How to challenge an international order: Russian diplomatic practices in multilateral security organisations

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Abstract

Many policy and academic debates focus on the extent to which Russia is a revisionist power challenging the 'liberal world order'. However, there is little agreement on the primary motives explaining the behaviour of Russia, some pointing to her unsatisfied great power ambitions and neo-imperial ideologies, and others to genuine security concerns. Adjudicating those claims is important because of their policy implications for engagement and/or deterrence towards Russia. This article contributes to this debate through a theoretical contribution to practice-based approaches to International Relations. Using De Certeau's understanding of practices, it analyses Russian diplomatic practices in multilateral security organisations and illustrates how this helps infer foreign policy motives, contrary to the field-specific relationalism of Bourdieu-inspired practice approaches. Empirically, it builds on 126 interviews and participant observation in three multilateral security organisations (the United Nations, the NATO–Russia Council and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe). The article shows that at least since 2014, Russian diplomats in the three organisations consistently defend policies and use narratives that reveal more interest in status recognition, sometimes at the expense of security concerns.

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Introduction

Since the beginning of the Ukraine crisis, many commentators have analysed Moscow's foreign military activism and information warfare activities as part of a larger trend of mounting challenges to the international order. The language used to describe Russian foreign policy is predominantly derived from the realist school, usually describing Russia as a 'revisionist' power. However, 'revisionism' is not a foreign policy objective but a behaviour, and the main scholarly debate lies in explaining the motives underpinning Russia's activities. Area specialists are heavily divided on this issue, some pointing to Russia's unsatisfied great power ambitions and neo-imperial ideologies and narratives and others to genuine security concerns as explanations for Russia's behaviour. Adjudicating those claims is important, notably because of their policy implications: depending on whether status or security concerns are the dominating motives for Russia's behaviour, strategies of deterrence or engagement are more or less likely to succeed.

This article contributes to this debate through a practice approach. Looking at what Russian diplomats do and advocate across a variety of multilateral organisations provides a way to infer Russia's motives. However, this requires moving away from the Bourdieusian understanding of practices currently dominating the 'practice turn' and introducing Michel de Certeau's conceptualisation of practices as an alternative, thus showing that while some usages of practices can be consistent with diplomatic studies (looking at the emergent effects of the interactions between state representatives), the 'practice turn' can also be useful to foreign policy analysis (understanding states' motives). Empirically, the article builds on 126 interviews and participant observation at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the NATO–Russia Council (NRC) to paint a picture of Russian diplomatic practices. I show that at least since 2014, Russian diplomats in the three organisations consistently defend policies and use narratives that reveal more interest in status recognition than security management, which is useful to infer Moscow's currently dominating motives.

Assessing Russia's motives: the riddle wrapped in mystery

To be clear, the vast majority of Russia experts acknowledge that Moscow's motives are mixed, combining both status-seeking and security. Where they differ is in the relative weight of those two motivations: is security the dominating factor, or is it status-seeking (Paul et al., 2014; Ward, 2017a, 2017b; Wohlforth et al., 2017)? This has important consequences, as depending on whether Russia is predominantly a security or a status-seeking state determines which type of engagement is more likely to succeed: if Russia is primarily motivated by security, then finding cooperation mechanisms for alleviating Russian anxieties is possible, from exchanges of information to arms control agreements. On the contrary, if Russia is primarily motivated by status concerns, common ground will be much more difficult to identify: status concerns are relational and often satisfied at the expense of other actors (Lebow, 2010; Renshon, 2017).

Several analysts converge on identifying status as the dominating motive for Russian foreign policy (Clunan, 2009; Hopf, 2009, 2016). For example, Neumann (2017) argues

that while Russian identity has historically been defined as being in relation to Europe, with Russia's perception of the West having a strong influence on its foreign policy (Tsygankov, 2012, 2015), two narratives were in competition after the fall of the USSR: one in which Russia would 'westernise' and move towards a full-fledged capitalist democracy, and another according to which Russia 'should rather be seen as the only vital remnant of the true Europe that today's false Europe once was' (Neumann, 2017: 177). The domination of the second narrative over time led to a 'superiority complex', which makes it 'hardly surprising that today's dominant stories of Russian superiority to Europe coincide with a policy of confrontation' (Neumann, 2016: 1383). Those narratives were made possible because of the frustration related to the loss of great power status after the end of the Cold War, and the failure of reformist politicians to increase the living standards of many Russians, thus facilitating the rejection of the western liberal model (portrayed as an odd foreign import), and the 'rediscovery' of endogenous norms : 'Russia had its own core values. These were patriotism, collectivism, *derzhavnost* —a tradition of being a great geopolitical state power that commands the attention of other countries—and *gosudarstvennichestvo*, the primacy of the state' (Ostrovsky, 2017: 264).

This grievance was aggravated by a number of western military activities perceived as humiliations, such as the Kosovo intervention in 1999. Although it can be argued that hostile perceptions of the West were already largely present in Russian policy circles before the conflict began (Marten, 2018), it was a turning point in western–Russian relations, which permitted to default back on blaming the old American enemy for Russia's miseries (Gudkov, 2017).

