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Russian Norm Entrepreneurship in Crimea: Serious Contestation or Cheap Talk?

Betsy Jose and Christoph H. Stefes

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GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies

Leibniz-Institut für Globale und Regionale Studien

Neuer Jungfernstieg 21

20354 Hamburg

Germany

<info@giga-hamburg.de>

<www.giga-hamburg.de>

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Abstract

Western actors have long dominated the political processes and discourses that shape global norms impacting interstate behaviour. Yet, more recently, powerful autocratic regimes such as China and Russia have seemingly challenged democracies, emerging as potential contesters of international norms. What might be the outcome of this contestation? This paper broadly explores this query by investigating Russia's humanitarian justifications for its Ukrainian incursion. It examines whether Russia's claim of humanitarian intervention is more than a petty attempt to disguise pure power politics. Is Russia contesting Western understandings of humanitarian interventions in order to reshape our ideas of permissible violations of sovereignty norms to protect vulnerable populations? Using Atlas.ti, we also explore global responses to Russia's humanitarian claims. Our initial findings indicate that the Ukrainian intervention enabled Russia to contest Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and to champion an alternative version of humanitarian intervention with some limited success.

Keywords: Russia, Crimea, authoritarianism, international norms, humanitarian intervention

Betsy Jose, PhD, JD

is an assistant professor in the Political Science Department at the University of Colorado Denver. She works on issues related to global norms, international humanitarian law, and civilian self-protection. She has published in *Contemporary Security Studies* (her article was awarded the 2018 Brodie Prize), among other outlets, and her recently published book explores the contestation of armed conflict norms (Springer 2018).

<betsy.jose@ucdenver.edu>

<<https://clas.ucdenver.edu/directory/faculty-staff/betsy-jose>>

Christoph H. Stefes, PhD

is an associate professor of Comparative European and Post-Soviet Studies at the University of Colorado Denver. He has published widely on autocratic regimes, including in his most recent book, *Crisis in Autocratic Regimes*, with Johannes Gerschewski (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2017).

<christoph.stefes@ucdenver.edu>

<<https://clas.ucdenver.edu/directory/faculty-staff/christoph-stefes>>

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Betsy Jose and Christoph H. Stefes

Article Outline

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Autocrats as Norm Entrepreneurs?
- 3 Probing Russian Norm Entrepreneurship
- 4 Tracing Communicative Trails
- 5 Conclusion

Bibliography

Appendix

1 Introduction

This paper centres on the following question: why did Russia make humanitarian arguments to explain its military actions in Crimea in 2014? At the time, Russia claimed it had intervened to protect Russian nationals and the Russian-speaking population, who were in peril.¹ Russia claimed that the anti-Russian sentiment that accompanied, and was partially responsible for, the ouster of President Viktor Yanukovich signalled a dangerous animosity toward

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Russian citizens and Russian-speaking Ukrainians who had pledged allegiance to Russia during this internal Ukrainian struggle. The community in Crimea was particularly vulnerable. When discussing Crimea, Putin claimed,

This [intervention] is legitimate and corresponds with our interests of protecting people who are historically tied to us, who have cultural ties to us, who have economic ties [...] This is a humanitarian mission. We won't dictate anything to anyone but of course we won't stand aside if people are threatened. (Borger 2014)

Such rhetoric contains elements of the norm of humanitarian intervention. Under the right conditions, this norm is considered a permissible exception to the non-intervention norm, a norm that protects sovereign states from external interference in their domestic affairs (Jose 2018). The humanitarian intervention norm's content has fluctuated over the centuries, as has the international community's embrace of it (Jose 2018). The latest version of humanitarian intervention embraced by many members of the international community is the Responsible to Protect (R2P) doctrine.

However, not all members of the international community have completely accepted prevailing versions of the humanitarian intervention norm as a permissible exception to the non-intervention norm. Russia is one of these states. It has repeatedly opposed the use of military force for humanitarian purposes, much to the frustration of R2P advocates (Badescu and Weiss 2010; Allison 2013). For instance, Russia consistently used its veto power in the UN Security Council to prevent international intervention to aid Syrian civilians in dire humanitarian need. Hence the reason that Russian claims of humanitarianism in Crimea are a puzzle. After all, Russia could reasonably expect the resulting accusations of hypocrisy by the international community when it justified its Crimean actions on humanitarian grounds.

There is a second reason why Russia's humanitarian justifications in Crimea are a puzzle. The country used similar justifications during its war with Georgia in 2008. At the time, the international community rejected those claims as disingenuous. Thus, arguably, Russia could have foreseen that a humanitarian defence was unlikely to assuage those who viewed its actions in Crimea as an impermissible violation of Ukraine's sovereignty to further its material interests. In fact, the humanitarian rhetoric may have emboldened the international community to penalise Russia, out of fear of the security and economic ramifications of its flouting of international law.

According to the autocracy literature, these rejections of Russia's normative claims as fig leaves for a materialist agenda are not completely unfounded. This literature claims that autocratic regimes are primarily motivated by their material interests, not norm compliance. If ideational justifications are used, they are used instrumentally to further those material interests. As Kurt Weyland (2017) points out, today's autocracies lack the missionary zeal of the fascist, national-socialist, and communist regimes of the twentieth century. Instead, they are "driven primarily by self-interest in regime survival and therefore engage in pragmatic col-

laboration and opportunistic alliances” (Weyland 2017: 1235). Yet, as our data show, Russia continued this humanitarian enterprise even after it became materially costly to do so. Consequently, Russia’s sustained claims of humanitarian motives present an intriguing question worth investigating.

One possible answer to this question is that, by deploying humanitarian justifications for its Crimea intervention, Russia aims to challenge R2P and proffer an alternative basis for permissibly violating the non-intervention norm. Thus, its motivations for military action in Ukraine might not have been exclusively rooted in the pursuit of material interests. It may have also been pursuing an ideational agenda, advocating for a norm that enables states to act unilaterally to protect their ethnic kin endangered within another state’s territory.

