explicit reference to these countries. It was foreboding to the start of the Russo-Georgian war in August 2008, one month after the release of the concept. Of course several factors were at play for Russia to initiate this war. Petit discusses that the NATO negotiations were accompanied by a wave of Westernization, manifested by the Colour revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine, which sparked a Russian foreign policy response to maintain and recover its influence in these regions (Petit, 2016, p. 57). This, along with NATO coming closer to Russian borders, played a major role in the political outcome.

NATO is framed as a security concern, but it is still presented rather evasively. It is stated that NATO military infrastructure coming closer to Russian borders violates the principle of equal security, which infer that Russia is less secure because of it, but it does not create the image of NATO in itself as a threat to Russia. Other implications of NATO enlargement are presented. They claim that new dividing lines in Europe will be created. NATO, then, becomes the cause for the deterioration of relations between Russia and its neighbors. It effectively constructs NATO as, at least in part, responsible for geopolitical fragmentation in Europe, and it is not unlikely that they insinuate a divide between Russia and the West as a whole.

Altogether, the framing of NATO is more contradicting in this concept than the previous. NATO is framed as a desirable partner and a staple of security, predictability and stability, but as soon as they expand, they become the cause of weakened security for Russia and dividing lines in Europe, constructing the view of NATO as an entity creating uncertainty on the political stage and a less secure environment. The two alternative

directions linked with Russian national identity discussed by Neumann and Williams can thus still be discerned. They highlight the paradoxical situation NATO puts Russia in. How can NATO be viewed as a partner and at the same time regarded as a threat? Russia has to both oppose and appease it. Time and time again it needs to be stated that expansion is unacceptable, while not undermining Russia's diplomatic, economic and strategic cooperation with the Western world (Neumann & Williams, 2000, pp. 384-385). This paradoxical situation is clearly evident in the framing of NATO in this FPC.

2.4 Foreign policy concept 2013

The concept from 2013 regarding NATO changed in several ways. The first thing addressed is that Russia-NATO relations are dependent on NATO's readiness for equitable partnership, adherence to international law, and every NATO members obligation to the Russia-NATO council by not providing one's security at the expense of others, as well as showcasing military restraint. More requirements have also been added, stating that the relations has to be based on "[...] the principles of mutual trust, transparency and predictability [...] (MID, IV, 63). NATO is thus still more accountable for the state of its relations with Russia, but it is given more salience here, being further developed and put on the forefront.

Russia's negative attitude towards NATO's expansion is then expressed, similar to the 2008 FPC. It is stated that NATO's military infrastructure approaching Russian borders "[...] violates the principle of equal security and leads to the emergence of new dividing lines in Europe." (MID, IV, 63). Again, NATO's expansion is framed as the cause of conflict and destabilization in Europe. However, the admission of Ukraine and Georgia is not mentioned. Georgia had already been dealt with in 2008, and the concept was released before the removal of pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovych, meaning the fear of Ukraine joining was not critical. Signs of the coming annexation of Crimea one year later is thus not that evident in this concept. However, around this time an overall shift in Russian attitude towards the West at large did get more solid ground, according to Neumann. In fact, during the Putin years, a xenophobic representation of Europe grew stronger and stronger with time, while the liberal position grew weaker and weaker (Neumann, 2017, pp. 176-177).

This changing representation can be discerned through the fact that NATO is no longer framed as much as an important actor in contributing to the security, predictability and stability in the Euro-Atlantic region anymore. The common security threats that were discussed in the previous concept, namely international terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, drug trafficking, and natural and man-made disasters, but also adding maritime piracy instead of regional crises, were brought up in this concept as well. However, Russia does not call on cooperation with NATO in resolving these problems, but instead "[...] all Euro-Atlantic states, including NATO member states [...]" (MID, 2013, IV, 63).

