Responsibility to Protect, Eurasianism, or Russkiy Mir?

A study examining which of the conceptual framings ‘Responsibility to Protect’, ‘Eurasianism’, and ‘Russkiy Mir’ has been the most prominent in Russia’s legitimation of its intervention in Kazakhstan, January 2022

Keywords: Russia, Kazakhstan, CSTO, R2P, Eurasianism, Russkiy Mir
Abstract

In January 2022, violent protests and clashes broke out in Kazakhstan and the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation decided to intervene. Although Russia tends to be a strong defender of Westphalian sovereignty and a frequent critic of interventions carried out by the West, this was not the first time Russia intervened in another country. During previous interventions has Russia legitimised its actions with arguments influenced by the conceptual framings ‘Responsibility to Protect’, ‘Eurasianism’, and ‘Russkiy Mir’, three concepts which have a central role within Russian foreign policy. The purpose with this thesis is to examine which of these three conceptual framings has been the most prominent in Russia’s discourse and legitimation of the intervention in Kazakhstan, January 2022. With an interpretivist approach, and a constructivist lens, is therefore a discourse analysis conducted to first investigate which arguments Russia has used to legitimise the intervention. Thereafter follows a discussion on which of the conceptual framings was the most prominent within the argumentation. The results show that ‘Eurasianism’ was the most prominent conceptual framing in Russia’s legitimization of the intervention, while ‘Responsibility to Protect’ and ‘Russkiy Mir’ was only prominent to a limited extent.
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Abbreviations

CSTO  Collective Security Treaty Organisation
EU    European Union
GPE   Global Political Economy
ICISS International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty
IR    International Relations
LPG   Liquefied Petroleum Gas
MFA   Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NATO  North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
OSCE  Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
R2P   Responsibility to Protect
RQ    Research Question
SCO   Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
UAV   Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UN    United Nations
UNSC  United Nations Security Council
USSR  Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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1. Introduction

This thesis focuses on the case of Kazakhstan, where violent protests broke out in January 2022, and the subsequent decision by the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) to intervene in the country. With an interpretivist approach, and a constructivist lens, is a discourse analysis conducted to examine the official Russian discussion in relation to the events in Kazakhstan. The purpose with the thesis is to explore which of the conceptual framings ‘Responsibility to Protect’ (R2P), ‘Eurasianism’, and ‘Russkiy Mir’ is the most prominent in the Russian discourse and the legitimation of the intervention. The research question (RQ) is hence:

Which of the conceptual framings ‘Responsibility to Protect’, ‘Eurasianism’, and ‘Russkiy Mir’ has been the most prominent in Russia’s legitimation of the intervention in Kazakhstan, January 2022?

The focus on the above-named concepts is due to their central role within Russian foreign policy. Russkiy Mir is a soft power-concept with an ethnocentric tone, focusing on the interests and rights of Russian ‘compatriots’ living abroad. Eurasianism, on the other hand, has a multinational approach (Laruelle, 2016) and concentrates on the understanding of Russia’s natural right and power to play a dominant role in the Eurasian region, due to its special location between Europe and Asia (Mostafa, 2013). R2P is a United Nations (UN) concept, which urges the global community to react if atrocity crimes are taking place, contradicting the traditional view on state sovereignty and non-interference (Bellamy & Dunne, 2016). The concepts will be further elaborated on in chapter 3.

Russia tends to have a critical stance towards R2P and is a defender of the traditional notion of sovereignty, at least in relation to itself and states outside of the post-Soviet space (Feklyunina, 2018), also known as the ‘near abroad’. However, although Russia usually criticises interventions carried out by the West (Allison, 2013), the operation in Kazakhstan was not the first of its kind and the Russian Federation has, as listed and defined by Charap et al. (2021), performed more than 20 interventions since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Russia has also presented different arguments to legitimise its previous interventions, which goes in line with the often-stated claim that intervening states should, in order to gain international legitimacy for the intervention, justify its actions by applying normative principles commonly accepted in the international society (Allison, 2013). The arguments
which Russia has presented, further discussed in chapter 4, are influenced by Eurasianism, Russkiy Mir, and R2P, despite Russia’s critical stance towards the latter concept.

This thesis first explores which arguments Russia has used to legitimise the intervention in Kazakhstan and interprets the underlying meanings of these arguments. It is done through the analysis of documents, such as statements, interviews, and transcripts, by President Vladimir Putin and representatives from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). The documents are published on the Kremlin and the MFA’s websites and are written in English, which is suitable since the purpose is to investigate the Russian discourse and legitimation directed towards the *international community*, not domestically. Then follows a discussion regarding how prominent the conceptual framings ‘R2P’, ‘Eurasianism’, and ‘Russkiy Mir’ are within the Russian argumentation. Prominence in this case, since the thesis applies a *discourse* analysis, is not the number of times President Putin says ‘R2P’ or Foreign Minister Lavrov refers to the ‘Russkiy Mir’-concept. It is rather an analysis and interpretation of the discourse, and to what extent the concepts can be derived from those interpretations.

By finding an answer to the RQ, this thesis aims to create a greater understanding for the Russian foreign policy and, although not a comparative study per se, detect if there is a continuity or change in the Russian discourse related to interventions. The thesis also aims to facilitate a discussion regarding possible reasons for why a certain concept might be more or less prominent, and what that can tell us about Russia’s relation to its ‘near abroad’ in general, and to Kazakhstan in particular, a former Soviet republic with a large Russian minority.

As a result, this thesis contributes to the field of International Relations (IR) and Global Political Economy (GPE) by increasing the knowledge about Russia as an international actor, its approach to issues related to the conceptual framings, such as sovereignty, and the perception of its own role within the region and on the global arena. It also continues the discussion on CSTO, an organisation which has been accused of being more talk than action since it, prior to the intervention in Kazakhstan, never had deployed troops to a member state (Molchanov, 2018). Furthermore, the thesis contributes with a deepened knowledge about the Kazakhstan-Russian relationship, interesting from a political-economic point of view since Kazakhstan holds great oil reserves and applies a multi-vector foreign policy, meaning it aims to maintain positive relations with all states that have a significant role in world affairs (Vanderhill et al., 2020). Finally, the thesis adds to studies such as Allison (2014, 2009) as well as Pupcenoks & Seltzer (2021), which discuss how Russia has legitimised previous interventions in the ‘near abroad’.
The remainder of the thesis is organised as follows: chapter 2 provides the reader with background information related to the events in Kazakhstan. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework. Chapter 4 discusses previous studies of interventions carried out by Russia in the ‘near abroad’. Chapter 5 is dedicated to the methodology. Chapter 6 consists of the analysis, followed by chapter 7 – the discussion. The thesis ends with chapter 8, the conclusion.

2. Background

On January 1, 2022, the price cap on liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) was lifted in Kazakhstan, leading to almost a doubling of prices, jumping from 50-80 tenge/litre to 120 tenge/litre (about $0.27). Peaceful protests against the rising prices started in the south-western oil town of Zhanaozen in the Mangystau province, where a large share of the citizens use LPG as a cheap alternative to gas. The protesters were not confined to a single group of people, in contrast to previous labour-protests carried out in the province, and became therefore soon problematic for the Kazakh authorities (Pannier, 2022). Although the protest lacked a formal leader, much due to the historical oppression of any opposition to the Kazakh government (Nyman, 2022), they grew and spread. First, to neighbouring cities where people wanted to show their solidarity with Zhanaozen, and eventually to the largest cities of Kazakhstan; Almaty, Nur-Sultan and Shymkent (Pannier, 2022). Along with the spread of the protests, they became more violent and shifted focus. What started as a protest against the raised LPG prices in the west of Kazakhstan, turned into nationwide protests against corruption, socio economic inequality, and the political management of the country (Nyman, 2022).

This chapter is further presenting some of Kazakhstan’s international relations, such as the Kazakh-Russian relation, which is beneficial for the continuous reading of the thesis. It is also providing information about Kazakhstan as country, to create a greater understanding for what led up to the outbreak of the protests, and explains more thoroughly what happened during the unrest as well.

2.1 Kazakhstan’s International Relations

Kazakhstan, neighbouring Russia to the north and China to the east, was the last republic to declare independence from the Soviet Union in December 1991. The country has applied a multi-vector foreign policy and develops ‘friendly and predictable relations with all states that play a significant role in world affairs and are of practical interest to the country’ (Vanderhill et al., 2020:977), meaning that Kazakhstan aims to balance positive relations with the West,
China and Russia while also protecting its state sovereignty (Vanderhill et al., 2020). Moscow’s interest for Kazakhstan and the Central Asian region can be traced far back in history. Russia conquered, in the 18th century, the nomadic and settled people of Turkic and Iranian origin in the region which gave the Tsars, and then the Soviets, control of an extensive landmass with a striking topographic and human diversity. The Tsarist and Soviet domination of the Central Asian region has resulted in an inevitable mark on contemporary Russia’s perception of, and attitudes towards, Kazakhstan and the other Central Asian states (Omelicheva, 2018).

Kazakhstan argues that regional cooperation is essential to further economic development and to solve emerging problems and contradictions within the region, and thereby strengthen the sovereignty of the individual states. As a result, regional cooperation is an important component of Kazakhstan’s foreign policy (Molchanov, 2012) and the Kazakh-Russian relationship is to some extent guided by regional organisations such as the Eurasian Economic Union and the CSTO. The CSTO is a security-oriented alliance between Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. It has since the establishment in 2002 evolved from a traditional collective defence organisation intending to ‘facilitate a multinational force fighting a conventional war’ (Deyermond, 2018:422), into an organisation that aims to address a number of traditional and non-traditional threats including drug- and human trafficking, peacekeeping, emergency response, and terrorism. Moreover, according to Deyermond (2018) is an implicit objective of the CSTO also to counter US-led Western influences. Russia is the unquestionably dominant state of the CSTO, in military and political terms as well as in relation to the composition of the organisation (ibid) and it is Russian forces, weapons, doctrines, and technology which has dominated the trainings and exercises of CSTO (Omelicheva, 2018). The Kremlin sees the organisation as one of the key elements of the security framework in the post-Soviet space (Molchanov, 2018), and Moscow is, through the CSTO, shaping Kazakhstan’s security policy (Laruelle, 2018). However, it has also been argued that the CSTO has failed to prove its usefulness and although joint military exercises take place on a regular basis, critical voices claim that CSTO falls behind the demand in terms of military cooperation, and is more talk than action (Molchanov, 2018).

Kazakhstan and Russia have, in addition to the regional cooperation, also a strong bilateral relation and analysts have often claimed that Kazakhstan is the former Soviet state which Russia has the fewest problems with (Goble, 2021). Russia is one of Kazakhstan’s main trading partners, Russian sources dominate Kazakh television, online media and newspapers, and several Russian universities have opened branch campuses in Kazakhstan (Laruelle, 2018). Moreover, almost 20 percent of the population in Kazakhstan are ethnic Russians, making
Russians the second largest ethnic group in the country after the Kazakhs (Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the United States, 2022), and about 97 percent of the population is fluent in the Russian language (American Council, 2015).

However, Kazakhstan aims, as mentioned above, to have positive relations with other states as well. The relation to the US is guided by issues related to security and nuclear non-proliferation. American firms’ interest in the Kazakh oil and gas sector is also an important aspect of the relationship between the two states (U.S Department of State, 2021). The Kazakh Tengiz oil and gas field is the sixth largest oil field in the world, and its proven gas reserves is ranked 15th in the world. The energy sector is an important part of the Kazakh Chinese relation as well, and the construction of oil- and gas pipelines in the beginning of the 21st century, stretching over Central Asia to China, is strengthening the relationship between the two countries. It is also challenging Russia’s monopolist role within the Central Asian energy sector, with reduced geopolitical and economic benefits as a result (Omelicheva, 2018). China and Kazakhstan’s cooperation is furthermore guided by the Chinese-led Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). The organisation was founded as a security-organisation (Blank, 2013), but is now also active within areas such as politics, economy, trade, technology, research, culture, transport, and tourism. In addition to Kazakhstan and China are also Russia, India, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan members of the organisation (SCO, 2022).

2.2 The Republic of Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan’s massive amount of hydrocarbon resources, along with structural reforms, a strong domestic demand, and foreign direct investments have contributed to its rapid economic growth since the dissolution of the Soviet Union (World Bank, 2022). The economic growth transformed Kazakhstan from a lower-middle income to an upper-middle-income country in less than two decades, and only between 2006 and 2013 fell the poverty rate from about 36 percent to less than 6 percent (World Bank, 2020). However, the development is fragile. Since hydrocarbon output constitutes 21 percent of GDP and around 70 percent of the country’s exports in 2020, Kazakhstan is facing challenges with diversification of its economy (World Bank, 2022). When the poverty rate doubled between 2013 and 2016, meaning about 1.2 million people fell into poverty, the World Bank (2020) concluded it was related to Kazakhstan’s growth strategy relying too much on oil exports, causing a vulnerability of the economy.
A regional, as well as rural-urban, divide in terms of economic opportunities, human capital, living standards, and social support is prominent in the country (ibid). A report by KPMG (2019) further shows that 162 persons (0.001 percent of the population) accounts for about 55 percent of the total wealth of the population. Each of these 162 persons are worth at least $50 million, while the five richest persons in Kazakhstan have a wealth between $2–3 billion. Meanwhile, the average salary in Kazakhstan 2019 was 187 510 tenge per month\(^1\) (ILO, 2020), corresponding to about $427 (May 2022 exchange rate).

Journalists are often facing harassment, physical attacks, arrest, and prosecution for carrying out their work, and it has been noticed that human rights defenders and journalists are targeted with spyware. Moreover, it is reported that ill-treatment and torture occur with impunity; of the 120 torture allegations that had been registered between January and May 2021 in prison facilities, no cases were sent to court. The civil society is hampered by laws which prohibit the receipt of foreign grants, and the UN Human Rights Commissioner Michele Bachelet has called the Kazakh authorities to remove far-reaching reporting requirements which negatively affects the freedom of association (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Furthermore, corruption is a major constraint to the country and constitutes an obstacle to effective decision making, implementation of programs and projects, and public service delivery (World Bank, 2020).