Interestingly, the extant norms literature provides insufficient guidance to explore this question. This state of affairs exists for myriad reasons. For one, this literature contains at least two sets of biases that impede its ability to fully inform our query. First, norms scholars have extensively studied the impact of so-called “good” norms, norms that promote human rights, limit state action, or encourage democratic processes (Jose 2017). Yet, Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink’s (1998) oft-cited definition of norms – shared standards of appropriate behaviour for members of a particular community – does not contain a particular valence. In fact, they argue genocide could be a norm in some communities. Thus, normative content is not limited to liberal values; it can also encapsulate illiberal ideas. Second, norms scholarship contains a directional bias. Much norm scholarship examines how global norms emerge in the West and are then diffused to the rest of the international community. However, nothing about the norm emergence process requires that global norms originate in a particular part of the world. Russia can be a source for new ideas about international rules as much as Canada. Because of these biases, though, our understanding of how norms impact global relations is incomplete. Exploring Russia’s humanitarian justifications enables us to expand our understanding of global norms. It is surely plausible that powerful autocratic regimes might champion illiberal ideas to effectively contest and shape existing international norms as well as introduce new norms.

This paper starts from this premise. We ask whether Russia’s claim that it engaged in a humanitarian intervention is more than a clever and disingenuous attempt to disguise pure power politics. Could ideational considerations motivate Russia’s attempt to contest dominant understandings of legitimate humanitarian interventions and reshape associated norms? We also try to assess how the world community responded to Russia’s justifications. Who has rejected these claims and who has been more amenable to them? We should emphasise that our research questions primarily focus on why Russia made humanitarian arguments to justify its Crimean intervention. Consequently, our paper does not examine the sincerity of Russia’s intentions. And while we do investigate how the intervention affected Russia’s material interests, we do so in order to accept or reject our norm contestation hypothesis. The intervention’s material impacts on Russia are not the primary focus of our paper.

We answer the paper's questions by tracking the global discourse among top government officials in Russia and two dozen other countries and international organisations between the time of President Yanukovich's ouster and the annexation of Crimea, applying qualitative data analysis (QDA). Our initial findings suggest, first, that the Crimean intervention enables Russia to contest international norms of humanitarian intervention. Russia does so not only by challenging dominant understandings of the humanitarian intervention norm, but also by offering an alternative version of it. Second, while Western and non-Western countries withhold support for Russia's norm entrepreneurship, Russia's justifications are not roundly rejected. Several states have expressed some support for Russia at various points during and after the Crimean conflict. These findings add further nuance to our understanding of Russian behaviour in the global arena, suggesting alternative explanations – especially when its behaviour does not conform to more materially based accounts. These ideational explanations can also supplement more dominant explanations of how autocracies behave internationally, demonstrating how norms can also further material interests.

The next section briefly summarises recent scholarship on international norms and norm entrepreneurship and shows how this scholarship might add insights to recent work on autocracy promotion. The third section assesses Russia's norm entrepreneurship in the context of its incursion into Ukraine. The fourth section summarises the preliminary findings of the qualitative data analysis used to track the global discourse concerning Russia's normative justification of the Crimean annexation. We conclude with a summary of our findings and how they enrich the relevant international relations and comparative politics literatures, bridging these disparate but highly related fields.

2 Autocrats as Norm Entrepreneurs?

We suggest that one reason Russia may have offered humanitarian justifications for its incursion into Crimea may be rooted in an ideational agenda. This paper focuses on two elements of that agenda. First, Russian humanitarian rhetoric suggests that the Kremlin contests dominant understandings of a more recent Western-sponsored doctrine for humanitarian intervention, called Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Second, in contesting this prevailing conceptualisation of R2P, Russia may also be advocating for an alternative version of humanitarian intervention, which more effectively advances the country's material and non-material interests. In making this argument, this paper employs a norm contestation framework.

Unlike other frameworks for understanding norm-related behaviour, which view norms as stable, monolithic mechanisms for regulating behaviour in the international arena, a norm contestation framework takes a more dynamic approach. It claims that norms are fluid and ambiguous and that they can be differently understood by various actors operating within a particular normative regime (Wiener 2008). Contestation over a norm's meaning erupts when actors are confronted with their divergent understandings of what that norm enables

and forbids. Ambiguity within a norm, especially characteristic of emerging norms such as R2P, increases the likelihood of such contestation. This contestation can occur even while contesters claim to subscribe to the overall norm. Instead, contesters may contest specific normative elements, like a norm's parameters. A norm's parameters inform actors under which conditions the norm applies (Shannon 2000). R2P's parameters permit violations of the non-intervention norm for a humanitarian cause, yet which specific causes qualify for R2P action remain unclear. Thus, while Russia may generally agree that the non-intervention norm can be violated on this basis (as was the case in Libya), it may disagree with other members of the international community on which situations are R2P-appropriate.

Russia's humanitarian justifications in Crimea may be evidence that it is acting as a norm entrepreneur, introducing an alternative version of humanitarian intervention as a challenge to the extant R2P doctrine. According to Finnemore and Sikkink's (1998) well-known norm life cycle model, normative ideas journey through various stages once they have been ushered into the global arena by a norm entrepreneur. The early phases, in which norm entrepreneurs lobby for their normative ideas, are considered the pre-emergence and emergence phases. During these phases, norm entrepreneurs pitch their ideas to various actors already holding many other normative commitments. In this competitive normative environment, norm entrepreneurs strategically use rhetorical action to gain supporters (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). And in challenging extant ideas about appropriate behaviour, entrepreneurs may also act inappropriately as a means of initiating the norm life cycle, incurring material and social costs to shepherd their pet cause through this process (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). Finnemore and Sikkink illustrate this point by describing how suffragettes were arrested for damaging property in their bid to achieve women's right to vote. In doing so, norm entrepreneurs seemingly opt to abide by the logic of appropriateness when it conflicts with the logic of consequences. If norm entrepreneurs are successful during this initial stage, the practice continues its development toward becoming a full-fledged norm. However, there is nothing inevitable about this process. Normative ideas may advance through this life cycle to emerge as norms. Yet they may also fail to emerge. Some factors vital to a normative idea's fate are whether the international environment is ready to accept this novel idea, how well the idea coheres with the extant normative structure, and the prominence of the norm entrepreneur (for a more detailed discussion, see Florini 1996).