Moreover, the evolution of the international system in the post-Cold War era created a deep contradiction between Russia's self-understanding as a great power and its perception of the way it was treated (Deyermond, 2016; Walker, 2018), thus leading a frustrated Russia to claim a greater status in the international system (Heller, 2014; Smith, 2014), a desire especially acute because of a sense of relative loss of status over time (Freedman, 2016). Several authors emphasise the 'humiliation' that followed the end of the Cold War and political elites' desire to take their revenge and reshape an international order that was rigged against Russia, which could explain the current confrontational policies (Larson and Shevchenko, 2014; Lukyanov, 2016; Tsygankov, 2014) in a country which strongly associates status with military power (Renz, 2018). This frustration was correlated with the gradual influence of nationalist and neo-imperialist ideas and personalities among power circles (Kolstø and Blakkisrud, 2015; Kuzio, 2016; Shlapentokh, 2014), which fed a neo-imperialist foreign policy (Dunn and Bobick, 2014; Kivelson and Suny, 2016; Laruelle, 2012; Oskanian, 2018; Toal, 2017). Other discourses and representations, such as an insistence on protecting the 'Russian world' (Engström, 2014; Feklyunina, 2016) and a revival of a traditional 'geopolitical' mind-set emphasising zero-sum games and competition (Auer, 2015; Guzzini, 2012), also contributed to justifying and legitimising a gradually assertive Russia. Several arguments thus identify status-seeking as the primary motive behind Russian foreign policy.

However, other Russia specialists, while acknowledging the ideological changes in the Russian regime, contend that the primary driver of Russian foreign policy is security. Russia's actions, as aggressive as they may seem, could be explained because Russian leaders fear for the survival and territorial integrity of their country, as a result of a

combination of the geopolitical challenge of defending the borders of such a vast territory, historical experiences of invasion and a perception of encirclement triggered by western double-speak and military activities. Such analysts point to a combination of factors that were bound to trigger a Russian reaction: a feeling of betrayal after a 'broken promise' of not enlarging NATO, the US abrogation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2002 and western military operations in Kosovo, Iraq and Libya. Combined, these western activities have created a feeling of insecurity in Moscow: 'The West had been moving in Russia's backyard and threatening its core strategic interests, a point Putin made emphatically and repeatedly' (Mearsheimer, 2014: 77–8). The 'broken promise' of not expending NATO after the Cold War has an important place in this line of argumentation: western countries claim that no official pledge was ever made, while Russia asserts that the tone and spirit of the negotiations were indicative of such a promise (German, 2017; Kramer, 2009; Sarotte, 2014; Shifrinson, 2016). Therefore, while wrapped in a language of 'humiliation', the primary motive behind Russian behaviour would be a feeling of threat which western countries declined to take into consideration: 'for Moscow the enlargement of NATO (particularly in tandem with the EU's enlargement) is seen in a negative light as a danger to Russia, with the potential to become a multiple political and military threat' (Monaghan, 2016: 76). The second factor perceived as threatening is what Moscow considers to be a western hypocrisy in the implementation of major arms control treaties. The main bone of contention is the US withdrawal of the ABM Treaty and the decision to build a ballistic missile defence, which Moscow interpreted as a hostile move directed against its nuclear deterrent capability (Giles, 2015; Lily, 2014). This was compounded by a gradual frustration with other nuclear and conventional arms control mechanisms, including the Treaty on Intermediary Forces (INF)[1], the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty or the Vienna Document, Russia perceiving western diplomatic efforts as attempts to undermine Russian security (Anichkina et al., 2017; Kühn, 2013; Williams, 2016). The third trigger of Russian insecurity is what was perceived as a reckless western military interventionism in Kosovo, Iraq and Libya, seeding chaos and instability (Makarychev and Morozov, 2011; Sakwa, 2017; Tsygankov, 2001), and in general the western practice of selectively complying with rules of international law (Sakwa, 2019). The combination of those strategic threats pushed the Russian authorities towards a policy of competition, as the West misunderstood that its activities were deemed to be perceived as hostile (Charap and Colton, 2017; Lo, 2015; Rosefielde, 2017).

Another source of insecurity is related to the kleptocratic and authoritarian nature of the regime itself (Dawisha, 2015; Ledeneva, 2011; Zimmermann, 2014). Russian elites want to remain in power to keep enjoying the material and symbolic benefits of the corrupt Russian economy, which incentivises the regime to conduct an aggressive foreign policy in order to beneficiate from the 'rally-around-the-flag' effect and build up nationalistic support for the authorities (Mendras, 2014). This would be related to Putin's concern that instability leads to disaster, and that order must be preserved in order for political communities to strive, which leads him (and other Russian elites) to be weary of popular movements and interpret them as being orchestrated by hostile foreign powers (Hill and Gaddy, 2015). In those accounts, whether they emphasise structural, regime-type or personal factors, security is the primary motive underlying Russian foreign policy.

As mentioned earlier, most authors recognise that Russian motives are mixed: experts differ in the relative weight they assign to either status-seeking or security as a fundamental motivation. Moreover, the relative weight of each motive can change over time. However, this assessment is crucially important in order for western countries to calibrate a Russian policy which does not increase the risks of conflict and, ideally, would reduce them. In order to adjudicate these competing claims regarding the fundamental motives behind of current Russian foreign policy, I introduce a practice-based analysis of Russian diplomacy in multilateral security organisations, albeit different from most practice research until now. The objective is to study what Russian diplomats do in multilateral settings, showing that this is an indicator of the Russian government's motives. The core finding is that Russia's foreign policy is currently mainly guided by status concerns, notably an ambition to be recognised as an indispensable actor by western countries. This status concern leads Russia to adopt policies in multilateral institutions designed to underline Russia's critical importance, sometimes at the expense of strategic stability. My argument is limited to post-2014 Russian foreign policy and I acknowledge that other motives may have been dominating in the past or may be dominating in the future. Tracing the evolution of Russian diplomatic practices over time will then be important to assess changes in the dominating motives of Russian foreign policy.

A practice-based approach to foreign policy

The basic approach shared by practice scholars is to 'take an account that starts in paying attention to what actors do and say, and how these activities are embedded in larger arrangements' (Bueger and Gadinger, 2014: 14). Practices can be defined as 'socially meaningful patterns of action, which, in being performed more or less competently, simultaneously embody, act out, and possibly reify background knowledge and discourse in and on the material world' (Adler and Pouliot, 2011: 4).