Kazakhstan’s first president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, was widely known for his authoritarian rule and stayed in power for almost 30 years. No genuine elections have been held during or after his rule and there is a limited freedom of assembly and expression (Lewis, 2016). During the presidency of Nazarbayev, the political system was firmly ‘personalist’, with the power concentrated to him and his inner circle, consisting of family and clan members who gained access to i.a. oil, metal, and gas revenues (Ambrosio, 2015). Moreover, in 2016, Nazarbayev appointed his eldest daughter Dariga Nazarbayeva to become deputy prime minister, and in 2019 she became the speaker of the Senate (Allworth et al., 2022). It has also been reported that Nazarbayev’s family has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in luxury real estates in Europe and the US over the past two decades (Eckel & Alikhan, 2020). Parties which tried to oppose the president never managed to grow, much due to the manipulation and manoeuvring of the ruling party Amanat (previously Nur Otan). However, a rare challenge of the government was seen in 2011 when oil and gas workers in the cities of Zhanaozen and Shetpe went on a seven-month strike. The strikes started off in a peaceful manner with a demand for salary increases and better working conditions, but soon became politicised as the strikers required

\(^1\) This can be compared with for example the 2019 average monthly salary of Uzbekistan: 2 324 500 UZS/209 USD, Russia: 47 867 RUB/700 USD, China: 7542 CNY/1 123 USD and the US: 4 173 USD (ILO, 2020).
nationalisation of oil and gas companies, called for the resignation of Prime Minister Karim Massimov, and advocated for a boycott of the upcoming 2012 parliamentary elections. Due to the fear that the strikes would spread to other parts of the country, the Kazakh regime ordered immediate suppression of the protests on December 16, Kazakhstan’s Independence Day (Niyazbekov, 2018), leading to the death of at least a dozen protesters (Achilov, 2016). The then CSTO General Secretary Nikolai Bordyuzha commented on the events saying that the Kazakh leadership was able to cope with the situation by themselves, and that there was no need for CSTO assistance. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, also rejected any possibilities of CSTO collective forces to be used in Kazakhstan, claiming that it was not envisaged in the Charter, and that CSTO only could assist member countries if there was a formal request for assistance from the president of the country in need (Kosolapova, 2011).

2.3 The 2022 Kazakh Unrest

Nazarbayev resigned in 2019 and chose the current president Kasym-Zhomart Tokayev to become his successor. However, Nazarbayev kept significant power by retaining his role as the (lifelong) head of the country’s Security Council and the official title of Elbasy, in other words; leader of the nation (Walker, 2022). Nazarbayev has, despite his authoritarian rule, nepotism, and corruption allegations been well-liked among a majority of the people in Kazakhstan (Isaacs, 2010:210). He was able to create a personal cult around himself, reaching the culm when the capital changed name from Astana to Nur-Sultan in 2019 in honour of the resigning president (Sauer, 2022). Yet, when the protests broke out in Kazakhstan in the beginning of 2022, frustration about the situation in the country was to a certain extent directed toward the former president; statues of Nazarbayev were torn down and protesters were chanting ‘Shal ket’, meaning ‘Old man, out’ (Walker, 2022). Moreover, current president Tokayev publicly criticised the former president for the first time, claiming that Nazarbayev’s rule had, based on the principle ‘everything for friends and laws for everyone else’ created a layer of wealthy people (Rickleton, 2022).

In an attempt to calm down the protesters, President Tokayev announced that Nazarbayev had resigned from his position as the head of the Security Council, a position which President Tokayev himself took over. The government also resigned, along with several close allies of Nazarbayev. Although President Tokayev took additional action to end the protests, by declaring a state of emergency and re-introducing the price cap on gas (Nyman, 2022) for example, they continued. The most violent protests were seen in Almaty, the largest city of
Kazakhstan, where the airport was stormed, violent clashes and shootings appeared, and government buildings were vandalised and set on fire (Walker & Bisenov, 2022). Since independent journalists and media had difficulties covering the protests, due to arbitrary arrests, blocked telecommunications, as well as internet cuts (Reporters Without Borders, 2022) information was difficult to access for the citizens of Kazakhstan, leading to rumours and different versions of what was actually going on.

President Tokayev blamed the unrest on foreign trained terrorists, but did not present much evidence for his statement (Nyman, 2022), and called the CSTO for help to restore the order in the country, arguing for Article 4 to be applied. According to Article 4, if any member state is subjected to aggression by an external threat, all other participating states should, upon request of the attacked state, provide necessary assistance (CSTO, 2022a). Since President Tokayev argued for Kazakhstan being under attack by foreign terrorists, CSTO concluded that Article 4 was applicable and sent peacekeeping troops, a vast majority of them Russian, to Kazakhstan with the main task of protecting important state and military facilities (Hedenskog & von Essen, 2022).

This was the first time CSTO deployed troops to a member state to intervene in a conflict, even though several conflicts have previously appeared in the territory of the member states, such as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the autumn of 2020, a border conflict between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in 2021 as well as the 2005 and 2010 revolutions in Kyrgyzstan. When Kyrgyzstan requested help from CSTO in 2010, the organisation declined. It was stated that CSTO could only interfere if there was an attempt from the outside to seize power, not in a case of internal conflicts of a country (Gutterman, 2022).

On January 7, one day after the troops’ arrival in Kazakhstan, President Tokayev announced that the constitutional order had in large been restored around the country, but if new signs of unrest would appear the security forced had been given orders to ‘shoot to kill’ without warning at the protesters (Nyman, 2022). On January 10, in a meeting with CSTO, President Tokayev claimed that Kazakhstan had been exposed for an attempted coup d’etat, but order had now been completely restored in the country (Aljazeera, 2022a). The troops began their withdrawal on January 13 (CSTO, 2022b) and the last troop left Kazakhstan on January 19 (CSTO, 2022c). The protests were the most violent in the history of Kazakhstan and according to Kazakh authorities were 800 people arrested and 227 killed. However, human rights groups have argued that the number of deaths far exceeded 227 (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2022), and that approximately 10 000 persons were detained (Human Rights Watch, 2022).
3. Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents the overarching theory used in the thesis, constructivism, and then applies it to the Russian foreign policy. Thereafter follows a presentation of the three central concepts of this thesis: R2P - a general presentation is first provided and then a discussion on Russia’s approach to the concept - Eurasianism, and Russkiy Mir. The chapter ends with a concluding discussion.

3.1 Theory

3.1.1 Constructivism

Constructivism, often referred to as social constructivism, has its origin in the early to mid-1980s. Then, a need for alternative readings of the very notions of structure, truth, and reality was emphasised by postmodern and critical theorists. However, constructivism was fully established within the IR discipline in the early 1990s, when neither realism or liberalism was able to predict or initially even explain the end of the Cold War (Flockhart, 2016), and has had a great impact on the studies of Soviet and Russian foreign policies since (Feklyunina, 2018). Constructivists put emphasis on the social nature of international interactions. The epistemology relates to the social construction of knowledge and ontologically, constructivism is about the social construction of the social world (Feklyunina, 2018). Thus, the social world, and thereby the world of social relations, is understood by constructivists as ‘a project under construction, as becoming rather than being’ (Adler, 2013:113). Also recognised by constructivists is that since our knowledge of the world is socially constructed, we can never understand the world ‘as it is’ (Feklyunina, 2018).

There are critics however who claim that constructivism is not a theory, but an approach, since constructivism ‘has nothing substantial to say about who the main actors are and what the main problems or issues are in international relations’ (Flockhart, 2016:81). However, what constructivism does offer is an alternative understanding for concepts of IR and its subfields, such as the relationship between state’s interests and identity, the meaning of anarchy and balance of power, and the outlook for change in world politics (Hopf, 1998). Moreover, with its origin in critical theory and postmodernism, it is devoted to problematizing things which are taken for granted and holds extensive potential as an applied framework for interpreting foreign policy (Flockhart, 2016).

A central theme within constructivism is power. In contrast to neoliberals and neorealists who believe that material, such as economic and/or military, power is alone the most important
source of authority and influence in world affairs, constructivists assume that both material and discursive power are together necessary for the interpretation of global politics (Hopf, 1998). Material ‘things’ as well as language, symbols, and rules are considered to affect how we understand the world and actions of others (Flockhart, 2016).

Another core feature of constructivism is identity, in other words an agent’s understanding of Self, its relationship with others, and its place in the social world. It is argued within constructivism that the agent’s understanding of Self and the understanding for who it is, shapes the interpretations of its interests and thereby provides information about its behaviour. The understanding of Self is dependent on an external ‘Other’, and the recognition, or non-recognition, of an actor’s identity by the Other is essential in the identity constructing process (ibid).

Existing structures are also shaping actors’ identities, and actors in their turn are reproducing and transforming these structures through their practices. Structures and agents are in other words co-constituted (Feklyunina, 2018). The structures are often codified in norms and rules, which agents are socialised to follow. The norms are specifying appropriate behaviour for agents with a given identity and within a given community and are in that way seen as cognitive ‘maps’ for actors, working as the foundation for an actor’s interests and identity (Flockhart, 2016). Additionally, an actor is not able to act as its identity, according to constructivism, until the relevant community of meaning recognizes the legitimacy of that action, by the actor, in the given social context (Hopf, 1998). If the actor for example fails to comply with norms constituted by international law, it tries to justify its actions and identity through persuasive argumentation to not damage their reputation and perceived legitimacy (Allison, 2013). States calculate their interests and arguments according to what is considered legitimate at that time in the international system. In an event of a military intervention, for example, the intervening state might justify its actions through the authority of international bodies or norms of protecting innocents or, in any other way attempt to establish new standards and prescriptions of acceptable behaviour and thereby redefine the nature of the international system (Becker et al., 2016).

3.1.2 Constructivism in Relation to Russian Foreign Policy

Russian identity, i.e., the understanding of Self and Others, is central within constructivist studies of Moscow’s image projection, practice of soft power and public diplomacy. Russia’s effort to transform its global image, especially in the West, cannot only be explained by rational concerns regarding investments or geopolitical issues, according to constructivists, but also by
the need for Russia to secure recognition for its identity. However, as there has been competing understandings of the Russian identity among the elite, there has also been different perceptions regarding how and what image Russia should project in the global arena (Feklyunina, 2018), causing an inconsistency and vacillation of the Russian foreign policy over time (Mankoff, 2009). Some of the efforts carried out by Moscow have prioritised the appearance of Russia as a trustworthy partner while others, on the expense of the reliability-image, have aimed to project an image of Russia as a Great Power and strong state (Feklyunina, 2018).

After the Cold War emerged new norms related to sovereignty, particularly the acceptance of intervention in other states’ affairs. Sovereignty and other norms are, according to constructivism, seen as socially constructed and thereby variable, evolving and changing depending on society. Sovereignty is also one of the major ideas which shapes Russia’s foreign policy and its relation to the West. Russia’s approach to sovereignty shows a close linkage between President Putin’s domestic recentralizing project and the view of Russia as a Great Power on the international arena (Ziegler, 2012). Russia is defending a traditional Westphalian sovereignty in relation to states outside of its ‘near abroad’ and in relation to itself (Feklyunina, 2018). However, according to Deyermond (2016) has the Russian interpretation of sovereignty in relation to the states within the ‘near abroad’ been porous and radically different in comparison to the states outside of the post-Soviet region. Russia is also arguing for its sovereign right to form and perform its own independent policies on the domestic as well as international arena. The West is on the other hand seeing these arguments as a way for Russia to conduct undemocratic reforms and an increasingly assertiveness in the Russian foreign policy (Morozov, 2008). This contrasting view on sovereignty and Russia’s sovereign rights can, as stated above, be explained by constructivists as a result of a variable and evolving notion of norms (Ziegler, 2012). Furthermore, both Russia and the West claim that their understanding of sovereignty is the correct one, and reject the other’s variant as ideological and distorted. This does also add to Russia’s construction of the West as a hostile external Other (Morozov, 2008).

3.2 Concepts

3.2.1 Responsibility to Protect

The phrase ‘Responsibility to Protect’, also known as R2P, was formulated in 2001 and reaffirmed at the UN World Summit in 2005 (Pattison, 2010). The ideas behind it emerged however from the Holocaust and is considered a result of decades of attempts within the international society to identify and define atrocious crimes and protect the population from
In the 1990s, the world saw a high rate of civilian suffering; the genocides in Srebrenica and Rwanda; ethnic cleansing and mass killing in Bosnia, Angola, Croatia, Burundi, Kosovo, East Timor, Liberia, Zaire/Congo, and Sierra Leone; state repression in southern and northern Iraq; and civil war in Somalia. The international community was both ill-prepared and divided regarding how to respond to the situations, but the human misery did however become a lesson (Bellamy & Dunne, 2016). New concepts and ideas were developed, such as ‘sovereignty as responsibility’, ‘protection of civilians’, and in 1999 Kofi Annan, then UN Secretary-General, declared that ‘state sovereignty, in its most basic sense, is being redefined . . . States are now widely understood to be the servants of their people, not vice versa’ (Annan 1999, quoted in Bellamy & Dunne, 2016:5). The new views of responsibility clashed with the traditional view of state sovereignty, which was understood as the right to non-interference according to Article 2(7) of the UN Charter. Questions were raised regarding how the international community should react in situations where a state itself is the perpetrator of atrocious crimes against its own population, or in other ways fails to protect the population from such crimes, and under which circumstances the use of force for human protection would be justified. In an attempt to find answers to these and other related questions was the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) established by the Canadian government, and the commission launched the report ‘Responsibility to Protect’ in December 2001. After a few years of negotiation and advocacy was R2P, as mentioned, endorsed by the 2005 UN World Summit (Bellamy & Dunne, 2016) and termed the most important adjustment to sovereignty in 360 years (Pattison, 2010).

R2P can be summarised into three pillars: ‘(1) the primary responsibility of states to protect their own population from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity, and from their incitement; (2) the duty of states to assist each other to build the capacities necessary to discharge the first responsibility; (3) the international community’s responsibility to take timely and decisive action to protect populations from the four crimes when the state in question fails to do so’ (Bellamy & Dunne, 2016:7–8).

In the event of an intervention, such operation must be authorised by the UN Security Council (UNSC) (Bellamy & Dunne, 2016). There are however no formal principles on how R2P should be applied, but there are five ‘criteria of legitimacy’ or ‘precautionary principles’ which aim to guide possible military actions, inform public debate, and deliberations among states. The criteria states that the violence in question must include large-scale actual or threatened ethnic cleansing or loss of life, the intention of the intervention must be to halt or prevent suffering, the means must be proportional to the ends sought, military force must be
the last resort, and the intervention must have a reasonable prospect of success (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2013).