As may now be evident, the norm life cycle is rife with contestation. In its early stages, there may not yet be consensus on a potential norm's contents. It is quite likely that as norm entrepreneurs cajole and threaten, their audience is actively pushing back (Jose, 2018). And there may be contestation between different norm entrepreneurs. Because Russia's preferred humanitarian intervention norms are in the early stages, we would expect to see R2P advocates and Russia deliberate their necessity and content with the rest of the international community. Questions addressing when a normative obligation would arise, how interven-

tion-related decisions would be made, and what would be considered permissible action, among others, are likely to be the subject of discussion during this early phase.

These discussions regarding norm contestation are situated within a broader norms literature that generally possesses a “good” norm bias. The norms literature typically focuses on “good” norms, such as those that promote civil and political rights and democracy (Deibert and Crete- Nishihata 2012). Yet, the concept of norms does not require a particular content, but a sense of “oughtness” for whatever behaviour they regulate. Norms are after all just “a standard of appropriate behaviour for actors with a given identity” (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). Thus, ideas that reflect illiberal values, like the version of humanitarian intervention advanced by Russia (see below), can be considered “norm-worthy.” Indeed, looking empirically into the global arena, we are able to observe and scrutinise the full panoply of norms.

Moreover, another bias manifests in the heightened attention given to how non-state actors introduce and promote new normative ideas (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Carpenter 2007). Yet, there is no reason why states cannot also be norm entrepreneurs (Reinold 2013; Fisher 2007; Jose 2017). As W. Jason Fisher (2007: 738) notes,

States possess advantages over other types of actors if they wish to act as norm entrepreneurs attempting to usher developing norms through the norm life cycle. Most States interact across a “wide range of fora and situations with [...] other states” and, as such, “have many opportunities [...] to persuade other states of the rightness of their views. “ Powerful States, moreover, tend to have more communication resources and to have more opportunities to interact with more States more often than less powerful States and, thus, hold an entrepreneurial advantage.

Consequently, Russia could be a norm entrepreneur for its version of humanitarian intervention, with justifications for its Ukrainian intervention serving as evidence. In other words, it may be advocating for a different set of parameters for humanitarian exceptions to the non-intervention norm which differ from those advocated by the United States, a norm entrepreneur for the more widely accepted R2P doctrine.

Lastly, much of the extant norms literature tends to have a directional bias: norms originate in the West and from there, diffuse to the rest of the international community. By examining Russia as a potential normative source, this paper offers a more inclusive perspective to the study of norms (Acharya 2014).

3 Probing Russian Norm Entrepreneurship

The literature on autocracies appears to parallel the IR literature’s blind eye to autocracies as normative actors. Recent studies indeed suggest that in promoting autocratic rule abroad, today’s powerful autocratic states pursue primarily material interests. It seems that no discernible ideational or ideological agenda is driving their foreign policies. Autocratic regimes

have little to offer as far as norms and ideas are concerned, whereas democratic regimes spread their norms and values globally for both material and ideational reasons (Burnell 2010: 3). Moreover, scholars allege that in pursuing their economic and security interests, autocratic states behave as “black knights” (Levitsky and Way 2010), disregarding international norms when it suits them to do so. As Rachel Vanderhill (2012: 13) states, “Autocratic states, not constrained by the norms of democracy at home or abroad, have greater freedom of action than democratic states.” If autocratic states offer ideational justifications for their action abroad, (Western) analysts consider them opportunistic and disingenuous. In short, the scholarly consensus seemingly suggests that autocratic states follow primarily the logic of consequence and rarely the logic of appropriateness (March and Olsen 1984).

Russia is widely regarded as one of those autocratic states that generally pursues pure power politics. Since Vladimir Putin’s rise to the Russian presidency in 2000, Russia’s regime has augmented power, which it has used to stifle political opposition at home and regain a dominant position abroad (Gelman 2015). To be more precise, Russia is attempting to stake out its exclusive sphere of influence, which largely coincides with its former colonies, the Soviet successor states, and regain its great power status, which it lost in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union (Ball 2017; Kuzio 2017). Political analysts assume that international norms do little to constrain Russia. Instead, analysts argue that Russia merely attempts to pursue its economic and strategic interests in a “ruthless campaign” (cf. Sakwa 2011: 960). For instance, Vanderhill (2014: 278 f.) differentiates between Western and Russian involvement in Belarus. While she considers Western involvement as principled, advancing international norms, she argues that, “Russia did not have a set of rules or programmes to follow when supporting autocracy in Belarus.” In short, whenever Russia advances ideational justifications for its foreign policies, Western responses often echo Deborah Ball’s (2017: 13) assertion: “Russia fabricates stories and distorts information without regard to verifiable facts. It weaponizes information to sow discord and spread doubt, *rather than advance a position or cause* [our emphasis].”

Reactions to Russian justifications for its Crimean actions illustrate this perspective. During its invasion of Ukraine in 2014, Russia claimed it was intervening to protect Russian nationals and the Russian-speaking population, who were allegedly in peril. Russia asserted that the anti-Russian sentiment which accompanied, and was partially responsible for, the ouster of President Viktor Yanukovich signalled a dangerous animosity toward Russian citizens and Russian-speaking Ukrainians who had pledged allegiance to Russia during this internal Ukrainian struggle. The community in Crimea was particularly vulnerable. Curiously, Russia has frequently opposed the use of military force for humanitarian purposes, as it espouses a rather rigid view of the non-intervention norm. For instance, Russia repeatedly used its veto power in the UN Security Council to prevent international intervention to aid Syrian civilians in dire humanitarian need. Consequently, opponents of Russian humanitarian claims to justify its military incursion into Crimea accused it of hypocrisy and cynicism.