One approach dominates the study of national and multilateral diplomacy: Bourdieusian praxeology (Adler-Nissen, 2012; Mérand and Pouliot, 2008; Sending et al., 2015). Bourdieu's approach requires a 'field' in which agents compete for symbolic and social positions, but Bourdieu himself failed to produce a general theory of fields (Fabiani, 2016; Fligstein and McAdam, 2012), which led him to study already established and clearly delineated fields. Transposed to the study of international politics, this approach very often leads to closely associate a field with a particular site (Neumann, 2013), through the study of specific ministry of foreign affairs (Lequesne, 2017; Pouponneau and Mérand, 2017), embassies (Cornut, 2015) or multilateral organisations (Adler-Nissen and Pouliot, 2014; Bicchi and Bremberg, 2016; Cooper and Pouliot, 2015; Schmitt, 2017; Wiseman, 2015).

Because of their relationist epistemology, Bourdieu-inspired practice approaches have a natural connection to diplomatic studies (Pouliot and Cornut, 2015), understood as the study of the emergent effects of the interactions between diplomats (Murray et al., 2011). However, such an approach has an important shortcoming. By looking at the constitution of a social order in a specific site through the interplay of a multiplicity of practices ('relationalism') (McCourt, 2016), it somehow depoliticises diplomatic interactions by over-focusing on the 'how' of diplomacy at the expense of the 'why' (state's motives)

(Bueger and Gadinger, 2015). It is true that interactions in a specific site sometimes create unexpected outcomes for states, but stopping the analysis at this stage tells ultimately very little about the ideological, political and normative motives underpinning politicians' objectives and the way they are translated into specific policies (and instructions for diplomats) by the bureaucracies. In short, while there is a tendency among practice theorists to treat relationalism as an epistemology (Jackson and Nexon, 1999; Qin, 2018), there is both a theoretical and an empirical value to treat it as an analytical choice (Wight, 2006). And while I agree with Rebecca Adler-Nissen (2015) that diplomats find International Relations theories 'strange', I also argue that an epistemology combining narratives, practices, strategies and tactics in order to approximate national governments' intentions and instructions (as introduced below) is actually much closer to a diplomatic experience than a narrow focus on relationalism and could be a more fruitful way to engage the discussion with policy-makers: an important part of a diplomat's work is to assess the intentions and instructions of her counterpart.

In order to better grasp states' motives through a practice approach, it is interesting to borrow from Adler's theory of world ordering. Adler introduces a 'cognitive evolution theory', defined as an 'evolutionary collective-learning process that takes place within and between communities of practices and through their action in their broader material and social environments' (Adler, 2019: 24). Summarising all of Adler's book goes beyond the scope of this article, but he makes three helpful analytical moves. First, he establishes communities of practices as the main vehicle through which practices are maintained and transformed, while eventually shaping a new social order. Communities of practices are defined as a 'community of people that creates the social fabric of learning and a shared practice that embodies the knowledge the community develops, shares, and maintains' (Adler, 2019: 20). Second, these communities of practices are never fixed: they are the locus of negotiation and contestation, which lead to the 'selective retention over time of collective meanings of reality in practices, thus, also in a community of practice's background knowledge' (Adler, 2019: 168). In turn, this selective retention leads to the evolution of social orders.

Third, and consequentially, normative and practical change within community of practices occurs through the actions and practices of practitioners themselves. Yet, unlike the Bourdieu-based practice literature which considers the habitus/background knowledge as largely tacit, 'practitioners reflect on their practices much more often than the Bourdieu-based literature concedes' (Adler, 2019: 204). Hence, a more agential perspective justifies taking into consideration the actors' strategies, as will be discussed below.

What are the consequences of this approach for understanding Russia's motives?

First, the focus on communities of practices is important. As sites of multilateral diplomacy, international organisations are a key place for the establishment and reproduction of multilateral pecking orders (Pouliot, 2016). But the diplomats posted in these international organisations belong to at least two communities of practices: their own community of fellow national diplomats (in which they acquire background knowledge about the national interest and defend certain national objectives in a certain way)

and the site-specific multilateral diplomatic community (in which their own national affiliation grants them a specific status in the hierarchy but where they have to learn how to competently perform a number of site-specific practices in order to achieve their objectives). While studies have examined how being embedded in a site-specific community of practice shapes diplomats' understanding of their national interest (which in turn contributes to the negotiation and contestation of what the 'national interest' is within their own national community of practice) (Sending et al., 2015), I am here interested in how national diplomats, acting under their ministries' instructions, negotiate and contest the practices of the site-specific community of practice, and what the modes of contestation they self-reflexively employ tell us about foreign policy motives. The conduct of foreign policy is never perfectly coherent and neatly coordinated, but there is always an attempt to do so. Thus, when studying the foreign policy of countries in which fieldwork is difficult (such as Russia), approximating motives requires analysing the work of diplomats across sites, in order to identify (in) consistencies and parse out what is site-specific and what amount to patterns of rhetoric or of actions from which to infer motives. In other words, in order to approximate the background knowledge on the national interest of the Russian diplomats' community of practice (and in turn infer Russia's motives), it is necessary to observe the way Russian diplomats negotiate and contest the social order within the site-specific community of practice.

The second consequence of taking Adler's approach seriously is to justify a focus on the practitioners, as vehicles of change in community of practices. Because practitioners are reflexive, we can conceptualise a room for agency in which practitioners purposefully and strategically employ certain practices in order to achieve a desired effect. This desired effect is determined by the instructions they receive from their ministries, but the implementation is a function of the site-specific community of practices' accepted patterns of action and the practitioners' own competent performance. Interestingly, while Adler acknowledges that practitioners negotiate and contest order within their own community of practice, he is silent on *how* they do so. I argue that borrowing from Michel de Certeau's work on practices is a fruitful way to conceptualise the ways through which practitioners negotiate and contest order, and thus infer foreign policy motives.