3.2.2 Russia and the Responsibility to Protect

Several issues related to R2P raise concern to Moscow, and attempts have been made by Russia to address these concerns in a politically desirable manner, useful for Russian domestic and international interests. Moscow usually agrees upon and emphasises the first pillar of R2P, i.e., a government’s responsibility to protect its population from atrocious crimes, as well as the second pillar; assistance from the international community to meet the responsibility (Pupcenoks & Seltzer, 2021). However, Russia tends to strongly reject the third pillar; external actors' rights to intervene in cases of grave humanitarian crises. There are cases though where Russia is not interpreting sovereignty in an absolutist manner and acknowledges that sovereignty could be overridden (Baranovsky & Mateiko, 2016) however, the UNSC’s authorization for interventions is then insisted upon (Pupcenoks & Seltzer, 2021).

Baranovsky and Mateiko (2016) argues that Russia’s emphasis on the first pillar of R2P and the ‘sovereignty as responsibility’ might be used to protect regimes from interference and against actions by the international community. Moscow often positions itself as a defender or advocate of those governments which could become targets of R2P operations, searching for arguments to protect its ‘clients’. A common claim by Russia is that states might be willing to protect their population, but unable to do so due to lack of resources, which must be taken into account when considering the R2P approach. This since even though R2P missions might be important, host states may still refuse to accept the assistance, which can make the mission impossible. External influence is another concern for Russia regarding R2P, and Moscow argues that the usage of R2P could become a way for external actors to influence the intervened country in an unacceptable manner. The acts against humanitarian suffering might, according to Russia, go far beyond its objectives and have a greater effect on domestic development, (mis)used as an intentional policy tool to impose normative, institutional, and other standards in the intervened country. Moscow is also criticising the West for its selectivity in human protection, noting that there has been a lack of Western enthusiasm for addressing humanitarian disasters in countries which are of little economic or strategic interest and importance, but a higher interest for R2P measures in countries with closer ties to Russia, and strained relations to the West (Baranovsky and Mateiko, 2016). Nevertheless, Russia tends to act in similar ways. Moscow has an interest in preserving the status quo and stable governments along the
periphery, hence its frequent opposition towards humanitarian interventions which could cause state fragmentation. From this comes support to repressive authoritarian regimes, often close to the Russian border or partner states, while remaining indifferent to interventions which do not directly affect Russian interests (Ziegler, 2016).

The disagreement between Russia and the West in relation to R2P can be traced back to the divergent view and approach to security. Russia has a narrower notion of what should be treated as an international and/or regional threat and as a legitimate issue for the international society. Since for example human rights violations generally belong to the domestic sphere, according to Russia, it is not a threat towards international security nor an issue for the international society to deal with. Moreover, even in times when Russia do recognise human rights violations as an international security-threat, it still tends to prioritise other threats, such as illicit arms trafficking, terrorism, or territorial disintegration, over the human rights violations. Russia has also historically focused on political settlement, and the building of strong state institutions, rather than the prevention of atrocities against civilians and protection of the population. The West and Russia also have different opinions on how to make citizens more secure. Russia argues that a repressive brutal regime might be a better option than an intervention since the intervention will make the whole country ungovernable, creating an opportunity for different groups to engage in the political and military struggle which might cause an even greater violence towards the population (Baranovsky & Mateiko, 2016). However, as will be seen in chapter 4, Russia deviated from its traditional approach to security in its argumentation for intervening in Georgia 2008 and Ukraine 2014.

3.2.3 Eurasianism

Mostafa (2013) argues that Eurasia is a highly debated and contested term, which has different perceptions and meanings in time and space. The Russian concept and notion of Eurasianism started as a political and philosophical movement in the beginning of the 20th century, born as a reaction to the Russian Revolution and the Bolsheviks seizing power. Classical Russian Eurasianists were however critical towards both the communist and the Tsarist (imperial) rules, as they were considered European products.

Eurasian writers reject that Russia would be located on the periphery of Europe (Laruelle, 2008) and are at the same time emphasising the importance of the Eurasian landmass as the pivotal of the world. It is argued that since Russia is in the centre of it, Russia has also a natural right and power to control and play a dominant role in Eurasia and balance interests between
Europe and Asia. One of the prime claims of these theorists is that Russia is neither an Asian or European state, but a Eurasian one with both European and Asian elements in terms of religion, people, and geography and should thereby protect, promote, and preserve its identity accordingly (Mostafa, 2013). Moreover, any attempt to force Russia solely into Europe or Asia is considered both useless and dangerous. It is also believed that Russia’s domestic peace and stability should be supported outside of Russia as well, through the civilisational balance between West and East which only Russia alone can ensure as a mediator (Morozova, 2009).

Since the beginning of the 21st century, ‘Eurasianism’ has increasingly been used when commenting on the development of Russian foreign policy. Laruelle (2008) however, argues that there is a need to distinguish between Russian nationalism and Eurasianism. She states that Russia as a ‘Great Power’ with a ‘national character’ who should regain its imperial pride is a dominant idea in Russia today but also common within all nationalist movements and not a specific expression of Eurasianism. Eurasianism and its contemporary relation to Russian foreign policy, is on the other hand as explained above, focused on the unique strategic location between Europe and Asia, which enables Russia to have legitimate interests and be an integral player in both continents (Morozova, 2009).

3.2.4 Russkiy Mir

In connection to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, 25 million Russians were suddenly living abroad and outside of the new borders of the Russian Federation. The fear of the new Russian diaspora forming political opposition groups in their new home states, pushing for irredentist territorial claims, or emigrating to the Russian federation nourished a demand for new policies towards the Russians abroad. The result ranged from criticism of language laws in the former Soviet-states and advocacy for the Russian diaspora’s right to dual citizenship, to new Russian legislation regarding linguistic and ethnic benchmarks for ‘Russianness’. At this time, influential actors within Russia also began to grasp the importance of the Russian diaspora and which role it could play in relation to Russia’s foreign policy as a tool to gain influence in the regions where the diaspora resides (Pieper, 2020).

Defining ‘diaspora’ is in general difficult, and it is argued by Brubaker (2005:3), that the term ‘diaspora’ has ‘been stretched to the point of uselessness’. The Russian government tends however to prefer the overarching term of ‘compatriots’, when referring to the diaspora, which includes Russian speakers, ethnic Russians, as well as people with cultural ties with their ‘homeland’ and the wider ‘Russian World’. The Russian Foreign Policy Concept launched in
2008 expressed the government’s commitment to protect compatriots abroad and claimed that the main threat to Russian compatriots, as well as Russian security interests, was the discrimination and suppression of the rights, interests, and freedom of Russian citizens in foreign states. This interchangeable use of ‘national interest protection’ and ‘compatriot protection’ raised questions about what role compatriots would have in serving these ‘national interests’ (Pieper, 2020).

According to President Putin, as well as other Russian officials, the term ‘Russkiy Mir’ has three interconnected sets of meaning: linguistic, biopolitical, and civilizational. The linguistic meaning does not relate to politics, but rather to the cultural sphere of the Russian language and the Russian world beyond the Russian state borders built upon ‘the community of a shared spoken language and culture’ (O’Loughlin et al., 2016:749). The biopolitical meaning concerns the management, organisation, and security of populations and diaspora, where compatriots can be seen as the biopolitical substance of the idea of the ‘Russkiy Mir’. In 2001, a Congress of Compatriots was arranged to address what was, according to Putin, a neglect of the Russian diaspora. At the Congress, Putin showed his support to the compatriots abroad, but stated also that since Russia was regaining its power, help from the diaspora was needed. According to Putin, a compatriot is defined by spirit and personal choice, not by any legal status or category. A Russian or Russian-speaking citizen is, according to Putin, not necessarily an ethnic Russian but someone who considers him- or herself a Russian person or part of the Russian community. Putin also stated that compatriots are those who care for Russia's future and its people, are committed to be useful for their historical homeland, promote Russian socioeconomic development and contribute to the strengthening of Russia’s international prestige and authority (O’Loughlin et al., 2016). The third meaning of ‘Russkiy Mir’, the civilizational, was expanded in 2012 after Putin’s return to presidency. According to O’Loughlin et al. (2016), this understanding defines Russia as a world power, with its own civilizational space. ‘Russkiy Mir’ is thereby the ideological foundation of the multi-polar world’s concept, a cornerstone of Russian foreign policy, and used to justify Russia’s view of its specific influence and space in the world. Critics of Russian foreign policy, such as Van Herpen (2016), have claimed that the concept is part of a larger project which aims to give the Kremlin back the global ideological influence it once had before the end of Communism. However, there are also authors who argues for the apolitical and anti-colonial underpinnings of the ‘Russkiy Mir’, claiming that the purpose of the policy is only to reunite, integrate, and reconcile people of different national, social, ideological, and ethnic background (O’Loughlin et al., 2016).
3.3 Concluding Discussion

The concepts discussed above can in many ways be intertwined with, and explained by, constructivism and its related aspects. For example, identity, perceived as the understanding of the Self, Other, and the Self’s place in the social world (Flockhart, 2016), is noticeable within Eurasianism where Russia considers its Self as a country with a unique strategic location between Europe and Asia and hence provided with certain rights, functions, and responsibilities in terms of e.g., preserving regional stability. The national identity within Russkiy Mir is also prominent, where Russia sees its Self as the main protector of Russian compatriots’ interests. Within the Russian view of R2P can the national identity also be detected, perhaps mainly in the understanding of the Other as an actor who misuses the concept for its own advantages.

Within R2P has the norm ‘sovereignty’ a central position. Russia tends to emphasise the traditional notion of sovereignty, and hence be rather critical towards R2P. However, there are also times when Russia does not interpret sovereignty in an absolutist manner and acknowledges that sovereignty could be overridden and R2P applied (Baranovsky & Mateiko, 2016). This differing interpretation of sovereignty can be explained by constructivists as a result of norms, such as sovereignty, being socially constructed, variable, and evolving, and thereby interpreted differently in time and space. Within Eurasianism is the traditional notion of sovereignty not emphasised much, at least not in relation to all countries except Russia, due to the vision of Russia having the natural right and power to control the Eurasian region.

Power is also a central theme within constructivism, with the emphasis on both material and discursive power (Hopf, 1998). Discursive power is a vital part of the Russkiy Mir-concept, where the Russian language is used as a unifying factor among the Russian compatriots and as a tool for Russia to gain influence beyond its own borders.

A few words should also be said about the differences and similarities among the discussed concepts. Both R2P and Russkiy Mir refers to the protection of people, however R2P applies in events of atrocities and towards all civilians, while Russkiy Mir applies to a more general protection of the interests among those who consider themselves Russian. Concerning Eurasianism and Russkiy Mir; both concepts pay attention to Russia and its perceived role in the international system, however the narratives of the concepts are to some extent contradictory. Russkiy Mir has an ethnocentric tone, with a focus on soft power and spreading the ‘Russian voice’ in the world. Eurasianism has on the other hand a multinational approach. It focuses on Russia’s geographically strategic location, which enables it to balance Asian and
Western influences, and accepts multi-ethnicity through Russia’s regional hegemon status (Laruelle, 2016).

4. Previous studies

This chapter examines previous studies of Russian interventions and the legitimation of such operations. It thereby creates an understanding for how Russia tends to legitimise its interventions, and how prominent the concepts of ‘R2P’, ‘Eurasianism’, and ‘Russkiy Mir’ previously have been in the Russian argumentation. It also enables a discussion further on in the thesis on continuity and change in the Russian discourse related to interventions.

The chapter does not cover any previous research on the intervention in Kazakhstan since this thesis is the first, to the best of my knowledge, to conduct such research. The discussion is neither covering all previous interventions\(^2\) carried out by Russia and operations have been included based on two criteria. Firstly, since the thesis focuses on Russia’s ‘near abroad’ in general and Kazakhstan in particular, the countries discussed within this chapter are also situated within the ‘near abroad’\(^3\). Secondly, bilateral military agreements such as a Russian base in Kyrgyzstan are also seen as interventions by Charap et al. (2021), but excluded from this discussion since they are not considered to have similar purpose or arrangement as the intervention in Kazakhstan in January 2022. Thus, a set of interventions remain which can be divided into four conflicts: the Tajik civil war, the Transnistrian war, the Russo-Georgian war, and the Russian intervention in Ukraine 2014 (Crimea and Eastern Ukraine). All the conflicts are complex; hence, each subchapter starts with a brief explanation of the conflict, followed by an analysis covering the motives and narratives Russia put forward in order to justify its intervention. The chapter ends with a discussion on how the theory and concepts presented in chapter 3, in other words constructivism, R2P, Eurasianism, and Russkiy Mir, are visible in the previous legitimation.

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\(^2\) The interventions selected among are all interventions carried out by Russia since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, listed by Charap et al. (2021), which includes: Russian Bases in Armenia, Russian Early Warning Radar in Azerbaijan, UN Peacekeeping operation in Croatia, Transnistrian War, Transnistria Base, Peacekeeping forces in Transnistria, Tajikistan border presence, Tajik civil war, Russian peacekeeping forces in in South Ossetia (1992), Abkhazia Separatist Insurgency (1992), Russian Peacekeeping Forces in Abkhazia, NATO/UN Peacekeeping Operations in Kosovo (KFOR), UN Peacekeeping Operations in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), Russian Base in Kyrgyzstan, UN Peacekeeping Operations in Sudan/South Sudan (UNMIS, UNMISS), Russia-Georgia, South Ossetia/Abkhazia Bases, UN Peacekeeping in Chad/CAR, Annexation of Crimea, War in Donbas/intervention in eastern ukraine, Syrian civil war.

\(^3\) Discussions have emerged whether Russia’s ‘near abroad’ has expanded due to the intervention in Syria 2015 (Özarslan & Ipek, 2022), however this thesis concentrates on the traditional view of the ‘near abroad’.
4.1 The Tajik Civil War (1992–1997)

By the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) political conflicts and competition began to escalate in Tajikistan. Shortly after the independence in 1991, nine presidential candidates contested in the country’s first multi-party election, which was won by Rahom Nabiev, a former Communist Party leader. However, the popular consensus on the legitimacy of his presidency was elusive, and the tension between government- and opposition supporters increased. In less than a year after independence, the civil war broke out (Akiner & Barnes, 2001). In 1994, the UN sponsored inter-Tajik negotiations began between two opposing parties; the Tajik government and the United Tajik Opposition and resulted in a peace treaty three years later (Barnes & Abdullaev, 2001).