Still, denying the possibility that autocratic regimes might follow the logic of appropriateness in their international relations is somewhat surprising. Autocratic regimes have frequently pursued normative agendas which rested on ideological and religious foundations (e.g., the Soviets' promotion of economic, social, and cultural rights; see Weyland 2017). Moreover, some studies show that shared values among autocratic regimes reduce conflicts between them (Oren and Hays 1997; Weart 1994). Olga Chyzh (2014) further demonstrates that most autocratic regimes are as likely as democracies to sign and comply with international treaties. Finally, Marianne Kneuer (2013) argues that autocratic regimes' foreign policies can strengthen national identity and loyalty to the political leadership by reifying the notion of the self and the other through "identity" and "delimitation" discourses. These discourses are especially successful if foreign policies align with the ideas and identities of the collective (Kneuer 2013: 212). Kneuer thereby appears to argue that both an internal and an external dimension of the logic of appropriateness shapes an autocratic regime's foreign policies.

In the wake of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, "perhaps [Russia's] greatest foreign policy defeat since the end of the Cold War" (Ambrosio 2007: 245), Russia has started to counter the Western normative hegemony, strengthen its soft power, and offer an "ideological alternative to Western values and norms" (Popescu 2006). This ideological alternative is centred on established international norms such as sovereignty and non-intervention, ideas of a "just" world order such as multipolarity embedded in the multilateral structure of the United Nations, and Russia's specific brand of "managed" democracy. Behind these norms and ideas stands Russia's conviction that its regime should be considered as legitimate as any Western regime, that the West should abstain from interfering in the domestic affairs of non-Western states, and that Russia has an exclusive responsibility for developments in the post-Soviet space, its "Near Abroad."

In particular, Russia insists that it has special responsibility for ethnic Russians in its "Near Abroad." This doctrine predates the accession of Vladimir Putin to the Russian presidency. In the wake of the Ukrainian independence movement in the summer of 1991, President Boris Yeltsin authorised his spokesperson, Pavel Voshchanov, to release a little known and largely forgotten press statement concerning the millions of ethnic Russians who would be stranded in the event of Ukrainian and Kazakhstani independence. During a subsequent press conference Voshchanov stated, "If these republics enter the union with Russia it is not a problem [...] but if they go, we must take care of the population that lives there and not forget that these lands were settled by Russians" (New York Times 1991). Voschanov recalled later that the contested areas included territories that had once belonged to Russia: Crimea and the Donetsk region of Ukraine, Abkhazia in Georgia, and the northern territories of Kazakhstan (Plokhy 2014). The framework of what would later become the Karaganov doctrine, the Russian right to intervene to protect ethnic Russians in its "Near Abroad," is evident in the Voshchanov statement.

The Karganov doctrine is echoed in the Russian constitution and has been further developed in recent years. Article 61, section 2 of the Russian constitution states, “The Russian Federation shall guarantee its citizens’ defence and patronage beyond its boundaries” – if needed by military force. Both the 2010 and 2014 military doctrines state that “the Russian Federation considers it legitimate to utilise the Armed Forces and other troops in order to [...] ensure the protection of its citizens located beyond the borders of the Russian Federation” (cited in Ball 2017: 15). More recently, it has appeared that Russia is willing to extend its protective shield not just to Russian citizens but also to ethnic Russians – in other words, to people of Russian descent but without Russian citizenship (see Coalson 2014; Conant 2014). This more comprehensive conceptualisation of who is Russian relieves the Kremlin from handing out passports to ethnic Russians in its “Near Abroad.” Russia might have thereby reacted to the critique of the international community, which roundly rejected this policy of *passportisation* as a credible legitimisation for Russia’s incursion into South Ossetia and Abkhazia in 2008. Overall, Russia denies the West any role in its “Near Abroad.” For instance, in its 2009 security strategy, Russia stresses “the need to resolve problems and crises on a regional basis, without the participation of non-regional forces” (Jackson 2010: 106).

Russia’s focus on its responsibility to protect ethnic Russians in neighbouring countries seems to indicate that Russia might not contest the Western parameters of humanitarian intervention on a global scale. Instead, it might simply reject the application of these parameters to its “Near Abroad,” replacing R2P with its own version of humanitarian intervention. If this version became a firmly rooted norm, the governments of neighbouring countries would feel obligated to protect the interests of ethnic Russians residing in their territories. Kazakhstan’s careful consideration of the interests of the large community of ethnic Russians in the country’s northern regions serves as an example (Schatz 2000).

Contesting R2P’s jurisdiction in the “Near Abroad” also enables Russia to more broadly challenge Western ideational hegemony on a global scale. To some degree, we have already seen this campaign in action, with autocratic regimes, including Russia, challenging Western notions of democratic rule and human rights (Bell 2000). Although it is unlikely that autocratic norms would gain much traction in the West, this scenario could still pose a threat to Western governments. It would indirectly promote autocratic rule through the weakening of Western norms and values, not just in Russia’s “Near Abroad,” but globally as well. Either way, Russia’s defence of ethnic Russians living abroad and its challenging of Western hegemony seem to indicate that the Russian leadership is engaging in the discourses of “identity” and “delimitation” that Kneuer (2013) considers part and parcel of autocratic regimes’ legitimisation practices.