In English, Michel de Certeau is mostly famous for *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), and the *Mystic Fable* (1992). Some International Relations scholars have used De Certeau, often in an effort to combine narratives and practices, but attempts at mobilising his concepts are rare and are more focused on the making of diplomacy at the expense of the motives for states' actions (Guillaume, 2011; Neumann, 2012). However, it is possible to mobilise De Certeau's concepts to study foreign policy, especially in cases where primary intentions are not easily available for research like in the case of Russia's foreign policy. When de Certeau initiated the research on cultural practices that led to *The Practice of Everyday Life*, he intended to distinguish himself from the cultural criticism of the Frankfurt school or the situationists, who criticise the over-normalising effect of the cultural industry for creating 'social idiots' only able to consume pseudo-cultural gadgets. On the contrary, de Certeau insisted on the tricks, creativity and intelligence of the actors to differently appropriate and reinvent their consumption of cultural products, thus looking at the margins and the interstices between the intended norms and

their appropriation in practice. De Certeau makes an important distinction between 'strategies' and 'tactics', in a definition worth quoting:

> I call a strategy the calculation (or manipulation) or power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a place that can be delimited as its own and serve as the base from which relations with an exteriority composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed. (. . .) A tactic is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. No delimitation of an exteriority, then, provides it with the condition necessary for autonomy. The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. It does not, therefore, have the options of planning general strategy and viewing the adversary as a whole within a district, visible, and objectifiable space. (. . .) It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of "opportunities" and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids. (. . .) It is a guileful ruse. (De Certeau, 1990: 59–61)

Strategies have two key dimensions. First, they relate to the constitution of an internal order through a differentiation between the inside and the outside: the 'subject with will and power' is not prior to the strategy, it is by practicing a strategy that it is constituted as a subject differentiated from others. Second, strategies are fundamentally an attempt to coordinate a multiplicity of activities related to the engagement with the outside: they are about regularities and control. Tactics differ from strategies through their ability to subvert established orders and conventions from the inside. Successful tactics are about seizing the right moment, what De Certeau conceptualises in reference to the Greek concept of *Metis* (Neumann, 2002). Skilful tacticians can understand and exploit the right timing for their actions, when they will have the maximum effect. Finally, De Certeau distinguishes between discursive strategies and discursive tactics, the former being about narratives (how activities are emplotted into a cohesive story) and the latter about linguistic games (rhetorical figures, alliterations, play on words, puns, etc.). I acknowledge that there is more to De Certeau's sociology than the strategy/tactics distinction, but I argue that focusing on these concepts is a fruitful way to contribute to a study of foreign policy anchored in practices.

   Diplomats in multilateral organisations must reconcile the instructions from their ministries (the 'subjects with will and power') with the specific constraints of the multilateral organisations they are posted to. Therefore, they mediate a *strategy* (their governments' objectives and instructions) through specific *tactics*, more or less appropriate to the organisation they belong to.

   For diplomats, the tactics are a way to contest and negotiate the social order of the international organisation, with the aim of advancing the broader objectives defined by their ministry. While observing diplomats' practices in different institutions, it becomes possible to disentangle the practices specific to this institution (the tactics) and those revealing the broader strategy, defined in the capital and enacted with more or less talent in multiple sites. It is thus possible to differentiate between a cohesive narrative found across multiple institutions and thus reflective of the strategy (and ultimately of the motives), on the one hand, and the specific linguistic games tailored to each institutions'

Table I. Varieties of diplomatic practices.

Practices	
Strategy (consistent across sites)	*Tactics* (Sites-specific)
Narratives	Linguistic games
	Coups

indigenous vocabulary, as well as the other 'coups' diplomats perform on the other. Therefore, we should empirically observe a consistent strategy across sites (and therefore similar narratives) and site-specific tactics (including linguistic games and coups), as shown in Table 1. It should then be possible to infer the motives from the observation of the strategy, and how it is enacted in tactics.

Therefore, in order to establish the primary motives behind Russia's foreign policy, I have conducted a study of the Russian diplomatic practices in three institutions: the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the NATO–Russia Council (NRC). Those three institutions are interesting, because they differ in how they institutionally and socially advantage the Russian representatives. Being a permanent member of the UNSC obviously gives Russia important power within the UN system. Similarly, the OSCE is a consensus-based organisation, and Russia can count on a number of allies from the former Soviet bloc to support Moscow's policies, although there is no higher authority equivalent to the Security Council in the UN system. On the contrary, the NRC was created as a discussion forum between NATO and Russia, and NATO members coordinate their positions in advance of the NRC meetings: the Russian representative is then alone against a (in principle) unified bloc. Because they vastly differ in how Russia can exert power, those three institutions are a good comparison to observe what belongs to the realm of Russian strategy, in particular towards western countries[2], and which tactics are specific to each institutional setting.