A shift has occurred here, where the problems have pretty much stayed the same, but combating them no longer involves NATO. It is not totally separated, as NATO members are specifically referred to, but it is not the organization itself. Russia does not place the same value in interaction and dialogue with NATO, leaving the impression of a diminished perception of NATO as an influential and important actor in Europe's security and stability. The problems have pretty much stayed the same, but NATO is no longer part of the solution to them, which is a stark contrast to the 2008 FPC.

NATO as a part of combating security threats is, however, not completely absent. NATO is brought up when the situation in Afghanistan is discussed. It is stated that the situation in Afghanistan poses a great security threat to Russia, and that Russia will make efforts to find a just and lasting political solution, which they will do by working together with "[...] Afghanistan and concerned countries, the United Nations, the CIS, the CSTO, the SCO and other multilateral institutions including Russia-NATO projects [...]" (MID, 2013, IV, 91). So, NATO is in fact again outlined as a beneficial organization to work together concerning security issues, but it is not framed as a very important one. It is not salient, only being mentioned as one actor among many, even last of them, almost like a by-product.

2.5 Foreign policy concept 2016

The tone around NATO shifted significantly in the 2016 FPC. Since the last concept the annexation of Crimea had occurred, greatly shaking the NATO-Russia relations. The discussion opens as follows: "Systemic problems in the EuroAtlantic region that have accumulated over the

last quarter century are manifested in the geopolitical expansion pursued by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) [...]." (MID, 2016, IV, 61). It is also added that this is also because NATO and the EU have refused to strive towards a common European security and cooperation framework, which "[...] have resulted in a serious crisis in the relations between Russia and the Western States." (MID, 2016, IV, 61).

NATO is blamed for a lot here, and framed as the cause of more problems with graver consequences, than before, such as systematic problems spanning 25 years, the whole period of post-Soviet Russia, effectively freeing Russia of responsibility for any foreign affairs issues. The naming of this as "systematic" portrays NATO as something fundamentally problematic. While Russia has claimed earlier that dividing lines have been created because of NATO, it has now become a "serious crisis" between Russia and the Western states, reflecting the increasing tension between Russia and the West under Putin, as discussed by Neumann.

NATO's unwillingness to cooperate is also emphasized as a cause of this. It has time and time again been stated that Russia-NATO relations are dependent on the latters respects towards Russia's interest and security, and they have acknowledged that their interests are contradicting, but this is the first time they claim that NATO refuses to do it. Both Vendil Pallin and Hjermann and Wilhelmsen additionally found the Russian view of NATO as deceitful in this regard. The former found that Russia felt fooled by NATO who time and time again gave false promises of not enlarging eastward (Vendil Pallin, 2022, p. 58). The latter found that Russia after Crimea in 2014 portrayed NATO as a two-faced actor hiding its true agenda and desire to expand (Hjermann & Wilhelmsen, 2022, p. 127).

 It is important to note that NATO is not framed as the sole cause of the problems lifted, as the EU is mentioned at an equal level. But NATO is still framed as a big part of the responsibility for issues in the Euro-Atlantic region. Moral judgments are still absent, but the criticisms are a bit more direct and the tone is a bit harsher than previously, with straight accusations directed towards NATO, which contributes to an overall more negative framing of NATO. Despite the criticism of NATO's cooperative willingness, they still outline how cooperation can improve, and it is the exact same paragraph as in the FPC from 2013 (MID, 2016, IV, 70). A way of working together is thus still presented, signaling that collaboration with NATO is still desirable and beneficial. However, the framing of NATO as a way to combat security threats has completely disappeared. The diminishing framework of NATO as a

maintainer of security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic region has stayed on the same trajectory. It is no longer even mentioned in the discussion on combating the wide range of security issues, such as terrorism, which means that Russia and NATO are not united through common threats anymore.