Yet in assessing Russia’s normative agenda, Richard Sakwa (2011) argues that Russia is neither a “norm-taker” nor a “norm-maker.” It is merely attempting to find a balance between its national identity and existing international norms, ensuring “that all parties are equally subjected to [these norms] while excluding the instrumental use of [them]” (Sakwa 2011: 966). Against this background, the ideational justification of Russia’s intervention in

Ukraine in 2014 might deserve reconsideration. Western analysts usually dismiss Russia's reference to humanitarian norms as mere fig leaves used to cover its pursuit of material interests in the post-Soviet space. Alternatively, Russia's reference to exactly those norms that the West has cited to justify – for instance, its campaign against Serbia in 1999 – is considered an attempt by Russia to expose Western hypocrisies. In both instances, Western analysts imply that Russia has acted in an unprincipled manner, merely advancing its economic and security interests without a genuine regard for international norms. This might, however, be an incomplete conclusion. It might well be that Russia is not a norm-taker. Instead, it may be that Russia is a norm-maker because it is both contesting dominant understandings of humanitarian intervention and lobbying for an alternative version of it.

4 Tracing Communicative Trails

The previous section raised the possibility that Russia is an unconventional principled actor and that its justifications for its incursion into Crimea indeed reflect a normative, albeit illiberal, agenda. But how do we know if Russia acts as a norm entrepreneur specifically for an alternative version of humanitarian intervention? We cannot touch norms, we cannot measure them, and we cannot look into the heads of Putin and other Russian officials.

Finnemore and Sikkink (1998: 892) suggest that, “we can only have indirect evidence of norms [...] However, because norms by definition embody a quality of ‘oughtness’ and shared moral assessment, norms prompt justifications for action and leave an extensive trail of communication among actors that we can study.” Thus, we can examine the role of norms in the global arena by investigating how they are used (or not used) in rhetoric aiming to explain behaviour in that arena.

We therefore analyse this trail of communication. We have collected articles from major news outlets in approximately 20 countries which are primarily the G20 countries (excluding those with limited ties to Russia, such as Argentina), plus countries with larger ethnic Russian minorities that share borders with Russia (e.g. Kazakhstan and Georgia). We are interested in the global discourse, since the norm of interest, the humanitarian intervention norm, regulates behaviour in the global arena. Discussions about the global rules of the game primarily take place in English. This is evident when even Russia foreign policy elites, fiercely proud of their Russian language, have English translations of their arguments made available to global media sources. Thus, we have only included newspapers and news agencies that publish in English. Our search period encompassed 21 months (1 October 2013–30 June 2015). Since we were initially interested in the global discourse surrounding Russia's incursion into Crimea *and* Eastern Ukraine, the search query in Lexis-Nexus for all articles was: Russia AND (Crimea OR Donetsk OR Luhansk) AND (NAME OR ADJECTIVE OF COUNTRY) AND (President OR Prime Minister OR Chancellor OR Foreign Minister OR High Representative OR Secretary General). We later purged articles that focused exclusively on Eastern Ukraine. In the end, we included almost 600 articles for further analysis.

In examining these articles, we focused on longer direct and indirect quotes from top government officials of these 20+ countries and top officials from major international organisations involved in the conflict, such as the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (see Appendix I for full list of countries and organisations covered). The articles were then uploaded to a QDA software (Atlas.ti). Two graduate research assistants coded these articles, largely independent of each other.

In this section of the paper, we present the results of the QDA. The research assistants were asked to code Russia's justifications for its incursion into and annexation of Crimea (material and non-material/normative); responses to these justifications by officials from the countries and organisations named above (rejection and acceptance); Russian denial of its official military involvement in Crimea; Russian acknowledgement of material, reputational and other costs incurred on Russia due to international sanctions; Russian accusations of Western hypocrisy in response to Western critiques of Russia's actions in Crimea; Western incentives to induce a change in Russia's course in Crimea; and "interesting quotes" from officials that deserve further analysis. After several rounds of coding and discussions between the principal investigators and the research assistants to clarify ambiguities and confusion, the intercoder reliability scores have reached satisfying levels for most codes, from as high as 1.0 to around 0.6. However, the scores for a few codes were lower, ranging between 0.35 and 0.5.²

If Russia used humanitarian justifications merely to fend off penalties for materially motivated violations of the non-intervention norm, we would expect it to abandon them if they no longer served their purpose. That is, we would expect Russia to shift to other justifications after the issuance of threats or the imposition of sanctions or other costs to its material interests.

However, if Russia tried to advance a normative agenda, we would expect to observe a few discursive patterns. First, Russia would consistently make ideational justifications for its incursion into Crimea. Of course, we are particularly interested in justifications that resemble R2P language, but we have also considered other normative justifications. Second, we would observe Russia's repeated use of this rhetoric. Merely offering ideational justifications alone would not necessarily indicate norm contestation and norm entrepreneurship. The strongest evidence of Russia's normative actor status would be its willingness to continue its normative agenda even if penalties for its contestation and entrepreneurship efforts were imposed. Such fidelity would demonstrate a heightened level of commitment consistent with the literature's depiction of norm entrepreneurs.

We now present the results of the QDA. In doing so, we distinguish between two longer periods of the conflict (the prelude to the Crimean conflict and the period after the downing of MH 17) and two shorter periods that are separated by significant events: 1 October 2013 to the end of February 2014 (Ukraine revolution and beginning of armed clashes in Crimea);

2 The intercoder reliability scores are usually interpreted in the following way: < 0 less than chance agreement; 0.01–0.20 slight agreement; 0.21– 0.40 fair agreement; 0.41–0.60 moderate agreement; 0.61–0.80 substantial agreement; 0.81–0.99 almost perfect agreement; 1.0 perfect agreement. Variations in scores are partly due to the inherently subjective quality of this type of analysis. Hence the reason for using multiple coders and focusing our analysis on codes which had the highest intercoder reliability scores.

1–18 March 2013 (referendum and Crimean parliament’s vote to join Russia); 19–31 March 2013 (build-up of tensions in Eastern Ukraine); 1 April–18 July 2013 (Malaysian airliner downed); and 19 July 2013–30 June 2015.