The empirics have been gathered through a total of 126 interviews under the condition of anonymity. Thirty-nine interviews were conducted at the NRC, 42 at the OSCE and 45 at the UN. Eight-seven interviews were conducted with diplomats from 32 different countries, from the secretary to the ambassadorial level, including 21 Russian diplomats, 34 diplomats from 'western' countries and 31 diplomats from 'non-western' countries (such as countries from the post-Soviet space at the OSCE or non-permanent members of the UNSC). Thirty-nine interviews were conducted with international staff in those organisations (9 at the NRC, 14 and the OSCE and 16 at the UN). Including 'non-western' diplomats and international staff in the interviews was to avoid basing the data collection exclusively on western and/or Russian perspectives. Of course, considering the specific make-up of the NRC, diplomatic interviews there only involved either 'western' or Russian diplomats, but I was able to attend a meeting of the NRC, thus conducting a brief ethnographic observation to complement the interviews. The time period is 2015 to 2018, and thus covers the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the Syrian crisis. This amounted to 1617 pages of transcribed interviews which I complemented with the available recording from UNSC meetings and the available Russian diplomatic

statements and communiqués in the three organisations, which I analysed in order to connect the identified practices with broader narratives.

There are limitations to use interviews in order to reconstruct practices: 'Interviews primarily provide post-hoc rationalisations by practitioners that have rightfully been criticized to provide little clues about actual practices' (Bueger and Gadinger, 2014: 89). One way to mitigate this problem was that I was not necessarily asking interviewees about their own practices, but the practices of others. By training and function, diplomats interact in highly ritualised environments and are experts at gathering information from social contexts. Breaks in the patterns of discourses and actions or Russian diplomats (or establishment of new patterns of discourses and actions) are then likely to be picked up by their colleagues. If certain patterns of Russian diplomats were regularly coming up in the interviews with diplomats from different countries, I considered that it was an indication of a likely practice. I could then ask Russian diplomats about those: I thus first gathered information about practices, and then co-interpreted practices with someone who enacted them and would probably not have mentioned them as it would have been self-evident to her. Hence, I systematically triangulated sources of information to identify a practice, combining interviews with non-Russian diplomats, interviews with Russian diplomats and open sources such as available recording of meetings, communiqués and briefings. I also conducted a short ethnographic observation at the NRC. This combination of method allows me to best approximate the practices in the three organisations, considering the limited access to diplomatic environments. In order to best preserve the anonymity of the diplomats I interviewed, I have limited direct quotes to a minimum. Those I decided to include in the text were carefully selected as particularly telling (for example, a specific narrative) and/or representing a broad consensus (and not simply one interviewee's perspective). Hence, while it may read as a narration, the reconstruction of Russian diplomatic practices established in the remainder of this article is thus done through a careful triangulation and based on a diversity of sources. In the empirics that follow, I first establish the main narratives advocated by Russian diplomats, because the narratives are related to the strategy and should be consistent across sites. I then turn to the analysis of the site-specific tactics, notably linguistic games and coups. I am not trying to assess whether the strategy and the tactics are *effective* (in terms of being successful at modifying social orders to Russia's liking), but rather what they say about Russia's motives.

Russian diplomatic practices in multilateral organisations

The NATO–Russia Council

The NRC was established in 2002 as a replacement for the Permanent Joint Council, which was created by the 1997 NATO–Russia Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security. It was conceived as a mechanism for cooperation and consensus-building, with monthly meetings at the ambassadorial level. Since the 2014 Russian aggression against Ukraine, NATO suspended all practical cooperation with Russia within the NRC framework, while keeping channels of communications open in the NRC at the ambassadorial level (and above), and some military-to-military contacts. Three meetings

took place in 2016, three in 2017, two in 2018 and two in 2019, this low number being a sign of the intensity of the political divergences between NATO and Russia.

In terms of narratives, one of Moscow's main objective seems to have NATO allies forgetting about Ukraine, treat it as a fait accompli and re-establish 'normal' relations. The Russian narratives strongly insist on the necessity for the NRC to resume normal work as soon as possible, since it would be in everyone's interest to resume strategic discussions on major security issues. One of the issues pushed forward by the Russian part is the possibility of NATO–Russia cooperation against terrorism: jihadism would be the 'real threat' and focusing on Russia would be both unfair and counter-productive in the face of the real security challenges. For example, in an interview, a Russian diplomat declared that 'it is odd for Western states to treat Russia as an enemy, as if we were committing attacks and killing innocents in the streets of Paris'[3] (a reference to the 2015 jihadist attacks in France). This narrative coexists with, and partly contradicts, a second one devoted to explaining the breakdown in NATO–Russia relations. Russian officials insist on the fact that Ukraine crisis is a consequence of NATO's expansion 'disrespecting Russia', and that the hopes generated by the NATO–Russia founding act have been shattered by NATO enlargements. While apparently contradictory (seeking cooperation while blaming the other side), these narratives are actually both revelatory of status concerns: Russian diplomats express a strong displeasure at perceiving being treated as if they were mere terrorists by NATO countries, while at the same time blaming NATO for not taking into account Russia's particular status in post-Soviet Eurasia. In both cases, the semantic fields of Russian exceptionality and disrespect are mobilised.

The specific linguistic games and coups (tactics) used by Russian diplomats reflect this contradiction between the narratives of cooperation and a constant blaming of the West. For example, after the resuming of the NRC meetings, the Russian delegate took the habit of holding a press conference in which he would publicly and in very strong terms criticise NATO, sometimes misrepresenting the substance of the discussions at the NRC meetings (regardless of the quality of such meetings), and actively used Twitter to post strong anti-NATO messages. This new media tactic combines a coup (Russia had never held a press conference after NRC meetings before the Ukraine crisis) and linguistic games in support of the narrative of blaming NATO.

Yet, the Russian delegates' tactics are heavily dependent on the broader relationship with the United States. The December 2016 NRC meeting, following President Trump's election, was unanimously considered a success as the Russian delegates seemed willing to engage, probably hoping that once in office, President Trump would drastically change the US policies regarding Ukraine. The post-NRC press conference comments by the Russian ambassador were as usual very critical of NATO, but the tone of the private meeting was more encouraging. However, in 2017, observing that the US policies had not changed much, the Russian delegates resorted to familiar tirades squarely putting the blame on NATO for the poor state of relations: this observation is consistent with the literature emphasising Russia's objective of being treated as a great power equivalent to the United States.