Just like the beginning of the discussion on NATO, the ending concludes once again the troubling effects of NATO expansion. The repetition of this critique, essentially making the same points, clearly makes this portrayal of NATO the most salient. It is the predominant theme of the concept. The ending conclusion on NATO is also pretty much the same as the paragraph from the previous FPC, with one slight difference. It is stated that NATO enlargement not only is a violation of equal security and cause of new dividing lines, it is also "[...] leading to the deepening of old dividing lines [...]" (MID, 2016, IV, 70). Again, the problems caused by NATO have increased, now alluding to the Cold War between the Western and Eastern blocs. Though not said outright, implying this can have strong cultural resonance, creating that idea that NATO's actions pushes towards the old dichotomy and antagonism between the West and East.

2.6 Foreign policy concept 2023

In the latest concept released, as of writing, what initially stands out is the lack of discussion on NATO. It is actually only mentioned once explicitly, a significant decrease in comparison to all other concepts. Vendil Pallin also notes this decrease around the same time on other official documents and speeches (Vendil Pallin, 2022, p. 63). In the one paragraph it is mentioned, it is stated that Russia needs to reduce and neutralize threats to "[...] security, territorial integrity, sovereignty, traditional spiritual and moral values, and socio-economic development of Russia [...] from unfriendly European states, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the European Union and the Council of Europe." (MID, 2023, V. 50 (1)). NATO is not even dedicated a segment for itself, it is merely included in a line of Western actors, signaling a lack of significance being accorded to the alliance. NATO is not exclusively portrayed as a threat in these aspects, but as a part of a wider, Western threat, which makes NATO as less of a singular threat in the formulation of these problems. This conclusion is also drawn by Hjermann and Wilhelmsen, who claim that Russia post-Crimea viewed NATO/USA/West as an interlinked,

combined threat towards security and stability in Europe and globally, with USA being the main driver (Hjermann & Wilhelmsen, 2022, pp. 122-124). However, as this is the only segment where NATO is mentioned, its threatening portrayal becomes the most salient image.

NATO has once again become the source of more problems than before. A threat towards Russia's security is not new, but a threat to territorial integrity and sovereignty is. Russia as a state is framed as if under threat to lose its land and perhaps even its independence. Russian society is also framed as under threat, claiming that Russian spiritual and moral values need to be protected. For the first time in the context of the FPC's are fundamental aspects of Russian culture, the society – the Russian way of life – in danger in favor of a Western values. The socio-economic development of Russia is also new. This concept was released after the invasion of Ukraine was initiated and after many actors put sanctions on Russia. This might therefore be less directed towards NATO and more towards the EU and individual European states, including NATO-members. The combination of all of these concerns makes NATO a comprehensive threat to Russia on multiple levels, both internationally and domestically. All of Russia, the whole nation and its people, is in danger. That is the level of menace NATO constitutes.

While there is only one mention of NATO, there is another that likely refers to it without explicitly saying so. In order to maintain and strengthen international peace and security, they aim to:

> [...] neutralize the attempts by any states and interstate associations to seek global dominance in the military sphere, project their power beyond their area of responsibility, assume primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, draw dividing lines and ensure the security of some states to the detriment of legitimate interests of other countries (MID, 2023, IV, 24 (2)).

It is reasonable to assume that interstate organizations refer, at least partly, to NATO. Vendil Pallin also notes that NATO is alluded to on several occasions in official foreign policy, often in terms of a collective West (Vendil Pallin, 2022, pp. 62-63). This assumption is also based on the fact that a lot of this reflects what has characterized the framing in the earlier concepts, such as the drawing of dividing lines and ensuring its own security to the detriment of the interests of other countries. If this is the case, then we can conclude that this view of NATO has consisted, but also developed further. As Russian foreign policy actions became more extreme one year

earlier, with the invasion of Ukraine, so has the foreign policy rhetoric. Such extreme actions need legitimization.