Figure 1. Russian Justifications

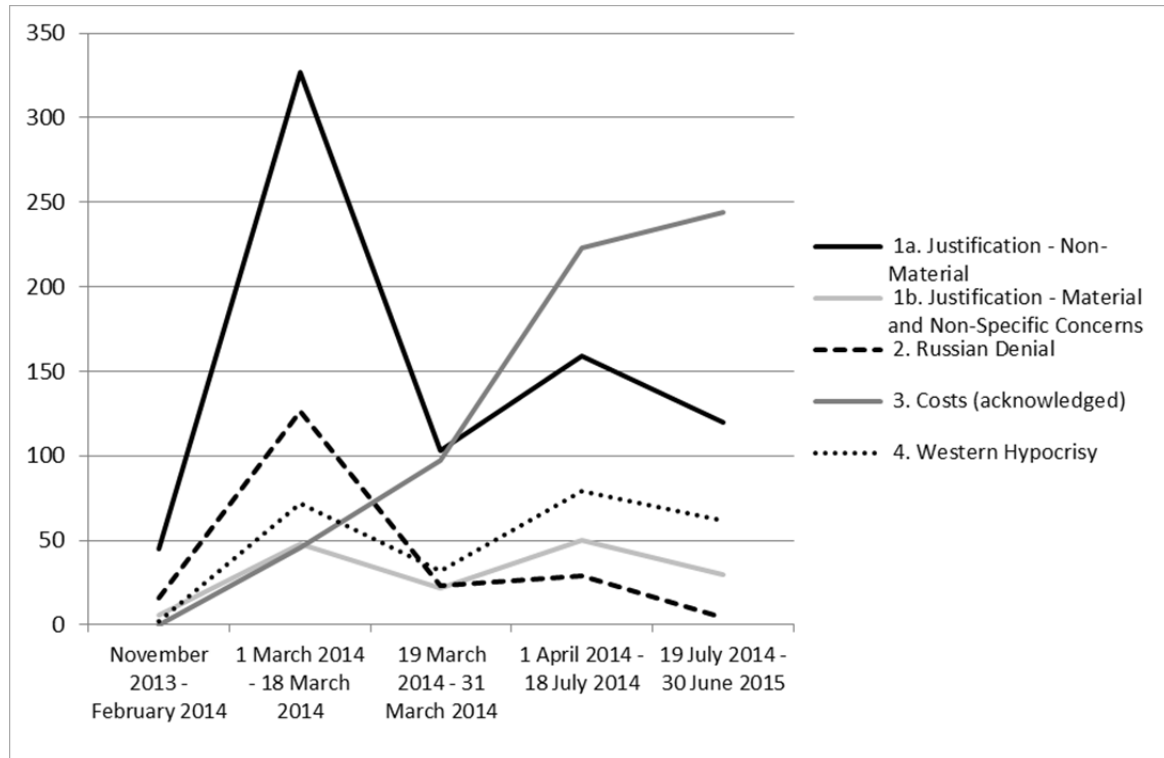
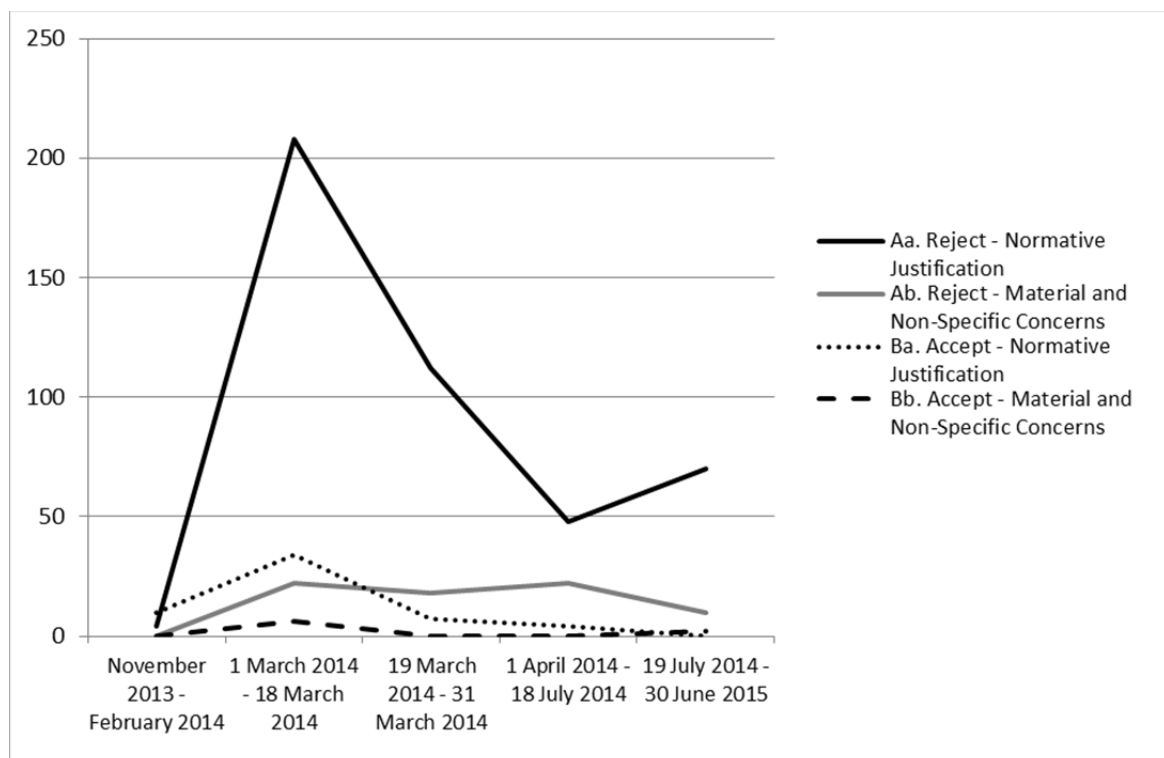