Russian delegates try different coups, for example by probing individual countries, notably those that are deemed more susceptible to break consensus (Hungary, Spain, France, Germany and Greece). For example, during an NRC meeting, the Russian delegate asked the Greek representative how Athens could tolerate being so aligned with her

'tormenters' (in this context, Germany as the leading European country willing to impose financial austerity measures on Greece following the Greek debt crisis). However, NATO allies have so far successfully coordinated their messaging, which has created a degree of frustration: one Russian diplomat candidly admits that they 'would prefer if NATO allies worked as individual nations instead of 29 against 1'[4]. Another way for Russian diplomats to try to break NATO unity is through a tactic of overtly showing contempt for the former Warsaw Pact countries which joined the alliance. In terms of linguistic games, the Russian delegates do not hesitate to use selectively presented historical facts to try humiliating or provoking central and eastern European allies, for example by associating them with Nazism or claiming that they are not 'real countries'[5]. In an interview, a Russian diplomat was surprisingly forthcoming about using such language: 'yes, it might be stretching diplomatic conventions, but sometimes, they [central and eastern European allies] have it coming'[6]. An example of coup was the studied effort to avoid meeting with the Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, General Petr Pavel, from the Czech Republic. In the framework of the existing military-to-military contacts still open despite the suspension of NATO–Russia cooperation, the Chairman of the NATO Military Committee was authorised to reach out to his counterpart in the Russian armed forces, General Gerasimov, who initially declined. He then offered only one time-slot while General Pavel was visiting Georgia, knowing full well that the Chairman was already committed and would be forced to decline the Russian proposal. However, General Gerasimov invited his American counterpart, General Dunford, to a meeting in February 2017, on the same day as the meeting of the NATO defence ministers. This effort to reach out to the US general while clearly avoiding the Czech was a signal that Russia, despite its rhetoric calling for meaningful cooperation, was more interested in bilateral relations with the United States than a cooperation with NATO. As a Russian diplomat declared, 'better talk straight to the big fish'[7].

The topics under discussion during the past NRC meetings are also an important indicator of Moscow's intentions. Agenda-setting is always an important aspect of multilateral diplomacy, and the NRC agenda is no exception to the rule (Voeten, 2011). During the first two meetings of 2016, there was an agreed-upon agenda between Russia and NATO, consisting of three items: Afghanistan, risk reduction and Ukraine. However, from the meeting of December 2016 onwards, Russia made a coup by refusing to establish a formal agenda. A Russian diplomat explained in an interview that the rationale was that 'it was useless to formalize the fact that we will always have the same conversations about Ukraine'[8]. In other words, the coup was an attempt to deny the Ukrainian crisis as a subject worthy of discussion, following the Russian interest to bet on a 'Ukraine fatigue' among western countries. Confronted with the Russian refusal to adopt a formal agenda prior to the meetings, NATO's Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottemoeller coordinated in advance with Russian ambassador Grouchko and had NATO's Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, send a letter of invitation to the Russian delegate containing the exact three items as in the previous meetings, thus being an agenda by any other name. The Russian delegates have not diverged from those three items in subsequent meetings, suggesting that the appearance of not endorsing Ukraine as a worthy subject in an official diplomatic document was more important than the content of the discussions. In another coup, the Russian delegate invited NATO delegates to observe a Russian military exercise in Crimea, knowing full well that no NATO country recognises the annexation of the

Table 2. Russian diplomatic practices at the NATO–Russia council.

Strategies	Russia is an indispensable actor and must be 'respected'		
Narratives	Resuming 'normal' relations	NATO is entirely responsible for the breakdown of relations	
Tactics	Displaying appearances of cooperation through technical issues	Breaking NATO's unity	Mobilising public opinion
Linguistic games	• Emphasising the importance of anti-terrorism cooperation • Underplaying the importance of the Ukraine crisis	• Insulting Eastern European allies	• Criticising NATO • Misrepresenting discussions
Coups	• Refusing the establishment of a formal agenda • Discussions on transponders data at the NRC • Refusing to brief on Russian military activities • Invite to observe exercises in Crimea	• Probing individual Allies • Refusing to meet with Eastern European officials	• Holding press conferences • Use of Twitter

NRC: NATO-Russia council.

peninsula, and would thus be sending delegates: asked about this in an interview, a Russian diplomat ironically declared 'NATO countries claim that Russia is dangerous, but refuse invitations to travel to *Russia* and see by themselves'. Here again, we can observe an attempt to sanitise the Ukraine issue under a disingenuous cooperation offer.

Threat reduction is also a contentious issue. Russian delegates have used this item to advance the idea that better information should be shared on transponders data in order to deconflict the airspace between Russia and NATO territories and reduce the risk of accidents that could escalate into a military confrontation. However, allies consider that the NRC is a political forum and offered to move this discussion on transponders to appropriate technical forums, which Russia declined. It is likely that discussing the transponders issue was a coup designed to foster the appearance of cooperation, in order to sanitise the underlying political oppositions between NATO countries and Moscow. Other discussions with far-reaching security implications under this item have been more tense. At the March 2017 meeting, a Russian briefing on military transformation in Russia was more aggressive in tone, the Russian delegate spending '75% of the briefing blaming NATO for the crisis, while saying very little about the subject matter'[9], another illustration of the narrative of criticising NATO. Similarly, while NATO countries asked the Russian delegate to provide information on the Zapad 2017 exercise (which raised several concerns in NATO countries), the Russian response was that a briefing would only be provided 'on the day of the exercise': this NRC meeting is then particularly representative of the Russian delegates' efforts to portray Russia as a great power, disrespected by NATO's actions and engaging when and if it wishes, and exclusively on its terms.