During the first period of hostilities in Tajikistan, Russia’s official position to it was neutral. When fighting broke out Russian troops, which were already stationed in Tajikistan since the collapse of the Soviet Union, undertook a neutral peacekeeping mission. However, Gleason (2001) argues, in reality supported Russia the volunteers fighting for the government and used the presence in the country to affect the course of events. The official order given to the troops in September 1992, to assist in matters such as protecting refugees and communication sites, and separating the opponents, was justified by Russia as actions based on bilateral military agreements. It was stated that the order came upon request by the Tajik government, and Russia denied any interference in the internal political affairs of Tajikistan while highlighting the sovereignty of the former Soviet republic. Instead, Moscow argued it only acted as an impartial third-party mediator in the conflict, and not on the side of the Tajik government forces (Allison, 2013).

Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) further claimed that the troops were needed in Tajikistan to handle the security threat which the civil war brought towards Central Asia as well as Russia (Ahmed, 1994). When domestic critics raised their voices against Russia's involvement in Tajikistan, declaring it was adventurous with a risk of ‘getting sucked into another unwanted and unwinnable Afghanistan-type war’ (Hyman, 1993:207), Anatoly Adamishin, the Russian president’s special representative to Tajikistan and First Deputy Foreign Minister, opposed. Adamishin argued that a Russian military withdrawal from Tajikistan would cause a destabilisation of the entire Central Asian region, where millions of Russians lived and where Russia had important economic interests. He also declared that if the Russians left Tajikistan, drug trafficking would get out of control and the current streamlet of drugs through Tajikistan would become a river (Hyman, 1993). Another reason and argument
for the Russian intervention in Tajikistan was the protection of Russian minorities in the country (Ahmed, 1994). Already in 1990, at the time of rioting but before the independence and civil war, was sympathy for Tajik-Russians whipped up in Russia. Literaturnaya Rossiya (1990, quoted in Hyman, 1993:207) published the following:

Dear comrades, mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters! The Russian-language populace of the capital of Tajikistan, the city of Dushanbe, appeals to you! Agitated by the outrages of fanatical crowds, by the bloodletting, by the blind hatred and by the pillaging, we appeal to you for help! The lives of children, women and old men are under threat! The compromising tactics of the [Soviet] government and its fear to take decisive action to halt the disorders assist the raging of anarchy and of religious fanaticism.

According to the draft military doctrine of the Russian Armed Forces, it was their ‘special mission’ to protect ‘the rights and interests of Russian citizens and persons abroad connected with it [Russia] ethnically and culturally’ (Greene 1993, quoted in Hyman, 1993:205). This, together with the restoration and preservation of stability in the post-Soviet space, would later become two key principles in Russia’s ‘near abroad-policy’ (Gretsky, 1995). The promise to protect Russians in Dushanbe and Tajikistan contributed to Russian Foreign Minister, Andrei Kozyrev, scoring some points domestically. In reality however, the Russians failed to protect the interests of the Tajik-Russians (Gretsky, 1995) and during the first five years of independence, the Russian population of Tajikistan dropped by 65 percent (Gleason, 2001).

4.2 The Transnistrian War (1992)

From December 1989 to November 1990, the residents of the Transnistrian region voted in a series of referendums with the aim of increasing local autonomy as a bulwark against Moldovan nationalism. While Transnistria was Russophone, a majority of Moldovans wanted to seek closer political and cultural ties with the neighbour in West, Romania. Transnistrians saw this as a ‘Romanization’, which would threaten non-Romanian speakers with disenfranchisement, persecution, and death. Eventually, the Transnistrian region declared its independence from the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic in 1990. Along with the fear of ‘Romanization’, it was also an attempt to become a new constituent republic of the USSR and save the Soviet Union by revitalising its federal structure (Bobick, 2014). However, Transnistria did not become a new republic of the USSR and until today, it is only recognized by the self-declared republics of South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Artsakh (Coakley, 2022). The tension between Moldova and Transnistria remained and the 14th Soviet Army, based in Transnistria, openly showed support for the separatist bid (Kaufman & Bowers, 1998). When
the Transnistrian crisis escalated into war in 1992, the 14th Army intervened on behalf of the separatists (Bobick, 2014). A security zone was eventually established along the Dniester, the river running between Moldova and Transnistria, to separate the fighting parties and a peacekeeping force of two Transnistrian, three Moldovan and five Russian battalions was introduced. The 14th Army’s intervention, along with the peacekeeping regime, led to the conflict being ‘frozen’, and no political settlement has yet been reached between the two sides (Rogstad, 2018).

The Russian involvement in Transnistria was to some extent legitimised for humanitarian reasons and Russian Vice President Alexander Rutskoi accused the Moldovans of committing mass murder of the civilian population. Sergey Stankevich, a Yeltsin advisor, argued that the events in Transnistria was a massive, ruthless slaughter, and the Russian Supreme Soviet voted to make a complaint to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe that Moldova was guilty of genocide. The Russian duty to protect Russians abroad was, like in Tajikistan, also seen in the case of Transnistria. When Vice President Rutskoi visited Transnistria in 1992, he declared that Russia should adopt ‘tough measures’ to protect Russians, no matter where they live (Kaufman & Bowers, 1998). He also appealed to Russian pride, condemning Moldova for attempting to ‘wipe their feet on Russia and on its citizens’ (Izvestiia 1992, quoted in Kaufman & Bowers, 1998:131). The external threat from Romania was also used as a narrative by the ethnic Russian political leaders in Tiraspol, the de-facto capital of Transnistria, and in Moscow to convince Transnistrians they must fight, and build domestic support in Russia for the intervention. In Tiraspol, an effort was made to stimulate a fear of Romanian aggression, and it was argued that hostile forces in Chisinau were allied with Romania with the purpose of attacking the ‘Transnistrian Republic’. It was also stated that the Romanian military was involved in the violence of 1992, something which later was revealed as untrue. In Moscow, the media falsely claimed that Romania provided aid to Moldova and that the Moldovan-Romanian reunification was practically decided, urging the army to defend the Transnistrians (Kaufman & Bowers, 1998).

4.3 The Russo-Georgian War (2008)

Russia’s interventions and involvement in other states’ affairs were prior to 2008 only related to civil conflicts. Its first military offensive against a foreign state, since the Cold War, took place in August 2008 in Georgia where an intensive five-day war was fought. Moscow, on the other hand, denied it had been at war at all with the former Soviet republic (Allison,
The focus of the war was South Ossetia and Abkhazia, two self-proclaimed republics where tension dates back to Georgia’s independence from the USSR in 1991. Soon after the dissolution, South Ossetia declared its independence from Georgia and established a Russian-backed, but internationally unrecognised, government which led to a civil war breaking out between pro-Russian separatists and Georgian nationalists. A separatist war was also fought in Abkhazia, where Abkhazian forces emerged victorious and agreed to a ceasefire, which resulted in Russian peacekeeping forces being deployed to the region. The Russian-Georgian relation deteriorated in the beginning of the 2000s, and the conflict in Georgia reached full diplomatic crisis in April 2008 when a Russian fighter aircraft shot down a Georgian Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) over the coast of Abkhazia. Russia sent more peacekeeping troops to the region but denied its involvement in the takedown of the UAV. The conflict escalated in the beginning of August when separatists from South Ossetia began shelling Georgian villages, and the armed conflict began August 7 when the Georgian Army launched an attack on Tskhinvali, the South Ossetian de facto capital. On August 9, Russia launched a large-scale military invasion in Georgia, and forced the Georgian military to flee from Tskhinvali. A ceasefire agreement between Georgia and Russia was negotiated a few days later, and the conflict ended officially on August 16 when the agreement came into force (Pupcenoks & Seltzer, 2021).

Russia has strictly kept to the claim that it was attacked first and Vitaly Churkin, Russia’s ambassador to the UN, argued for Russia’s right to use self-defence according to Article 51 of the UN Charter. This as a response to Georgia’s ‘illegal use of force against the Russian Federation’ (Churkin 2008, quoted in Allison, 2009:176). Then prime minister Putin further argued, ‘[w]hat did you want us to do . . . when an aggressor comes into your territory, you need to punch him in the face - an aggressor needs to be punished’ (as reported by Kendall 2008, quoted in Allison, 2009:177, emphasis added by Allison).

Furthermore, Russia accused Georgia of committing genocide and ethnic cleansing in Tskhinvali (Allison, 2013), and President Dmitry Medvedev argued that the Georgian troops were carrying out ‘what amounts to an act of aggression against Russian peacekeepers located there and the civilian population in South Ossetia’ (Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2008, quoted in Allison, 2013:151), of which the majority were ‘citizens of the Russian Federation’ (ibid). He further declared that as president of the Russian Federation it was his duty to ‘protect the lives and dignity of Russian citizens wherever they may be’ (Medvedev 2008, quoted in Nagashima, 2019:186). The large share of Russians in South Ossetia and Abkhazia was a result of what has been called a ‘passportization policy’, the mass distribution of Russian passports.
and citizenships, which was carried out in the territories a few years before the intervention (Nagashima, 2019).

Georgia criticised Russia’s use of R2P-language, calling it a cynical misapplication of the R2P-principle and several of the ‘criteria of legitimacy’, presented in chapter 3.2.1, were not fulfilled. For example, there were no good evidence for atrocities taking place in the region, the protection of civilians targeted Russian nationals and not civilians at large, and the operation lacked UNSC approval (Allison, 2013).

4.4 Russian Intervention in Ukraine (2014)

In the end of 2013, tension between those having a more positive stance towards the European Union (EU) and those seeking deeper ties with Russia reached its peak in Ukraine when President Viktor Yanukovych decided to seek closer relations with Russia and gave up an agreement on deeper trade relations with the EU, resulting in widespread protests and deadly violence across Ukraine. During this time, unidentified ‘little green men’ in combat uniforms took control over strategic infrastructure and positions within the Crimean Peninsula. Russian president Putin denied that these men would be sent by the Kremlin and claimed he was unaware of the nationality of the troops. Nevertheless, on March 1, Putin’s request to use force in Ukraine was formally authorised by the Russian parliament and on March 16, a secession referendum was held in Crimea which gained almost 97 percent popular support for a union with Russia. However, the vote did not meet international standards regarding a free and fair election according to international observers, and it was argued to be a referendum held at gunpoint since over 25,000 Russian troops were stationed in Crimea at the time. Two days after the referendum, Crimea was officially absorbed into the Russian Federation. In the Donbas region, pro-Russian demonstrations were held as a reaction to the events in Crimea, leading to a large-scale conflict between the Ukrainian government and separatist coalitions of the self-declared Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics, both located within the Donbas region. An, unrecognised, referendum was also held within Donetsk and Luhansk, where 89 and 96 percent voted for independence. During the disruption in Donbas, special elections were held in Ukraine in May and pro-western Petro Poroshenko was elected to replace Yanukovych as the president of the country. The pro-Russian forces reacted violently and their presence in eastern Ukraine escalated during the summer of 2014. In August, it was reported that Russian military vehicles and combat troops crossed the border in several locations of the Donetsk Oblast and in September, Ukrainian forces were defeated while Russian military activity continued in the
region. Eventually, the Minsk Agreement was signed as a temporary ceasefire agreement and a buffer zone was created to separate pro-Russian fighters and government troops (Pupcenoks & Seltzer, 2021). However, the Minsk Agreement broke down, a Minsk II Agreement was settled but never fully implemented and deadly fighting between the rebels and Ukraine continued (Aljazeera, 2022b), taking a new turn on February 24, 2022, when Russia launched an open military invasion of Ukraine. The war in Ukraine is still taking place when this thesis is being written, and the course of events is constantly changing. Moreover, to the extent of my knowledge, no academic studies have yet been conducted on the arguments related to the 2022-invasion. The focus of this paper is therefore limited to the previous studies and legitimation of the intervention in 2014.

In similarities with the intervention in Georgia was the situation in Ukraine 2014 described as a humanitarian crisis and the Ukrainian government was often mentioned in negative terms. The Putin regime claimed that ‘the authorities in Kyiv were preparing to commit mass atrocities against the Russian-speaking population in South-eastern regions’ (Snetkov & Lanteigne 2014:124), and the MFA stated that Russia was ‘aware of its responsibility for the lives of its compatriots and nationals in Ukraine and reserves the right to defend these people’ (Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2014, quoted in Allison, 2014:1283). Besides the need for protection of compatriots and vulnerable Russians living abroad, Russia’s ambassador to the UN, Churkin, repeatedly denounced violence against journalists in Ukraine and expressed concerns about kidnappings, assaults, torture, and killings of journalist (Pupcenoks & Seltzer, 2021). Although Russia invoked R2P-language when portraying the situation in Ukraine, arguing for a grave human rights crisis, it was not R2P references which was used when Russia officially justified its military actions in the country. In general, Russian rhetoric avoided making any references to its involvement in Donbas at all. Regarding Crimea was the self-determination of the Crimeans, that is their right to decide how they will be governed, emphasised (Pupcenoks & Seltzer, 2021) by referring to the result of the secession referendum held in March 2014 (Becker et al., 2016).

Moreover, Russia often drew linkages between fascism and the anti-Russian groups when talking about the situation in Ukraine. When the anti-government protests erupted in Kyiv in the beginning of 2014, for example, it was described as the rebirth of fascism and activists were described as fascist inspired radicals, which had taken over the protests. In 2015, President Putin also blamed Western powers for the escalations of conflicts in Ukraine and claimed that the Ukrainian people’s frustration with their government was used for the instigating of a coup
4.5 Concluding Discussion

R2P is a recurrent concept through most of the cases discussed above. Although it was not an established concept by the time of the Transnistrian War, the arguments and accusation of the (Moldovan) regime for committing mass murder, massive ruthless slaughter, and other atrocities can be considered an early use of R2P-language. This type of language is also seen in the case of Georgia, where the Georgian government was blamed for committing genocide and ethnic cleansing in Tskhinvali, and in Ukraine where the authorities in Kyiv was accused of preparing mass atrocities against the south-eastern regions. However, R2P was not detected in the Russian discourse on the Tajik civil war. Noticeable is also that when Russia applied R2P-language in the cases of Transnistria, Georgia, and Ukraine, it was to protect Russians or Russian-speaking civilians residing in the areas, and not to protect all civilians, resulting in a rather arbitrary use of the R2P-concept.

Eurasianism is not very prominent in the cases of Ukraine, Georgia, or Transnistria, but is detected in the case of the Tajik civil war. In Tajikistan, Russia took on the vital role of stabilising the situation which otherwise, according to Russia, was at risk of spilling over to other parts of Central Asia and to Russia. According to Eurasianism, these actions could be explained by Russia’s natural right and power to control and play a dominant role in the region.