Figure 2. International Reactions



The two figures support the hypothesis that Russia is committed to its normative agenda. First, normative justifications far outweighed material justifications at every stage of the conflict. Second, this was the case even though the international community mainly rejected these justifications and imposed sanctions, the costs of which Russian officials publicly acknowledged. This is quite interesting considering the literature's emphasis on material interests as an impetus for Russian actions in the global arena. It appears that, given the extent to which these justifications are offered, the humanitarian case was an important one for Russia to make. It also appears that the material costs did not dissuade Russia from promoting its norm. These patterns indicate that Russia was quite dedicated to challenging the extant R2P doctrine and advancing its own version of humanitarian intervention. The frequency with which Russia acknowledged the material costs suggests as much. Russia may have been trying to enhance its credibility as a norm entrepreneur by demonstrating the lengths it will go to champion its norm. This pattern conforms to Finnemore and Sikkink's (1998: 897) description of norm entrepreneurs:

Deliberately inappropriate acts [such as violating non-intervention and R2P norms], especially those entailing social ostracism or legal punishment, can be powerful tools for norm entrepreneurs seeking to send a message and frame an issue.

Of course, Russia's leadership also gained from the annexation of Crimea. In the wake of the annexation Putin experienced a large bump in his domestic approval ratings, as did the Russian government; meanwhile, Russians' attitudes towards Europe and the United States plunged. However, the Russian government's ratings have since dipped considerably, and Putin's at least slightly. Attitudes towards Russia's main adversaries have also significantly improved (Levada-Center 2017). It was quite predictable that political gains at the domestic level would only be temporary. Economically, the annexation has been very costly – and that is not even considering Western sanctions (Berman 2015). It is unlikely that these costs caught Russia's leadership by surprise. Regarding security interests, Russia secured the port of Sevastopol where Russia's Black Sea Fleet is located. Yet Russia's right to keep its fleet in Sevastopol was never contested. In fact, in 2009 Ukraine had extended its lease to Russia until at least 2042. While the interactions between Ukrainian officials and the officers of the fleet were never easy, the Ukrainian government never questioned the legality of that lease.

And what exactly is the norm Russia has promoted? While we have not been able to sift through the hundreds of quotes yet, a cursory look at Russia's justifications reveals the skeletal framework of this norm. First, it could actually coexist with the non-intervention norm. This may seem surprising given the widespread allegation in the international community that Russia violated Ukraine's sovereignty (see below). In a nutshell, Russian authorities accused the opposition of having staged a coup against the legitimate government of Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich, who then had every right to ask for foreign help against this unconstitutional attempt to oust him from power. Thus, Russia was able to counter accusa-

tions of hypocrisy when its critics pointed to its actions in Syria. There, Russia has repeatedly prevented the international community from intervening on the grounds that doing so would violate Syria's sovereignty rights (among others). In Ukraine, Russia did not, in its eyes, violate these rights because the legitimate ruler gave his consent to Russian intervention (similarly to the case in Syria). Thus, it appears that at this moment, *Russia is advocating for consensual intervention*. This differs from R2P, which *permits coercive humanitarian action* under certain conditions.

Yet the main thrust of Russia's normative justification centred on the apparent anti-Russian stance of the ringleaders of the coup, whom Russian officials interchangeably called "nationalists, neo-Nazis, anti-Semites and Russophobes" (Putin 2014). This focus reveals the second element of Russia's humanitarian intervention norm. In the face of the threatened and actual assaults on ethnic Russians living in Ukraine, Russia claimed a moral and constitutional obligation to protect ethnic Russians and Russian citizens in Crimea. This justification does indeed closely resemble the language of the R2P doctrine, in that human security can form the basis for intervention in another state's territory. However, Russia's norm differs in that a much smaller community of vulnerable individuals might qualify for humanitarian assistance than would be the case under R2P. R2P permits states to engage in coercive humanitarian action anywhere that a grave situation of *massive* human insecurity exists, even if it does not involve their own citizens. For Russia, it seems that ethnic ties primarily determine who are the appropriate victims and intervenors.

Another difference is that Russia's norm enables unilateral action, whereas R2P requires UN Security Council approval for the humanitarian intervention to be legal under international law. It is interesting that Russia not only justified its incursion into Crimea with its responsibility to protect the Russian minority in Ukraine, but that it also denounced Western critiques of Russia's action in Ukraine as hypocritical. In doing so, it claimed Western countries had repeatedly engaged in humanitarian interventions without the approval of the international community (e.g. in Serbia and Kosovo in 1999). Russia thereby attempted to dismantle the normative legitimacy of the West on this issue while at the same time propping up its own normative agenda, which focuses on the protection of its own citizens. It is less clear, however, why Russia denied official military involvement until the very moment the annexation of Crimea was a *fait accompli*. It might have attempted to lay the normative foundation for its intervention before the international community started to focus on the actual developments on the ground. Yet, what is more significant is that Russia continued to make normative arguments once it had begun to make them, thereby abandoning its denials, which had accounted for a much smaller proportion of its entire rhetorical repertoire.

Most members of the international community rejected many of Russia's humanitarian claims, accusing Russia of impermissibly violating Ukraine's territorial integrity. Russia might have elicited stronger support for its position had anti-Russian violence been more

widespread, given that some members of the international community reacted sympathetically, at least initially, to Russian concerns for ethnic Russians in Ukraine.