As Table 2 illustrates, Russia has an overall conflicting narrative of blaming NATO for the breakdown of relations over Ukraine, while seemingly willing to resume 'normal' relations over terrorism issues, which reflects major status concerns. The specific tactics of linguistic games and coups also support this analysis, Russian delegates being more

interested in the appearance of cooperation (thus in line with status concerns) than actual security engagement over substantial issues.

The OSCE

The OSCE is active in all fields of security: political-military, economic and environmental and human. It thus deals with arms control, confidence-building measures, human rights, democratisation, counter-terrorism, etc. It has a membership of 57 states, including Russia as well as Central Asian and North American countries. It has two routine decision-making structures, the Permanent Council (PC) and the Forum for Security and Cooperation (FSC), which meet in Vienna on a weekly basis.

Since the beginning of the Ukraine crisis, the conflict has been a major point of contention at the OSCE, which was the only multilateral forum bringing together all parties. Like at the NRC, the general narrative pushed forward by Russian delegates is that western countries are solely to blame for the Ukraine crisis, as they allegedly failed to 'respect' Russia. Exactly like at NATO, Russian delegates are keen on showing an interest in as many technical cooperation as possible, for example on counter-terrorism. Yet, an important narrative is based on moral equivalence, with Russian delegates insisting that Russia may not be perfect, but western countries are no better and probably worse. This is narrative is perfectly summarised by a Russian diplomat in an interview, who declared: 'the West think they know better than anyone else and that they can tell us what we should be doing in order to be a proper country, according to them. But they should have a hard look in the mirror, and I don't think they would like what they see'[10]. Again, this is revelatory of status concerns and attempts to protect Russia's reputation.

Different tactics sustain this overall narrative. The first consistent Russian tactic observed is the fact that Russia denies being a party to the conflict in Ukraine (despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary and Vladimir Putin's own admission of that fact) and denies the term 'aggression', thus calling the situation an 'internal conflict' in both the PC and the FSC. Complementing this language game, Russian diplomats use several coups. For example, there is no 'Ukraine' item on the PC agenda, but the Russian delegate always manages to make this point in one way or another. This is facilitated by the fact that while speeches at the PC are supposed to be five minutes long, this rule is not really enforced, and the Russian delegate routinely speaks for 20 minutes or longer. However, at the FSC, Ukraine is on the agenda, which leads to a scripted interaction repeated every Wednesdays. First, the Ukrainian delegate has the opening statement, usually a list of accusations of Russian-supported rebels violating the Minsk II agreements. This is followed by a statement from the European Union representative[11], usually supporting Ukraine. Following are statements from the United States and Canada, strongly supportive of Ukraine. Finally, the Russian delegate has the closing statement, which is the mirror image of the Ukrainian, blaming Ukrainian troops for violations and incidents. When making such statements, the Russian delegate uses insulting rhetorical devices also observed at NATO: for example, insisting on the level of alcoholism and corruption in Ukraine as an effort to discredit the country, or associating the current regime with alleged Nazi roots. A typical linguistic game for Russian delegates is to routinely mix real and fake information in their oral statements, forcing other delegates to scramble their notes when they hear a new piece of information as they do not know

whether it is something they have overlooked or if it is simply made up. As a result, some allegations and insinuations are left unanswered, as western/Ukrainian delegates cannot answer everything. Interestingly, OSCE members are encouraged to produce a written version of their oral statements for the OSCE database, which Russia never does, thus preventing from fact-checking their allegations.

Regularly, some countries raise the issue of human rights in Russia. As a counter-tactic, Russia attacks those countries on apparently derivative topics, raising concerns about freedom of press in France or the United States, accusing the Baltic states of treating their Russian-speaking population as 'non-citizens' and Germany of discrimination against its elderly, or being seemingly concerned about children's rights in Norway. As one diplomat from the post-Soviet space summarises it, 'they find a topic which no one thinks has any purchase, but they claim to be concerned by it, just so they can criticize the EU or the US'[12]. This tactic of muddying the waters is consistent with the overall narrative: the point is not that much to claim that Russia is superior to western countries, but to argue that western countries are no better than Russia. A Russian diplomat explains: 'why should we be the only ones to be always accused of everything bad? Is there no corruption in Western countries?'[13]. As part of the linguistic games being deployed, Russian diplomats blame western diplomats for 'politicising issues' whenever topics such as Ukraine and human rights are raised. The semantic of 'politicisation' is interesting as it introduces a distinction between 'technical issues', on which engagement would be legitimate (because allegedly Russia cannot be criticised), and 'political issues' that should be avoided because Russia could be challenged. In line with the attempts at establishing moral equivalence, Russian delegates have been pushing for defunding the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) for some time, officially in order to 'rebalance' the OSCE activities towards 'hard security', but also because they are dissatisfied with the ODIHR's focus on the post-Soviet space (Russian delegates have also advocated an ODIHR mission in the United States).

An important activity for the OSCE is conventional arms control, since it is the organisation responsible for the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (also called CFE Treaty), the Open Skies Treaty and the Vienna Document (VD). Those three arms control agreements were not initially conceived as part of a coordinated mechanism but were independent initiatives (Falkenrath, 1995; Jones, 2014). However, in combination, they establish an overarching conventional arms control framework in Europe. In 2016, Moscow blocked initiatives to re-issue an updated version of the VD, while withdrawing the four proposals it had previously circulated in relation to the modernisation of the document. Russian diplomats argued that the political climate was not permissive for such negotiations and have since then declined to engage on any update of the VD. To justify this coup, Russian officials used the language game of blaming western countries for the situation and have since 2014 declined to engage in risk-reducing measures. For example, the official Russian justification for blocking the re-issuance of the VD is worth quoting:

> the fate of the Vienna Document is *inseparable from the general situation regarding European Security*. (. . .)