Russkiy Mir-related statements are recurring throughout all the cases discussed above. In Tajikistan, for example, it was argued that the Russian troops could not withdraw from the country since it would cause a destabilisation of the whole Central Asian region, affecting millions of Russians living there. Hence, it can be argued that Russia saw itself as responsible for not causing any insecurity for the Russians in Central Asia, but not having any responsibility for the ethnic Tajiks, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, or Turkmens living there. Other examples of ‘Russkiy Mir-arguments’ are 2008 President Medvedev and 1992 Vice President Rutskoi’s statements about the duty to ‘protect the lives and dignity of Russian citizens wherever they may be’ (Medvedev 2008, quoted in Nagashima, 2019:186), and that Russia should adopt ‘tough measures’ to protect Russians, no matter where they live (Kaufman & Bowers, 1998).

Table 1 below summarises the arguments which Russia has used to legitimise its previous interventions in the ‘near abroad’.
Table 1. Arguments used by Russia to legitimise its previous interventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By invitation and military agreement</td>
<td>External threat</td>
<td>Self-defence</td>
<td>Self-determination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protect Russians</td>
<td>Protect Russians</td>
<td>Protect Russians</td>
<td>Protect Russians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peacekeeping mission</td>
<td>Humanitarian</td>
<td>R2P</td>
<td>R2P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure stability in the region</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Anti-fascist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s own

5. Methodology

This chapter explains the methodology of the thesis, applied to provide an answer to the RQ:

*Which of the conceptual framings ‘Responsibility to Protect’, ‘Eurasianism’, and ‘Russkiy Mir’ has been the most prominent in Russia’s legitimation of the intervention in Kazakhstan, January 2022?*

The chapter starts with a brief introduction to the qualitative method ‘discourse analysis’ and my interpretation of it, followed by a discussion regarding the choice of empirical material, and a review of the study’s delimitations. The chapter ends with the operationalisation.

5.1 Discourse Analysis

The shared concern for constructivist studies of Russian foreign policy is to find an (inter)subjective understanding of social reality, which often leads to the use of interpretative methods. This study will, along with many other scholars who emphasise the role of language in the social construction-process, apply discourse analysis as the chosen method (Feklyunina, 2018). The aim with a discourse analysis is to process what has been said or written and find patterns in the statements and explore what social consequences different discourses might cause. Through examining a specific discourse, it is possible to discover how the world and society is constructed, where the boundary between true and false runs, and which actions are considered relevant and which are unthinkable, in that given social context (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000).
The interpretivist approach applied in this thesis states that people construct and reproduce the social world through their continuing activities and are always involved in interpreting and reinterpreting social situations, their own and other people’s actions, as well as humanly and naturally created objects (Blaikie, 2007). However, this implies that as a researcher, it might be difficult to investigate a discourse which oneself is part of and/or have an opinion about, as it might create a bias towards the empirical material. Moreover, according to constructivist beliefs, the result of a study is itself a discursive construction, and just one of many possible versions of the world and the reality. It is hence important for the researcher, in order to validate the findings of a study, to be transparent and declare where in relation to the material she stands, and what implications this might bring to the conclusions of the study (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). In this case, since I am a Swedish researcher, there is a possibility that I have a more critical stance towards the Russian empirical material compared to e.g., a researcher residing in the post-Soviet space, which causes a risk for a misinterpretation of the discourse to Russia's disadvantage. Caution and awareness of my potential bias will hence be applied throughout the whole study in order to reach a conclusion which is as objective as possible.

Additionally, the report contains representative examples from the empirical material as well as explanations to how the interpretation and analysis of the material has been done, to additionally increase the transparency and validity of the research. This enables the reader to follow the analytical process closely, from the empirical material to the conclusions, and allows the reader to form his or her own understanding of the discourse (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000) and Russia’s legitimisation of the intervention, rather than solely relying on the researcher's personal understanding of it.

A possible critic towards discourse analysis is that it cannot show the reality behind the discourse, or display what actors really mean with their statements. However, this is not the purpose of a discourse analysis. The point of departure of the discourse analysis is that it is not possible to truly reach the reality beyond the discourse, and the focus of the analysis is hence the discourse itself and its social consequences, not whether the statements within it are true or not (ibid) since ‘truth’ is contextual and flexible (Torfing, 2005). Hence, the discourse analysis is suitable for this thesis since the main purpose of it is to examine and understand the discourse Russia used in order to legitimise the intervention and what foreign policy-concepts are prominent in such discourse, not to examine whether the legitimisation of the intervention coincides with the true reason for the intervention.
5.2 Source Material

The empirical material of the thesis is selected based on the included actors and authorities’ influence on the formulation of Russia’s foreign policy and its related discourse, according to the 2016 Russian Foreign Policy Concept.

The President of the Russian Federation is, according to the Concept, deciding ‘the State’s foreign policy guidelines, directs the country’s foreign policy and, as the head of State, represents the Russian Federation in international relations’ (Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016:25). This implies that the president has a strong influence on the foreign policy-discourse and material related to President Putin, such as speeches, meeting transcripts and news, are hence collected from the Kremlin’s website, kremlin.ru, and included in the analysis.

The 2016 Foreign Policy Concept does also state that the MFA develops the general foreign policy strategy, presents relevant proposals to the president, and implements the Russian foreign policy according to the Foreign Policy Concept and the executive order of the president (Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016). Hence, documents from the MFA, such as interviews of Foreign Minister Lavrov and briefings by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, collected from the MFA’s website mid.ru, are also included in the analysis.

Additionally, the Russian Security Council is, according to the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept, formulating the foreign- and military-policy guidelines and examines issues related to security within international cooperation (ibid). However, documents published on the Kremlin’s website regarding the Security Council are not covering the events in Kazakhstan, and the material from the Security Council’s own website is entirely in Russian, while this thesis examines English documents only. No empirical material related to the Security Council is therefore included in this study (for the full list of empirical material, see References).

The decision to only use English sources is due to the thesis’ focus on the Russian discourse and legitimation of the unrest towards the international community, and not domestically. It can be assumed that documents published in English are primarily aimed to target the international audience, while documents in Russian do not have the same reach. All documents are officially translated from Russian to English by the publishers; the MFA and the Kremlin, and although translated versions of the documents might be rather summarised compared to the Russian versions, they still contain the key message and are written in the same manner as the Russian originals, and therefore considered useful for this thesis.

The empirical material is published between January 5th and March 5th, which is from when the first reference to the events in Kazakhstan was made by the above stated sources, until the
last. In total, 28 documents are analysed. 14 of the documents are published by the Kremlin, whereof six documents contain statements, transcripts, and speeches by Putin and eight are news articles about Putin. From the MFA are 13 documents collected, six of them are interviews, remarks, and answers by Foreign Minister Lavrov, three documents are briefings by the Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Zakharova, and four documents are statements, press releases, and publications from news conferences by the MFA. The analysis does also contain one statement by the Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Vershinin at a UNSC debate discussing cooperation between the UN and the CSTO, published by the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the UN. It is analysed together with the documents published by the MFA since Deputy Foreign Minister Vershinin is considered to be a representative of the MFA’s discourse as well.

The 28 documents are argued to be representative for the Russian discourse on the events in Kazakhstan since they, as explained above, originate from sources which have a significant impact on the Russian foreign policy and its discourse. Moreover, these are all of the documents published by the Kremlin and the MFA which relate to the events in Kazakhstan, meaning they contain everything said by the Russian authorities regarding the unrest and the intervention. The discourse, and thereby the result of the analysis, could be affected if new documents which refer to the unrest are published after the finalisation of this thesis. However, it is noticeable that the interest for the situation in Kazakhstan decreases by time since the majority of the collected documents are published in January or the beginning of February, and documents published later on are often repeating what has already been said. Hence, if documents referring to the Kazakh unrest are published after the finalisation of this thesis, they will probably not have a great impact on the whole Russian discourse.

What should additionally be addressed regarding the 28 documents is their relative importance. Although all documents have their own role in the construction of the Russian arguments and narrative, they cannot be considered as having an equally large impact on the discourse. Due to the Russian president’s important role in the formatting of the country’s politics (Roberts, 2017) and thereby the official discourse, a speech held by President Putin is considered to shape the official Russian discourse to a larger extent, compared to e.g., a briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Zakharova.
5.3 Delimitations

An important aspect of Russia’s identity and foreign policy is, according to Roberts (2017), the relation to, and actions by, the West and especially the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The expansion of NATO does also affect Russia’s relation to states in the ‘near abroad’, such as Georgia and Ukraine which both have been proposed admission to NATO (Kramer, 2009). Kazakhstan and NATO do have a defence cooperation, but according to McDermott (2012) it is only symbolic and political. Meanwhile, legal and doctrinal issues keep Russia and Kazakhstan together in their defence cooperation, creating a much deeper partnership than the Kazakh-NATO. This implies that the relation between Kazakhstan and Russia is not affected by NATO in the same manner as the Georgian-Russian or Ukrainian-Russian relation. Hence, in order to keep the focus on the Kazakh-Russian relation in this thesis, the aspect of NATO is not discussed further.

Another aspect which has a leverage on Russian foreign policy is domestic influences and perspectives (Lo, 2015). However, the Russian domestic situation is argued to be too complex to grasp and include in this study given the time- and page limitation. Hence, the domestic perspective is not included, which enables a more thorough study of the foreign policy instead.

A third delimitation of the study is the fact that the empirical material is only covering official Russian sources with an impact on the Russian foreign policy, which excludes Kazakh and other Russian sources. The possible inclusion of other Russian sources would contribute to a broader picture of the situation in Kazakhstan and create a greater understanding of the ‘true’ reason for Russia’s intervention. Kazakh sources would be favourable to include to gain a broader, and not only a Russian, perspective of the events. However, since the main purpose of the thesis is not to find the true reason for the intervention or Kazakhstan’s attitude towards it, but to examine the one-sided Russian discourse used to legitimise the intervention, the chosen sources are argued to be suitable for such purpose.

5.4 Operationalization

The empirical material is collected from the MFA and the Kremlin by reading all speeches, statements, briefings, news etc. published at each authority’s website, and thereafter selecting the publications which refer to the events in Kazakhstan. The websites are also re-visited during the process of writing the thesis to ensure no new publications are left out from the analysis. The websites of Foreign Missions, such as the Embassy of the Russian Federation to the
Republic of Kazakhstan and the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the UN, are also visited to examine if additional publications related to the MFA and the events in Kazakhstan can be found, resulting in the inclusion of one more document, published by the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the UN. Relevant publications are downloaded to PDFs to ensure continuous access to them as the MFA’s and Kremlin’s websites are blocked for periods of time, most likely due to the war in Ukraine. The documents are coded according to source and the alphabetical order of the documents’ title, e.g., Kremlin 1 and MFA 14. The references to page numbers in the analysis is based on the page numbers in the PDFs, since the websites of the Kremlin and MFA are not paginated.

Due to the relative importance of the empirical material, which implies that different Russian authorities and actors have different impact on the Russian foreign policy-discourse, it would be ideal to divide the analysis based on individual actors, having one subchapter dedicated to President Putin’s discourse, one for Foreign Minister Lavrov’s discourse etc. However, due to the limitations of empirics and pages of this study, it is more suitable to divide the analysis of the material based on the sources: the Kremlin and the MFA. This still enables a separation between documents related to President Putin, who has the largest impact on the Russian discourse, and documents related to other actors and authorities. The relative importance among the MFA-representatives and their discourses is considered by paying attention to which authority says what, and clearly declare this throughout the analysis and discussion in chapter 6 and 7.

A number of questions and ‘alert-words’ are set up to enable a careful reading and processing of the empirics, and to identify important aspects of the material. The questions are used both to create an understanding for which types of arguments Russia uses to legitimise the intervention and to pay attention to a possible appearance of R2P, Eurasianism, and Russkiy Mir within these arguments. The ‘alert-words’ are on the other hand mainly used to detect the appearance of the conceptual framings. The questions and ‘alert-words’ are based on the theoretical framework and previous studies (deductive approach). However, while reading the documents other interesting aspects appears as well, which are not very prominent in chapter 3 and 4, such as the focus on terrorists, resulting in a revision of the questions (inductive approach). The questions are found in Table 2 and the ‘alert-words’ in Table 3, both below.
Table 2. Questions asked to the empirical material to enable a careful reading and processing of the empirics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How are [the subjects below] portrayed in the empirical material?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lawfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sovereignty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relation to the 'near abroad'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relation to Kazakhstan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSTO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russians/compatriots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otherness (who is the Other and how is it portrayed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power (material &amp; discursive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia &amp; Russian identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interventions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s own

Table 3. Alert-words used to identity R2P, Eurasianism, and Russkiy Mir in the empirical material

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Responsibility to Protect</th>
<th>Eurasianism</th>
<th>Russkiy Mir</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alert-words</td>
<td>Atrocities, genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, crimes against humanity, mass murder, suffering, civilians, humanitarian disaster, humanitarian crisis, protect</td>
<td>Euroasia, natural right, natural power, regional balance, regional stability, mediator, strategic location, (Russia’s) special role</td>
<td>Russians, compatriots, Russian speakers, special responsibility, protect Russians, rights/interests/ freedom of Russians</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s own

With the assistance of the questions is the empirical material read, processed, and analysed, which results in a few themes of arguments being derived from the empirics. The material from the Kremlin forms three themes and from the MFA-documents are five themes derived. The themes of arguments are presented below in Table 4.
Table 4. Themes of arguments used by Russian authorities to legitimise the intervention in Kazakhstan January 2022, divided by source.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Themes of arguments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The Kremlin                  | 1. By invitation and military agreement  
                              | 2. Providing assistance to stabilise the situation  
                              | 3. External aggression                                                                 |
| The Ministry of Foreign Affair| 1. By invitation and military agreement  
                              | 2. Providing assistance to stabilise the situation  
                              | 3. External aggression  
                              | 4. Secure stability in the region  
                              | 5. Protect civilians                                                                 |

Source: Authors own

The analysis of the documents and arguments then continues, assisted by both the questions and ‘alert-words’, and focuses on the interpretation of words, sentences, and formulations which constructs the arguments, and what underlying meanings these arguments might have.