Table 1. Foreign Support for Russian Normative Justification

	Aa. Reject Normative Justification	Ab. Reject Material and Non-Specific Concerns	Ba. Accept Normative Justification	Bb. Accept Material and Non-Specific Concerns
Armenia	n/a	n/a	3	n/a
Belarus	6	n/a	5	3
Canada	13	2	n/a	n/a
China	2	n/a	3	n/a
EU	32	6	3	n/a
France	9	n/a	6	3
Georgia	9	n/a	n/a	n/a
Germany	60	6	6	n/a
Japan	8	2	n/a	n/a
Kazakhstan	n/a	n/a	6	n/a
NATO	48	26	n/a	n/a
OSCE	2	n/a	n/a	n/a
Other Countries	25	10	9	n/a
Other Organisations	51	11	2	2
Poland	n/a	n/a	3	n/a
Turkey	18	2	2	n/a
Ukraine	62	13	3	n/a
United Kingdom	60	6	n/a	n/a
United Nations	9	n/a	3	n/a
USA	291	52	35	5

Consequently, at least at the beginning of the conflict, Western countries were somewhat divided over Russia's normative and even material justifications. While Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States, and all international organisations roundly criticised Russia for violating international law, Germany, France, and even Poland were more receptive to Russia's normative justifications. Unsurprisingly, Kazakhstan, with a large Russian minority, China, and some other countries (including Russia's ally in the Middle East, Syria) accepted the legitimacy of Russia's normative justifications. This acceptance might have emboldened Russian norm entrepreneurship, even in the face of Western sanctions. Yet given how normatively and materially powerful Russia's primary opponents are, the emergence of its norm is not certain. It may well fail to emerge as such.

5 Conclusion

Based on a preliminary QDA of the communicative trail surrounding Russia's incursion into Crimea, this paper suggests that Russia has pursued inter alia a normative agenda in its foreign policy. Furthermore, our research indicates that Russia is willing to incur material costs to pursue this agenda. This is not say that norms cannot ever further material interests. In

fact, norms can emerge for precisely that reason. After all, Western advancement of a liberal world order has certainly served the normative agenda as well as the material interests of Western countries. Today's autocracies have taken notice of the link between norms and material interests, and they are now challenging the normative hegemony of the West – for instance, by revealing Western hypocrisy. Thus, it may well be the case that Russia's entrepreneurship of this particular version of humanitarian intervention may be materially beneficial at some point. However, what we have shown is that Russia is also ideationally committed to this norm, such that it continues with its advocacy even when the potential material benefits have yet to offset the incurred costs. This is what the norms literature expects for norm entrepreneurs: their allegiance to a norm is generally unwavering, even if it undermines or does not further their material interests.

Furthermore, there is no doubt that the Russian government's understanding of humanitarian intervention has distinctive autocratic traits. Internationally, it acted unilaterally, undeterred by a lack of UN Security Council mandate. Domestically, it acted without prior parliamentary approval. While there are always exceptions (see the example of the United States in Syria below), this finding suggests close correlations between a norm entrepreneur's characteristics and the norm it promotes, especially if the norm entrepreneur is a state. Russia's behaviour in this instance has exhibited a deeply undemocratic streak, which has been accentuated by the fact that only Russia's top officials have been involved in the discussion and framing of the country's normative stance in international relations.

Whether Russia's version of humanitarian intervention will pass beyond the initial stages of the norm life cycle is an open question at the moment. As already mentioned, there are indications that it may fail to emerge. However, the US missile strikes in Syria in 2017 could ironically help it graduate to the next stage in the cycle. The United States claims that its unilateral military intervention was legitimate because it was motivated by humanitarian concerns that were accepted by a diverse group of governments, even though many legal experts considered it a violation of the non-intervention norm and the R2P doctrine. Such a significant reaction may indicate shifting global state attitudes about the non-intervention norm, in ways unexpectedly favourable to Russia's ideational agenda.

These findings and implications should encourage international relations scholars to theorise norms in new ways. Norms can encapsulate a wide range of content and can be promoted by a broad array of actors. Such insights, and the exciting possibilities for future research they inspire, are possible if there are concerted efforts to build bridges between disciplines. Rather than operating within segregated silos, interdisciplinary collaborations can reap important benefits for the scholarly enterprise.

These findings also ask scholars studying autocratic regimes to widen the scope of their studies when they look at autocratic diffusion and cooperation. Autocratic regimes might not just want to spread non-democratic rule beyond their (immediate) borders, be it for self-interested or ideological reasons (Weyland 2017). They might also want to change the ways

we think about what constitutes appropriate behaviour in international relations. And while we know that autocratic regimes have not been particularly successful in spreading non-democratic rule beyond their borders, despite strong regional patterns of authoritarian diffusion and cooperation (Bank 2017:1351; Brownlee 2017), they might be quite successful in contesting international norms.

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Appendix

I. Code Book

<i>X. Russia</i>	<i>Other Countries/Organisations</i>
	Y. Which country/organisation?
Justification (also in preparation, laying the ground for future justifications) Non-material justification: any reason given other than security or economic interests, such as being asked to intervene by the Yanukovich government or self-identity and protection of ethnic Russians, etc. Material concerns (mainly: security and economic concerns, but also non-specific concerns such as “strategic” concerns)	Rejecting Russia’s justifications Normative justifications Material and non-specific concerns
	Accepting Russia’s justifications Normative justifications Material and non-specific concerns
Denial Presence of Russian troops/weapons and/or of future action such as annexing Crimea or sending in troops	
Costs (acknowledged) Material, reputational, etc.	
Western hypocrisy In other words, if anyone violates international law and poses a threat to international security then it is the West (e.g. in Kosovo, Libya)	Incentives and support (offered to RUS to change Russian behaviour, such as withdrawing from Crimea or foregoing annexation/ referendum) Material (e.g. not imposing or withdrawing economic sanctions) Reputational/diplomatic
Z. Interesting quotes (write memo, but NOT in Atlas.ti, rather in a separate Word document)	

X. Russia

Y. Which countries and organisations? Armenia, Belarus, Brazil, Canada, China, European Union (EU), France, Georgia, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), South Africa, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United Nations (UN), United States, other countries, other organisations.

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