One year after the invasion, NATO is framed as seeking global dominance and power beyond their responsibility, leaving the image of a power-hungry entity with the goal of dominating the entire world. The claim that this is beyond their area of responsibility effectively delegitimizes any expansion of NATO. They are outsiders coming to take over, control and rule over people and places they can't claim valid responsibility over, such as Ukraine and Georgia. This is perhaps the only section which could be considered an expression of a moral judgment, but it is not very developed. All of these attempts by states and interstate associations are additionally said to "[...] pose a threat of regional conflicts and a world war to the present and future generations." (MID, 2023, IV, 24 (2)). Here the implications of NATO's behavior is outlined, and it is ominous. Russia denounces itself from any blame for conflicts and wars, and the violence, death and atrocities that ensues, as is currently going on in Ukraine.

This framing can be used to legitimize almost any foreign policy actions. A reality has been constructed where Russia is under attack as a state, with its sovereignty, territory, community and culture. The Russian schemata reflect a situation where Russia needs to be protected at all costs. Hjermann and Wilhelmsen came to a similar conclusion, that any military activity by the Russian Federation can be legitimized as "in response", "retaliatory measures", or "forced by the activities of the other party [NATO]" (Hjermann & Wilhelmsen, 2022, p. 126).

Entman's emphasis on the importance of what is included in a frame being as important as what is being left out is especially relevant in this concept. Any talk about establishing or improving Russia-NATO relations is omitted. Cooperation is no longer desirable to Russia or a solution to the problems presented, such as security, stability and common threats. No concrete remedy is presented at all, only that the threats need to be reduced and neutralized. The only image you are left with is that of an enemy and a threat. The frame is thus not contradicting anymore. Russia is no longer trying to favor two directions in its foreign policy as a result of a conflicting Russian national identity. A choice between falling in line with Western civilisation or becoming a counter-civilisational force has been made, and it fell on the latter.

3 Discussion and conclusions

The aim of this paper was to answer the following research question: *How has the framing of NATO changed in Russian foreign policy during the 21st century?* The analysis, guided by framing theory and its functions – definition of problems, diagnosis of causes, moral judgments and suggesting remedies – has illuminated the framing process of NATO in Russian discourse at different points in time during the 21st century.

It is evident that the framing of NATO has changed in several ways. One pronounced change was the portrayal of NATO as a cooperation partner. In the 2000 concept, the problems presented were the maintenance of stability and security in Europe, and cooperation with NATO was suggested as a remedy. NATO was framed as an important and influential actor in Europe, and a valuable partner for Russia. This is repeated and the most salient reinforcing message. This is still the case in 2008, although some things have altered. The problems that cooperation with NATO can help combat increased, and they were framed as common threats, putting Russia and NATO side by side against outside dangers, such as terrorism. Discussion on how this cooperative relationship would function did also increase, however, so did the emphasis that NATO needs to change and be more respectful of Russian interests.

By 2013, the salience of cooperating with NATO took a big step back. The framework of NATO as an important figure in maintaining security, stability and other problems diminished, though it was still in the discussion. This downward trend would continue in 2016 and 2023. NATO's former elevated position in the Euro-Atlantic region is completely gone by 2023, and there is no discussion of cooperation whatsoever. This absence is very significant, since what is omitted is a big part of the powerful nature of frames. Russia thus conveys that cooperation with NATO is no longer desirable and even completely out of the question. These findings are also supported in a broader context by Vendil Pallins research where she concluded that Russia by 2021 no longer viewed Europe and the West as a desirable cooperation partner, as they had by the year 2000. This paper has also brought the research up to date by including the discourse and framing of NATO after the invasion of Ukraine.

Another pronounced change is the framing of NATO as a problem and its expansion. NATO's enlargement was already opposed in the 2000 FPC, as Russia did feel at the time, as Petit discussed, that the Russian "sphere of interest" was intruded. It was, however, not salient within the overall framework, and NATO was not portrayed as an enemy or threat. The appeasement was thus more salient than the opposition. The same goes for the 2008 concept, but with some changes. NATO's expansion was the source of more problems and claimed to be at the expense of Russian security, as well as the cause of new dividing lines in Europe. This was also observed by Petit.