Chapter 6 is in other words providing an overview of how President Putin and the MFA have legitimised the intervention in Kazakhstan, and my interpretation of such legitimation. It does also work as a foundation for chapter 7, which discusses how prominent ‘R2P’, ‘Eurasianism’, and ‘Russkiy Mir’ has been in the arguments and legitimation. Since the research question relates to the Russian discourse and legitimation of the intervention, it should also be noticed that the final discussion in chapter 7 merges Putin’s and the MFA-representative’s discourses into one united Russian official discourse, although maintaining an emphasis on the actor with the greatest impact on the Russian foreign policy-discourse, President Putin.

6. Analysis

This chapter is dedicated to the analysis of the empirical material. The focus lies in the interpretation of the discourse, who said what, how it was said, and what underlying meanings this could imply.

6.1 The Kremlin

What follows in this subchapter is an analysis of 14 documents published by the Kremlin, containing statements, speeches, transcripts, and news by and about President Putin.
6.1.1 By Invitation and According to the Military Agreement

President Putin stresses that CSTO troops were sent to Kazakhstan because President Tokayev requested such help (Kremlin 6) and that the operation in Kazakhstan was thereby performed strictly according to Article 4 of the CSTO Treaty. According to Article 4, if a CSTO member state is exposed to aggression and requests help, all other CSTO member states should immediately provide support and assistance, including military assistance, to the member state under attack. Putin further explains that the CSTO member states took a unanimous decision to approve the operation and contribute with troops to Kazakhstan (Kremlin 5) and is thereby once again making references to Article 4 of the Treaty. It is also highlighted that Tokayev expressed appreciation for the CSTO’s response to the invitation (Kremlin 9), along with a ‘special gratitude for the help and support of the Russian Federation, Kazakhstan’s strategic partner and ally in the CSTO’ (Kremlin 10:1).

Putin’s recurrent reference to Article 4 of the CSTO Treaty is a way to emphasise the lawfulness of the operation. Furthermore, his portraying of CSTO as an organisation with members states who all care for a colleague in need, can be interpreted as a way to show that CSTO is a successful, unified organisation with trustworthy members who all act according to the military agreement they signed up for.

The emphasis on Tokayev’s appreciation for the CSTO can be considered a way for Putin to demonstrate that Tokayev wished to receive support and assistance from the CSTO, since he later showed his gratitude for the help. If the troops had entered Kazakh soil and interfered in the Kazakh state affairs without the approval of Tokayev, he had probably not expressed his gratitude towards the organisation in the same manner. The discourse and narrative on the operation taking place upon the request of Tokayev is in other words strengthened by the portraying of Kazakhstan as a grateful partner to the CSTO. Moreover, Tokayev’s ‘special gratitude’ for Russia’s support is positioning Russia as an important actor within the CSTO, the region, and in relation to Kazakhstan.

6.1.2 Provide Assistance to Stabilise the Situation

What should be noticed is that Putin never refers to the actions by CSTO as an intervention, but rather as a peacekeeping operation. He explains that troops were deployed to Kazakhstan, a fraternal and brotherly country, only to provide assistance to the Kazakh authorities by protecting key infrastructure facilities. This in turn, Putin argues, enabled national law enforcement and security agencies to focus on counterterrorism and combat operations, the
protection of civilians, and to exercise policing functions to restore law and order in the country (Kremlin 5). However, although the Kazakh authorities had the main responsibility for handling the situation, described as an ‘unprecedented challenge to the country’s sovereignty, integrity and stability’ (Kremlin 4:1), the significant role of the CSTO and Russia in stabilising the situation is often mentioned as well (see for example Kremlin 3, 4, 7 and 12) and Putin argues that:

[T]he CSTO forces have helped bring the situation back to normal and restore law and order. In fact, this is the first CSTO operation like this. We performed a very important task through a concerted effort [...]. [Russia’s] military aviation transport played a big role in this respect; this is clear. We managed to deploy and concentrate our military equipment and personnel, our resources, in a short span of time. Everything went like clockwork: quickly, smoothly and efficiently (Kremlin 2:3).

He further explains that when order was restored, all armed forces withdrew upon the request of the Kazakhstani leadership (Kremlin 6).

By presenting the division of tasks between the CSTO and the Kazakh law enforcement and security agencies, Putin shows how the CSTO and Russia respect the Kazakh authorities’ monopoly on the use of violence. Moreover, Putin’s reference to the actions by the CSTO as a peacekeeping operation, rather than an intervention, contributes to an image of Russia as a country which respects state sovereignty and does not interfere in other countries’ affairs. The emphasis on the troops leaving Kazakh territory upon the request of Tokayev further strengthens this image. The timely departure of the troops does also demonstrate that Russia had no own underlying interests with the operation in Kazakhstan, and that the troops were only deployed to provide professional and well-coordinated assistance to Kazakhstan and could hence be withdrawn whenever Tokayev said so.

6.1.3 An External Aggression

Putin argues that ‘Kazakhstan faced an act of terrorist aggression committed with the direct participation of destructive internal and external forces’ (Kremlin 4:1). He further claims that the ones protesting for a reduction of gas prices were not the same group of people who fought ‘the armed forces for several days’ (Kremlin 2:3), and that these two groups had completely different goals with their actions. Those who fought the armed forces were, according to Putin, international terrorists (Kremlin 6) and part of international groups who used the difficult situation in Kazakhstan for their own benefit (Kremlin 3). According to Putin, it is obvious that they had obtained training ‘in foreign camps and acquired combat experience in hotspots
around the world’ (Kremlin 5:17). President Tokayev is however praised by Putin for his response towards the aggressors, using resolute and consistent actions (Kremlin 12). Although it is, as previously explained, emphasised that CSTO only provided assistance to the Kazakh authorities, it is at the same time highlighted how crucial the deployment of the troops was to combat the terrorists. In a conversation between Putin and Tokayev, for example, the two leaders are discussing how the concerted actions under the CSTO mandate were used to restore order, combat international terrorism, and protect Kazakhstan’s citizens (Kremlin 14). Putin further argues that the CSTO was:

[A]ble to take all the necessary decisions in a swift and well-coordinated manner. In fact, [CSTO] had very little time and had to act in a matter of hours to prevent the foundations of state authority in Kazakhstan from being undermined, and the situation inside the country from deteriorating, as well as to stop terrorists, criminals, looters, and other criminal elements (Kremlin 5:16).

Putin further recognises that the events in Kazakhstan were not the first, nor the last, attempts from the outside to interfere in the domestic affairs of the CSTO member states, but argues that the actions taken by CSTO in Kazakhstan show that the organisation and its member states ‘will not allow anyone to stir up trouble at home’ (Kremlin 5:18).

Putin’s recurring reference to an external terrorist-aggression as the cause of the unrest can be considered another way of validating the deployment of CSTO-troops and an argument for the lawfulness of the intervention. This since Article 4 in the CSTO Treaty is limited to outside threats and does not cover internal matters. Moreover, by highlighting that the unrest was not just an internal matter sprung off from the increased gas prices, but a serious terrorist and security issue of which civilians must be protected from, Putin is insinuating that the events in Kazakhstan could have become a problem for the whole region and its population if not CSTO troops had been deployed. The highlighting of CSTO’s importance throughout the discourse can thereby be considered as a way for Putin to refute the claim that CSTO would be more talk than action, and instead show that it is a highly functional organisation and the main security provider in the region. Putin’s statement that CSTO will not let anyone ‘stir up trouble’ in the region can also be interpreted as it is not afraid to prove its role again. Lastly, Putin’s recognition of Tokayev, for his way of handling the unstable situation, can be interpreted as an encouragement and acknowledgement of Tokayev’s choice to appeal to the Russian led security organisation, instead of e.g., the Chinese led SCO, and an additional confirmation of the CSTO’s important role as security provider in the region.
6.2 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs

This subchapter contains an analysis of the 14 documents with statements, press releases, interviews etc. by representatives of the MFA.

6.2.1 By Invitation and According to the Military Agreement

In similarity with Putin are representatives from the MFA referring to the invitation from Tokayev when discussing the deployment of CSTO troops to Kazakhstan (see for example MFA 8 and MFA 10). Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Zakharova explains that when Tokayev appealed to the CSTO Collective Security Council, a unanimous decision was taken ‘to provide military assistance to the fraternal country’ (MFA 3:6) and thereby invoke the Collective Security Treaty. She further points out that the UNSC, and the secretaries-general of the SCO and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) were notified on the decision. In a statement by the MFA, on the decision to deploy troops to Kazakhstan, it is once again stressed that the decision was made in accordance with Article 4 of the Treaty, and by supporting the adoption of urgent measures, Russia was ‘[r]eaffirming its commitment to allied obligations within the CSTO’ (MFA 11:1). Furthermore, Foreign Minister Lavrov is in an interview discussing how conspiracy theorists speculate if the West controlled the events in Kazakhstan, to undermine Russia’s position ahead of the talks in Geneva and Brussels regarding the developments in Ukraine, or whether it was Russia who invaded Kazakhstan to take it under control. Lavrov argues that neither Russia nor the West had any underlying intentions with the operation in Kazakhstan, on the contrary, the events in Kazakhstan were according to Lavrov a Kazakh affair and Russia acted merely upon the direct request from Tokayev (MFA 7).

The discourse provided by the representatives of the MFA is in other words, like Putin’s, emphasising the lawfulness of the operation. CSTO is framed as an organisation with no internal issues or disagreements, resulting in a unanimous decision on the deployment of troops. Furthermore, Zakharova’s declaration that the UNSC, SCO, and OSCE were notified on the decision can be interpreted as if she wanted to show that CSTO and Russia had nothing to hide regarding the operation in Kazakhstan but were acting completely according to the rules.

Russia’s commitment to the ‘allied obligations within the CSTO’ and Lavrov’s denial that Russia would have any underlying intentions with the intervention, portrays Russia as a loyal partner and ally who only follows the military agreement it signed up for, with no own interest.
in the matter. What is further interesting with Lavrov’s statement is that the West is not portrayed as the hostile Other, as he rejects the conspiracy theories regarding a potential involvement of the West during the unrest.

6.2.2 Provide Assistance to Stabilise the Situation

The MFA states that the deployment of CSTO-troops, often referred to as ‘peacekeeping forces’, aimed to stabilise and normalise the situation in Kazakhstan (MFA 11). Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Zakharova further explains that the CSTO peacekeepers were primarily deployed to Kazakhstan to protect and defend critical infrastructure, which enabled Kazakhstan’s law enforcement agencies ‘to restore law and order and eliminate threats to the country’s security’ (MFA 3:6). She continues by claiming that ‘[i]t is important to underscore that Kazakhstan’s leaders praised the CSTO peacekeeping operation as highly effective and useful’ (ibid). The efficiency and capacity of the troops is also highlighted by Deputy Foreign Minister Vershinin and Foreign Minister Lavrov. The former argues that the assistance provided by CSTO, together with the steps of the Kazakh authorities, prevented a disaster (MFA 1). The latter, Lavrov, states that the recent years’ effort to build up peacekeeping capacity within the CSTO had now been proven useful. Lavrov further claims that ‘[t]he West watched with amazement how rapidly the units sent by all CSTO countries to help allied Kazakhstan at the request of its President were deployed’ (MFA 8:12). He also argues how obvious it was that everything about the operation was ‘impeccable from both the technical and logistical perspectives, as well as in terms of performance’ (MFA 7:11). In addition to Zakharova is also Lavrov referring to Tokayev’s appreciation of the assistance and describes how the president of Kazakhstan declared that the CSTO-troops had fulfilled their core mission and could be withdrawn from the country (MFA 7). The timely withdrawal of the troops is further stressed by other representatives of the MFA, such as Deputy Foreign Minister Vershinin, who explains that the troops ‘left the country as soon as the situation stabilized’ (MFA 1:2).

Zakharova and the other MFA-representatives’ emphasis on the CSTO merely providing assistance to Kazakhstan, not being involved in any combat, is an example of how Russia portrays its respect for the Kazakh government, its monopoly on the use of force, and sovereignty. The recurrent claim throughout the discourse regarding the troops leaving Kazakhstan on time, is also adding to this narrative. The timely withdrawal of the troops can also be interpreted as a way for the authorities to once again show that Russia had no hidden
agenda in Kazakhstan but was merely there to provide assistance and then leave as soon as the work was done and order was restored, hence being a strong and reliable partner. Lastly, the praising of the troops for their efficient and well executed operation can be considered a way of showing the importance and utility of CSTO during the unrest, and to promote the deployment of troops for future events.

6.2.3 An External Aggression

The events in Kazakhstan are, in a statement by the MFA, described as externally provoked attempts to disrupt the security and integrity of Kazakhstan, performed by trained and organised armed groups (MFA 11). Foreign Minister Lavrov explains that CSTO-troops were therefore deployed to Kazakhstan to stabilise the situation, and to eliminate the threats which the attempted terrorist attack caused the country (MFA 10). Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Zakharova further describes the events as a ‘an aggression of international terrorism, which threatened to undermine the constitutional order, destroy government institutions and seize power in the country’ (MFA 3:6). She additionally argues that the terrorist gangs, consisting of ‘gun-toting extremists’ (MFA 4:21) trained in foreign terrorist’s camp and with experience in military operations (MFA 3) turned the peaceful protests into clashes and massacres (MFA 4). Foreign Minister Lavrov contributes to the narrative by describing how ‘the looting, burning buildings, beheadings of police officers and the way these rioters and terrorists treated journalists presented a horrible scene’ (MFA 7:11). Zakharova is also criticising the West and human rights organisations for keeping quiet about the events, not demanding a calming of the situation, or criticising the extremists. But, according to Zakharova, as soon as the situation was taken under control again by the Kazakh authorities and the assisting CSTO-troops, ‘a media attack was unleashed with calls to calm the situation’ (MFA 4:21), although the situation was already calm, and with allegations towards the Kazakh authorities for restricting media activities. However, Zakharova further argues, no one from the West ‘saw the extremists break into editorial offices, hold journalists hostage for many hours, demand to go on air, threaten their lives, and actually take the lives of some of their employees’ (MFA 4:21).

In a press statement by the MFA on the developments in Kazakhstan, published in the afternoon the 5th of January and thereby before the deployment of CSTO troops, one can see a slight difference in the discourse describing the events in Kazakhstan compared to after the deployment of troops. In the press statement it is declared:
We call for peaceful solutions to all issues within the constitutional and legal framework and through a dialogue, not through street riots and violations of law. This is exactly what the efforts by President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev are aimed at: stabilising the situation and prompt settlement of the pressing problems, including those mentioned in the protesters’ legitimate demands (MFA 13:1).

While this statement is talking about ‘the protesters’ and their ‘legitimate demands’, all other documents published by the MFA are referring to the ones taking part in the unrest as trained gun-toting extremists, terrorists and similar. Hence, although some clashes had already occurred in Kazakhstan before January 5 (Ria Novosti, 2022), the MFA press statement still made references to ‘protesters’, and not to ‘trained and organised armed groups’ or terrorists such as in the documents published on January 6 and onward, when CSTO started to deploy troops to Kazakhstan.

In similarity with Putin’s statements regarding an external aggression can the statements provided by the MFA and its representatives be considered a way to assure that the deployment of CSTO-troops was completely according to Article 4 of the Treaty, as it was an external and not a domestic threat which caused the unrest in Kazakhstan. This is also seen by how the description of those taking part of the protests changes after the 5th of January. Before and during January 5, these people were referred to as protesters, hence a domestic issue which would not allow CSTO-troops to be deployed. After the 5th of January, they are referred to as foreign trained terrorists, and thereby an external threat which permits CSTO to deploy troops.

Furthermore, Lavrov and Zakharova’s discourses describe the events in Kazakhstan as chaotic, which contributes to a narrative of the situation where CSTO had both the legitimate right, and moral duty, to help Kazakhstan defeat the external threat and prevent the situation from deteriorating completely. This in contrast to the West who, as interpreted from Zakharova’s statements, only acted to benefit from the situation and find a way to criticise Russia and its allies.

6.2.4 Secure Stability in the Region

The MFA and its representatives argue to some extent that the operation in Kazakhstan was needed to prevent the disorder from spreading to other parts of the region, and that there is still an imminent risk that unrest could take place in Kazakhstan again, or elsewhere in the region. Foreign Minister Lavrov, for example, argues that CSTO needs to be prepared for similar events as those in Kazakhstan due to the continued external encroachments which derail the situation in Central Asia and other CSTO countries. He claims that the encroachments in the
region have become ‘much more persistent, risky, and dangerous after the Americans fled Afghanistan along with the rest of NATO’ (MFA 8:12), but is also explaining that CSTO is capable of providing the services which are needed to prevent the potential threats coming from Afghanistan. Moreover, Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Zakharova questions the knowledge among Americans regarding the Central Asian region and claims that it is obvious, but impossible for Western journalists to understand, that the combination of a destabilised country and an ‘inflow of extremists and fighters disguised as Afghan migrants could pave the way to a global collapse’ (MFA 4:22). Hence, the ‘prompt, targeted, legitimate and effective actions’ (ibid) by the Kazakh authorities and the CSTO prevented a whole chain of large-scale disasters in the region. Zakharova further argues that it is clear how CSTO is ‘increasingly becoming a key entity for ensuring security and stability in the region’ (MFA 4:21) and that the interest among other states to become a member, partner, or observer within the CSTO is huge (MFA 4).

The statements by Lavrov and Zakharova portray Russia and the CSTO as the only adequate actors to prevent the spread, and recurrence, of the Kazakh unrest. CSTO is hence framed as a responsible, trustworthy, and powerful actor in the region, who will clean up the mess which US and NATO left after fleeing Afghanistan. The criticism towards the US, NATO, and Western journalists insinuates fear, cowardness, and ignorance among the West, while the CSTO is considered a highly functional, knowledgeable, and attractive organisation, according to the Russian authorities. A narrative which is also strengthened by Zakharova’s argument regarding an increased interest among other states to be part of the CSTO.

6.2.5 Protect Civilians

The MFA is during a press conference declaring it was concerned over the situation in Kazakhstan and the ‘attacks on civilians and law enforcement personnel’ (MFA 14:25) but believed that the actions taken by Tokayev were ‘timely and commensurate with the scale of the threat the republic faced’ (MFA 14:25). When the decision to send CSTO-troops to Kazakhstan was taken, the MFA also stated that Russia would continue the close consultations with Kazakhstan and the other CSTO member states to, among other things, ensure ‘the safety of all civilians in the country without exception’ (MFA 11:1). Along with the focus on civilians at large, there is also some emphasis on the safety of Russians in Kazakhstan throughout the discourse. Press releases published by the MFA during the unrest stated that no Russian nationals were among the victims of the unrest (MFA 12; MFA 13) and Foreign Ministry
Spokeswoman Zakharova explains that the ‘telephone hotline of the Ministry’s Crisis Management Centre department worked around the clock’ (MFA 3:7) to process the appeals from people wishing to leave Kazakhstan. As a result, more than 2,200 persons were helped and flown from Kazakhstan to Russia through a joint operation between the Russian Ministry of Defence and the MFA, using military transport aviation flights. Among the people who left Kazakhstan for Russia were groups of children’s sports teams, Kazakh students studying at Russian universities, and about 20 people from Hungary, Austria, Belgium, and Greece. Zakharova further describes how the MFA continues to receive letters from Russian citizens and foreign partners who express their gratitude for the provided help (MFA 3).

However, what should be noticed is that the Russians who received assistance by the MFA and the Ministry of Defence are mainly referred to as ‘Russians’ or ‘Russian nationals’ and only once, during a press conference with Foreign Minister Lavrov, are these people referred to as ‘compatriots’ (MFA 8). Furthermore, the MFA explains that ‘[m]any Russians had travelled to Kazakhstan on holiday over the New Year’s to visit their relatives’ (MFA 14:5). This implies that those who were provided assistance to leave the country were citizens of Russia temporarily visiting Kazakhstan, not Russian compatriots living in Kazakhstan.

Overall, the emphasis on the protection of all civilians, together with the assistance provided to Russians and other nationalities to leave Kazakhstan, can be interpreted as a way for the MFA to portray itself as a responsible actor at the global arena, who cares for those innocent people who were affected by the violence caused by the aggressive groups of terrorists.

7. Discussion

Chapter 6, the analysis, has provided an overview of which arguments Russia has used to legitimise the intervention, this chapter uses the analysis as a foundation for a continued discussion. The purpose is to examine how prominent ‘R2P’, ‘Eurasianism’, and ‘Russkiy Mir’ have been in the legitimisation and thereby find a final answer to the RQ. This chapter also aspires to detect if there is a continuity or change in the Russian discourse related to interventions, discuss possible reasons for why a certain concept might be more or less prominent and what social consequences the inclusion (or non-inclusion) of the concepts has for Russia in terms of its relation to the ‘near abroad’ in general, and to Kazakhstan in particular. This chapter aspires in other words to fulfil the aims of the study, discussed in chapter 1.
7.1 The Kremlin

President Putin’s statements, speeches, and interviews, published by the Kremlin, resulted in what could be divided into three categories of arguments used to legitimise the intervention in Kazakhstan. Putin claimed that the intervention was:

1) based on the invitation from Tokayev and according to the CSTO military agreement
2) providing assistance to stabilise the situation
3) needed due to an external aggression

The discussion below contains three sub-chapters, divided by the conceptual framings ‘R2P’, ‘Eurasianism’, and ‘Russkiy Mir’. Each sub-chapter discusses how prominent the conceptual framing has been within the arguments, and what possible reasons there might be for the inclusion, or non-inclusion, of the conceptual framing within the discourse.

7.1.1. Responsibility to Protect

The R2P-concept constitutes the commitment and responsibility of states and the global community to protect civilians from atrocity crimes. Influences of R2P-language is detected in Putin’s discourse as he, for example, argues that the assistance provided by the CSTO troops enabled the Kazakh law enforcement and security agencies to focus on i.a. counterterrorism and the protection of civilians (Kremlin 5) also referred to as ‘Kazakhstan’s citizens’ (Kremlin 14). However, despite the emphasis on the protection of civilians, which relates to R2P, Putin is not mentioning the need for CSTO and Russia to protect the civilians from genocide, ethnic cleansing, or other atrocities, which is a central aspect of the R2P-concept.

The discourse provided by Putin in relation to the events in Kazakhstan is on the other hand projecting an image and identity of Russia as a trustworthy partner which respects the sovereignty of other states. Hence, a traditional Westphalian approach to sovereignty and (non-)intervention is presented, contrasting the concept of R2P which ‘allows’ states to intervene and violate state sovereignty. It can hence be argued that overall, the conceptual framing of ‘R2P’ was not very prominent in Putin’s legitimisation of the intervention in Kazakhstan, January 2022.

A possible reason for why R2P is not prominent within Putin’s discourse related to the events in Kazakhstan is Russia’s (positive) relation to the Kazakh regime. Kazakhstan has been argued to be the country of which Russia has the least issue with among the post-Soviet states (Goble, 2021), and it can hence be considered inappropriate to accuse the Kazakh regime, a friend, for atrocities against its own population. Putin is instead, throughout the discourse,
praising Tokayev for his great way of handling the unforeseen situation and the so-called terrorist group who attacked the country.

7.1.2 Eurasianism

Eurasianism highlights Russia’s unique geographical location which provides it with a natural right and power to play a dominant role in the Eurasian region (Mostafa, 2013), and enables it to have legitimate interests in both Europe and Asia (Morozova, 2009).

Putin is throughout the discourse discussing the security threat and unstable situation occurring in Kazakhstan. It is implied that if CSTO had not deployed troops to the country, the situation would have degenerated completely, and perhaps even spread outside of Kazakhstan. CSTO is thereby considered an important tool to restore and maintain the security and stability of the region. What should then be remembered is that Russia has a high influence on the CSTO: it is Russian forces, doctrines, weapons, and technology which dominates the trainings and exercises of CSTO (Omelicheva, 2018), and the vast majority of the CSTO troops in Kazakhstan were Russian (Hedenskog & von Essen, 2022). Hence, it is argued by this thesis that when CSTO is used as a tool for restoring and maintaining security in the region, it is also a Russian tool which is applied. Moreover, it is emphasised by Putin that President Tokayev thanked all CSTO member states but extended a special gratitude to Russia for the assistance, implying that Russia had a special role, and contributed the most, within the operation.

However, it is noticed that Putin also frames the Kazakh authorities as the ones responsible for the restoring of order while the CSTO troops were only providing assistance to the local authorities. Russia is thus not portrayed as the main actor and it can be argued that in this case, the image of Russia as a country which respects the sovereignty of other states is prioritised. However, by including statements which describes Russia and the CSTO as vital for the Kazakh authorities’ possibility to combat the terrorists and ensure stability in the country, the special role of Russia in the Eurasian region is still present within the discourse.

Altogether, it can be concluded that the conceptual framing of ‘Eurasianism’, and the view of Russia as a special power with special rights within the region, is prominent within Putin’s discourse.

The prominence of Eurasianism in Putin’s discourse could be a way for him to show that despite the rise of China and its great economic power, which i.a. has challenged Russia’s monopolist role within the Central Asian energy sector, Russia still has a great role regarding security and stability in the region.
Another possible reason to why Eurasianism-language is detected within Putin’s discourse is the increased tension in the world, with Ukraine as a focal point of instability in Russia’s ‘near abroad’. In other words, the geopolitical issue contributes to a need for Putin to secure recognition for Russia’s identity as the main security provider in the region and a discourse which emphasises Russia’s understanding of its Self as an actor with a natural right and power to control the region, in line with the Eurasianism-arguments.

7.1.3 Russkiy Mir

Russkiy Mir focuses on the interests and rights of the so-called Russian ‘compatriots’ which reside outside of the Russian Federation (Pieper, 2020).

Putin never mentions the compatriots when he discusses the events in Kazakhstan, neither is he mentioning any other of the ‘alert-words’ related to Russkiy Mir. The focus lies instead, as mentioned above, on the general security issue and not the safety of Russian compatriots. It can hence be concluded that the concept of Russkiy Mir is not prominent at all within Putin’s legitimisation of the intervention in Kazakhstan, January 2022. This despite the Russian minority being the largest minority in Kazakhstan.

The lack of Russkiy Mir-references in Putin’s argumentation could depend on the wish for a continued good relationship with Tokayev and Kazakhstan, in similarity to the discussion above on why R2P is non-prominent within the discourse. By accusing Tokayev and Kazakhstan of not respecting or caring for the rights of the Russian compatriots in the country, tension between the two partners would probably occur. Hence, it is more reasonable to focus on the external terrorist group’s attack on the whole of Kazakhstan, rather than the potential threat to Russian compatriots. Putin is thereby also contributing to the narrative on Kazakhstan as a friend in need, of which Russia comes to the rescue for, which would not be as prominent if Putin focused on Russian compatriots in need instead.

7.2 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The MFA provided what could be divided into five categories of arguments to legitimise the intervention in Kazakhstan in January 2022, claiming that the intervention was:

1) based on the invitation from Tokayev and according to the CSTO military agreement
2) providing assistance to stabilise the situation
3) needed due to an external aggression
4) a way to secure stability in the region
needed to protect civilians

This subchapter proceeds in the same manner as chapter 7.1, discussing the prominence of R2P, Eurasianism, and Russkiy Mir in the MFA and its representatives’ discourses, and possible reasons for the inclusion, or non-inclusion, of the concepts in the legitimation of the intervention.

7.2.1 Responsibility to Protect

The MFA is, in a statement regarding the decision to send CSTO troops to Kazakhstan, emphasising the need for protection of all civilians (MFA 11) which could be argued as leaning towards the R2P-concept. However, the statement does not mention anything about protection of civilians from atrocities which is, as previously argued, a central aspect of R2P. The R2P-concept is on the other hand considered to be rather prominent during a briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Zakharova. She describes how the peaceful protests in Kazakhstan, due to the actions of gun-toting extremists, turned into clashes and massacres for which the West did not care about (MFA 4). However, this is the only time this more explicit kind of R2P-reference is made by an MFA-representative. Foreign Minister Lavrov is, for example, describing the situation in Kazakhstan as chaotic, with lootings, buildings set on fire, and police officers found beheaded (MFA 7), but he is never describing the unrest in Kazakhstan with wordings related to e.g., crimes against humanity.

Thus, the inclusion of R2P in the MFA’s discourse is to a large extent a result of a statement by Zakharova, who is known for her straightforward, sarcastic, and aggressive style. And, in accordance with the discussion in chapter 5 regarding the sources’ relative importance, it can be argued that R2P would have been considered to be more prominent in the discourse if Foreign Minister Lavrov described the situation in Kazakhstan as a ‘massacre’, instead of Zakharova.