This critical take on NATO was similar in 2013, however, more pronounced considering the diminished discussion on how Russia and NATO would partner together. By 2016 the framing of NATO became much darker and accusing, which matches the intensified xenophobic representation of Europe, and weakening liberal position that started around 2013, as Neumann explains. Russia and NATO were no longer framed as on the same side against common threats. Instead, NATO became the cause of more, bigger issues than before, with graver consequences, such as systematic problems in Europe spanning a quarter of a century, deepening old dividing lines in Europe, creating a "serious crisis" between Russia and the West. This description invokes the remembered and culturally familiar Cold War divide, which is an effective tool to utilize according to Entman. An important aspect of this framework is that Russia is not to be blamed for this antagonism, it is NATO along with other Western actors, and they are to be blamed for the consequences of this situation.

The concept from 2023 greatly diminished the discussion on NATO, not even dedicating it a segment of its own as all previous concepts had. It is instead framed as part of a larger Western threat, greatly reducing its significance. This "lumping together" of several different actors as one coherent Western threat is also noted by Hjermann and Wilhelmsen. More problems are also once again added, and they are more comprehensive than earlier. NATO constitutes a threat to Russia's sovereignty and territory, and its traditional and moral values, framing both the Russian state and community as under threat.

One of the functions outlined by Entman, namely the making of moral judgment, have actually stayed the same throughout by being almost completely absent. This is understandable, given that all texts may not include all four functions, according to Entman, and given the format and purpose of the FPC's. They are official foreign policy documents meant to showcase

strategic objectives, outline diplomatic priorities, and provide a framework for international engagement, rather than providing moral judgments.

These observed changes can be understood through the constructivist perspective applied by Neumann and Williams on the ambivalent Russian national identity in relation to NATO and the West. By the turn of the 21st century, Russia was characterized by different conflicting images of national identity. Voices called for a more "Westernized" Russia, as well as Russia as a counter-civilisational force. This paradoxical situation can be discerned in the framing of NATO in the 2000 and 2008 FPC's, where NATO is both appeased and opposed. The following three concepts shows the steady turn toward the latter direction of Russian national identity. Russia did not, and does not "fall in line" with the Western world, but instead opted to be a unique civilization of its own, countering NATO and other Western states and organizations. This Russian schemata has, consciously or unconsciously, affected how NATO has been framed in the 21st century.

In summary, the dual, contradicting framing of NATO as an ally and a threat by the year 2000, with a heavier salience on the former, did successively shift to a heavier salience on the latter going forward, which, by 2023, entirely dominates the Russian framing of NATO. Analysis of the Russian FPC's through the theoretical perspective of framing has indeed highlighted how certain aspects of the organization have been emphasized, and others have been left out. This gives insight into how the Russian leadership understands and sees NATO in the world, which affects what actions Russia takes in foreign policy, thus contributing to an understanding of Russian behavior on the international stage. The use of framing as a tool within international relations and foreign policy is also better understood. Within the framework of Russia being increasingly put under threat, where NATO more and more becomes a danger to Russian security, any means necessary to prevent or defend itself can be legitimized, which is exactly what is attempted in foreign policy actions such as the Russo-Georgian war, the annexation of Crimea and the invasion of Ukraine. There are of course a lot of factors at play in events like these, but the impact the Russian perception and presentation of NATO had is illuminated through this analysis, making the whole explanation more nuanced.

These findings leave incentives to further research. The Russian framing of NATO could be applied to other material, such as speeches, newspapers or social media, because other arenas

and formats have different motivations and give different framing possibilities. An alternative angle could also be applied towards how the framing is received, such as what impression audiences are left with of NATO, or whether or not they embrace the presented framework. This would give a more comprehensive understanding of the whole framing process. Finally, research in the opposite direction – how NATO frames Russia – would also provide valuable insights to the way Russia-NATO relations unfold.

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