Overall, it can be concluded that although R2P was somewhat part of the MFA’s discourse it did not have a central role in the legitimation of the intervention in Kazakhstan.

The use of R2P-language, mainly by Zakharova in this case, can be a way to describe the situation in Kazakhstan as an issue which needs to be taken seriously. Since she at the same time accuses the West for not caring about the events, it can be interpreted as a seized opportunity to praise Russia and the CSTO, while condemning the West. The Russian image and understanding of its Self is in other words portrayed in contrast to the external Other, the West. The general lack of R2P-references from the other MFA-representatives can be
explained with the same reasoning as for Putin’s lack of R2P-language. The MFA would need to be careful about what words and accusations they use to describe the situation in Kazakhstan, in order to maintain good relations with the neighbouring country of Kazakhstan.

7.2.2 Eurasianism

In similarity to President Putin is the MFA and its representatives emphasising the security issues in Kazakhstan and how the CSTO contributed to a calming of the situation and the restoring of order, thereby preventing the unrest from spreading to other parts of the region. Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Zakharova is also stating that CSTO is increasingly becoming a key entity in the region for ensuring security and stability (MFA 4). Since CSTO is considered a Russian tool, as has been argued above, the statement by Zakharova can be a way of saying that Russia is increasingly becoming a key entity for ensuring security and stability in the region, implying influences of Eurasianism in the discourse. Furthermore, Lavrov and Zakharova criticise the West for its irresponsible acting in the region, the lack of response during the unrest, and its questionable knowledge about Central Asia. The criticism can to some extent be related to Eurasianism as well, since Eurasianist tend to question the claim that Europe would be the centre of the world, and Russia placed in its periphery. By criticising the West and portraying it as foolish, while also highlighting Russia and ‘its’ CSTO as a capable and responsible actor and security provider, the MFA places Russia in the centre as an actor with legitimate interests and knowledge about the Central Asian and Eurasian region, all along with the concept of Eurasianism.

The prominent role of Eurasianism in the MFA’s discourse and legitimation of the intervention in Kazakhstan could, in similarities with the discussion in chapter 7.1.2, be explained by the rise of China and its increased role as an economic champion of the region. However, due to the MFA’s vast criticism of the West when referring to the events in Kazakhstan, and the indirect comparison between the West’s and Russia’s knowledge and capacity of acting in Kazakhstan and the rest of the region, there is a greater probability that the current world order is the reason for Eurasianism’s prominent role in the discourse. The intervention in Kazakhstan and the discussion before, during, and after it, took place in the context of an increased tension at the global arena, including deepened disagreements between Russia and NATO as well as the Russian military invasion in Ukraine. Hence, it would be reasonable for Russia to apply Eurasianist language when talking about the events in Kazakhstan, and thereby secure recognition for its identity as an actor with a natural right and
power to play a dominant role in the Eurasian region, while portraying the West as an external Other who has no legitimate rights in the region.

7.2.3 Russkiy Mir

If the Russkiy Mir-concept is to be considered prominent in the MFA’s discourse related to the events in Kazakhstan, it implies that the MFA would use Russians residing abroad as a foreign policy tool and argue for their rights and interests. Furthermore, the Russians abroad would be referred to as ‘compatriots’ since this is the term, as explained in chapter 3, Russian officials tend to prefer. ‘Compatriots’ includes those who speak Russian, are ethnic Russians, or have cultural ties with their ‘homelands’ and the wider ‘Russian World’ (Pieper, 2020). In Kazakhstan, this includes a large share of the population since almost 20 percent are ethnic Russians (Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the United States, 2022) and about 97 percent speak fluent Russian (American Council, 2015).

The analysis in chapter 6 shows that the MFA did consider the interests of the Russians in Kazakhstan, in the manner that those who wished to leave Kazakhstan were assisted to do so. However, when talking about the Russians in the country, they were referred to as just ‘Russians’ or ‘Russian nationals’, and not ‘compatriots’, with the one exception of Foreign Minister Lavrov’s reference to ‘compatriots’ during a press conference. It is also stated that many Russians were visiting Kazakhstan over the holidays, which implies that those who were provided assistance to leave the country were citizens of Russia, temporarily visiting Kazakhstan, and not Kazakh-Russian compatriots. This implies that the Russkiy Mir-concept is not very prominent in the MFA’s discourse.

Moreover, it is emphasised throughout the discourse that there was a need to care for all civilians in Kazakhstan, and hence not only the Russian civilians, which further decreases the prominence of the Russkiy Mir-concept. However, one can argue that since about 97 percent of the Kazakh population could be considered Russian compatriots, due to the high level of Russian-speakers, the emphasis on protection of all civilians in Kazakhstan is at the same time an emphasis on the protection of all compatriots. Yet, this thesis argues that in order for the Russkiy Mir-concept to be considered prominent in the discourse, a more distinct reference to compatriots would be needed.

It can be assumed that the MFA wishes not to accuse the Kazakh regime of violating the rights of Russians, as it would risk the start of a diplomatic crisis with the neighbouring friend. However, it can also be assumed that the MFA wants to emphasise the well-coordinated and
rapid assistance it provided to those civilians wanting to leave the country and portray itself as a responsible actor. These two objectives are thereby resulting in the vague, but still existing, references to ‘Russkiy Mir’ by the MFA.

7.3 Concluding Discussion

In this thesis, documents published by the Kremlin and the MFA have been analysed separately due to their relative importance, i.e., different authorities have different impact on the Russian official discourse. The purpose of the study is nonetheless to explore which of the conceptual framings is the most prominent in the official Russian discourse. Hence, with a continued respect for the relative importance, the separate discourses will be merged into one ‘general’ Russian official discourse below.

President Putin makes no references related to Russkiy Mir, and only vague ones to R2P, when legitimising the intervention in Kazakhstan. Eurasianism is however considered, by this thesis, to be the most prominent within the Russian president’s discourse. The MFA and its representative’s discourses contain references to both R2P and Russkiy Mir, although to a limited extent. The most prominent conceptual framing within the MFA-discourse is therefore also Eurasianism. Hence, merging these discourses together, with some emphasis on Putin’s statements due to his importance for the Russian official discourse, it can be concluded that out of the three conceptual framings, Eurasianism was the most prominent in Russia’s legitimation of the intervention in Kazakhstan, January 2022.

As has been discussed above in 7.1 and 7.2, the rare appearance of R2P- and Russkiy Mir-influenced arguments in the discourse indicates that Russia wishes to keep Kazakhstan as a close ally. The care for Kazakhstan can also be noticed by the decision to send CSTO-troops to the country, which was the first time CSTO-troops were deployed to a member state. Russia is thereby using both its material power, in terms of deployed troops, and its discursive power, with Eurasianism-influenced arguments on how successful the operation in Kazakhstan was, to emphasise its important role as a security provider in the ‘near abroad’.

Within the Russian discourse, both continuity and change can be noticed in comparison to the previous interventions discussed in chapter 4. A change in the discourse is detected when comparing the Kazakh case to the interventions in Transnistria, Georgia, and Ukraine. During these interventions, the discourse focuses to a large extent on the R2P-concept - with accusations of genocide, mass murder, and other atrocities - as well as the Russkiy Mir-concept, emphasising the need to protect specifically Russian compatriots from the atrocities taking
place in the countries and regions of concern. The Russian discourse associated with the Tajik civil war is also influenced by the Russkiy Mir-concept, implying a change in discourse compared to the Kazakh case, however continuity is noticed as well. This since both the Tajik- and Kazakh-related discourses have an emphasis on local and regional stability, military agreements, the respect for (Tajikistan and Kazakhstan’s) sovereignty as well as a prominence of Eurasianism. It can thereby also be concluded that during the interventions in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, the image of Russia as a reliable partner to the Tajik and Kazakh governments is highlighted, along with two Russian identities; one identity of Russia as the main security provider in the region, and another identity of Russia as an international actor which respects and defends the traditional notion of sovereignty. In the cases of Transnistria, Georgia, and Ukraine on the other hand, the identity of Russia as a protector of Russians abroad from atrocity crimes is prioritised.

8. Conclusion

This thesis has focused on the case of Kazakhstan, where violent protests broke out in January 2022, and the subsequent decision by the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) to intervene in the country. The purpose of the thesis was to, using a discourse analysis, investigate which of the conceptual framings ‘Responsibility to Protect’ (R2P), ‘Eurasianism’, and ‘Russkiy Mir’ was the most prominent in Russia’s legitimation of the intervention. The reader was provided with a background-chapter on Kazakhstan and the unrest, and a theory-chapter which presented the three conceptual framings as well as constructivism which has been applied like a lens throughout the study. Thereafter followed a chapter dedicated to previous studies of Russian interventions in the ‘near abroad’, and a chapter explaining the methodology of the thesis, succeeded by the analysis and discussion.

The relative importance of the documents and the authorities, that is different authorities have different impact on the Russian official discourse, was considered throughout the analysis and discussion. It was done through the separation of documents related to President Putin, who has the greatest impact on the Russian politics and discourse, from the MFA-documents. The relative importance of the authorities within the MFA was considered by paying attention to who said what, instead of assuming everyone within the MFA portrayed the events in Kazakhstan in the same manner.

Within the analysis were documents, such as speeches, statements, and transcripts from MFA-representatives and President Putin examined and interpreted to create an understanding
for how the intervention was legitimised. Three main arguments were found within President Putin’s discourse. He claimed that the intervention was based on an invitation from Kazakhstan’s President Tokayev and the CSTO military agreement, it was needed to provide assistance to Kazakhstan and stabilise the situation, and it was needed due to an external aggression threatening Kazakhstan. The arguments by the MFA and its representatives were equal to Putin’s, with two additional claims; the intervention was needed to secure the stability in the whole region, and it was needed to protect civilians.

Thereafter followed a discussion regarding the prominence of the conceptual framings within the discourses and arguments. Within Putin’s discourse was ‘Eurasianism’ most prominent, ‘R2P’-arguments were detected, but only vaguely, and ‘Russkiy Mir’ was not prominent at all. The MFA and its representatives referred to both ‘Russkiy Mir’ and ‘R2P’, but to a limited extent. ‘Eurasianism’ was the therefore considered the most prominent conceptual framing within the MFA’s discourse as well. Since the purpose with the thesis was to investigate the official Russian discourse, the different discourses were thereafter, with a continued respect for the relative importance of the authorities, merged to one united official Russian discourse. It could then be concluded that ‘Eurasianism’ was the most prominent among the three conceptual framings in Russia’s legitimation of the intervention in Kazakhstan, January 2022.

While examining the discourse and the prominence of the conceptual framings, this thesis aimed to create a greater understanding for the Russian foreign policy. It also aimed to facilitate a discussion regarding possible reasons for why a concept was more or less prominent within the discourse, and what that could tell us about Russia’s relation to its ‘near abroad’ in general, and to Kazakhstan in particular. In chapter 7, it was therefore discussed that the lack of R2P and Russkiy Mir in the Russian discourse could be a consequence of Russia’s wish to keep good relations with Kazakhstan, and the prominence of Eurasianism a result of the increased tensions in the ‘near abroad’. It was also concluded that the Russian discourse constructed a social world where Russia was considered a reliable partner to the Kazakh government, along with two different Russian identities; one identity as an actor with the legitimate right and duty to provide security and stability in the region, and the other identity as an actor who respects and defend the traditional notion of sovereignty.

Another aim with the study was to examine if there was a continuity or change in Russia’s discourse related to interventions. The study found that the Russian discourse related to the events in Kazakhstan was to a large extent a continuity of the discourse on the intervention in the Tajiki civil war (1992–1997), with its main focus on the security and stability of Tajikistan
and the region, while a change in the discourse was detected when comparing it to the interventions in Transnistria (1992), Georgia (2008), and Ukraine (2014), which mainly focused on the protection of Russian compatriots from atrocity crimes. This study is however not, as previously mentioned, a comparative study per se. It would therefore be interesting to continue and deepen the discussion on continuity and change in future studies, with a more systematic comparison of the Russian discourse and legitimation of interventions. It could, for example, be done through comparing the discourse on an intervention in a country of which Russia has positive relations with, such as Kazakhstan, with the discourse related to an intervention in a country where the relation is not as good, such as Georgia.

Another aspect which needs to be taken into consideration for future studies is the current (2022) war in Ukraine, as it can be assumed that the war affects Russian foreign policy, international relations, and perhaps the Russian discourse on interventions. For future studies it would therefore be interesting to examine if there is a change in Russia’s discourse related to interventions before and after 24th of February 2022, that is when Russia invaded Ukraine.

Lastly, the results of this study are not without limitations. It cannot be assumed that the results are applicable for all future interventions carried out by Russia, since each situation, intervention and relation is unique, affecting how Russia legitimises its actions. However, a strength with this study is that it contributes with a piece to the Russian foreign policy-puzzle, that is, it increases the understanding for how Russia aims to construct the social world in its ‘near abroad’ and contributes to the pattern on how Russia tends to legitimise its interventions, and especially interventions in a country of which Russia has positive relations with.
References


### Empirical Material

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<td>Meeting with Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu</td>
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<td>Kremlin 2</td>
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<td>The Kremlin</td>
<td>Meeting with President of Kazakhstan Kassym Jomart Tokayev</td>
<td><a href="http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67748">http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67748</a></td>
<td>Kremlin 3</td>
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<td>The Kremlin</td>
<td>Telephone conversations with President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko and Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan</td>
<td><a href="http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67564">http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67564</a></td>
<td>Kremlin 8</td>
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<td>The Kremlin</td>
<td>Telephone conversation with President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon</td>
<td><a href="http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67569">http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67569</a></td>
<td>Kremlin 11</td>
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<td>The Kremlin</td>
<td>Vladimir Putin had several telephone conversations with heads of CSTO member states</td>
<td><a href="http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67561">http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67561</a></td>
<td>Kremlin 14</td>
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<td>Permanent mission of the Russian Federation to the UN</td>
<td>Statement by Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Vershinin at UNSC debate &quot;Cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations in maintaining international peace and security (CSTO)&quot;</td>
<td><a href="https://russiaun.ru/en/news/160222vr?fbclid=IwAR2CY_jPVtXGLu_s1MRDQQ4HmqpSBUH2442_KtBMHLQ-nGTDmECLpmfnM">https://russiaun.ru/en/news/160222vr?fbclid=IwAR2CY_jPVtXGLu_s1MRDQQ4HmqpSBUH2442_KtBMHLQ-nGTDmECLpmfnM</a></td>
<td>MFA 1</td>
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