> For some reason, our distinguished colleagues are not bothered that the *adoption of a new version of the Vienna Document would send a false political signal* that everything is rosy in this area and that we are harmoniously implementing optimistic plans from five or six years ago as if nothing happened.

(. . .) We can envisage prospects for the modernization of the Vienna Document 2011 *only if the North Atlantic Alliance abandons its policy of containment of Russia, recognizes and respects Russian interests, and restores normal relations with the Russian federation, including in the military sphere.*[14]

This statement is entirely consistent with the narrative pushed by Russian delegates in other multilateral forums. Russia links together developments in confidence and security-building measures with a broader discussion on the European security architecture, most notably NATO, in a language perfectly consistent with the narrative of an ever-expanding NATO disrespecting Russia (Sokolosky, 2017). This is a long-standing Russian claim and objective in the OSCE framework, and Russian foreign policy has regularly argued for a reshuffling of the European security architecture which would grant Russia its 'due'. The current Russian lack of interest in engaging western countries on security issues is further demonstrated by the Russian diplomats' attitude towards the informal reunions organised by the FSC chair. Those meetings are conceived as back-channels to voice concerns and discuss security issues in a more direct manner. However, Russian delegates simply don't attend such meetings[15]. This is consistent with the coup observed at the NRC of refusing to discuss Russia's military posture[16]. Table 3 summarises the Russian diplomatic practices observed at the OSCE.

The UN Security Council

Being a P5 member, Russia is of course in a powerful institutional position at the UN. The general narrative developed by Russia is to follow a very traditional line and to

Table 3. Russian diplomatic practices at the OSCE.

Strategies	Russia is an indispensable actor and must be 'respected'		
Narratives	The West is no better than Russia	The West is entirely responsible for the breakdown of relations	
Tactics	Muddying waters	Denying Russian involvement in the Ukraine crisis	Refusing to engage on arms control
Linguistic games	• Deflecting blame • Creating false equivalencies • Blaming the 'politicisation of issues' • Lauding technical cooperation	• Calling it an 'internal conflict' • Blaming/insulting Ukrainian delegates • Making false statements	• Blaming NATO's policies
Coups	• Defunding ODIHR	• Speaking longer than scheduled at the PC • Refusing to provide written versions of oral statements	• Refusing to re-issue the Vienna Document • Refusing to participate in informal discussions at the FSC

OSCE: Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe; ODIHR: Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights; FSC: Forum for Security and Cooperation.

emphasise the defence of sovereignty above anything else. Therefore, the default Russian position is to oppose anything that could appear as a potential foreign interference in the affairs of a sovereign state, as well as any expansion of the role and responsibilities of the UNSC. For example, when Senegal was elected as a non-permanent member of the UNSC, it tried promoting an agenda titled 'water, peace, security', which was originally blocked by the Russian diplomats in New York for being too 'untraditional'[17]. By the same token, Russia is extremely reluctant to develop more robust peacekeeping operations and continuously argues against it on the ground of respecting states' sovereignty. Similarly, the Russian intervention in Syria, which could be couched in the language of international law and the defence of sovereignty (with the Syrian government officially inviting Russia to intervene), was easy to justify for the Russian diplomats. This approach is consistent with the Russian focus on status and the importance of states in global governance, which obviously favours Russia within the UN system.

As part of this strategy of maintaining the UNSC 'as it was in 1945'[18], Russian delegates use a number of tactics. An example of coup is to consistently block all attempts to have the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights officially briefing the UNSC, and being added as such to the agenda, arguing that human rights issues are not a concern for the UNSC, which should focus on the more important task of managing international security. The High Commissioner is nevertheless invited by other countries, but the briefing does not constitute an official agenda item. However, in March 2018, Moscow went a step further by organising a blocking minority to prevent the High Commissioner to discuss human rights in Syria (always under the same argument that the UNSC should not be discussing human rights at all), an escalation in the previous practice of refusing to put the briefings on the official agenda. This attention to keeping the UNSC as traditional as possible goes down to etiquette. In 2013, the French ambassador to the UN proposed to introduce two measures to facilitate the collegiality and the spirit of cooperation between the P5: first, that during the private meetings of the P5 (which precede the public recorded session), ambassadors would be authorised to remove their jackets (while obviously keeping their ties on for men); second that ambassadors would address each other on a first-name basis. Both initiatives were declined by Russia, which wanted to preserve 'the dignity of the council': status concerns are evidently related to protocolary issues. As one Russian diplomat explained: 'I know that French people like pretending they are casual; but this is the UNSC after all!'[19].

When it comes to negotiating specific resolutions, Russian delegates are considered as not being in the spirit of finding 'a final compromise' and do not resort to 'constructive ambiguities' in order to escape a deadlock. It is a classic diplomatic tactic for a delegate to argue that a specific suggestion may be 'crossing the capital's red line', while actually having more flexible instructions. Yet it seems that it is not the case for Russian diplomats, who adopt an attitude of 'giving nothing until further instruction'. In practical terms, it creates a very clear division of labour between the First Secretary and the Ambassador: the First Secretary spends all his time cementing the Russian position with increasingly intricate legal arguments, and then the Ambassador decides when to compromise. Therefore, this tactic emphasises the importance of the Ambassador and of the plenary meeting of the UNSC (instead of more junior committees), again illustrating the importance Russia grants to maintaining a traditional UNSC. However, the Ambassador himself

Table 4. Russian diplomatic practices at the UNSC.

Strategies	Russia is an indispensable actor and must be 'respected'	
Narratives	Keeping a traditional council	Sovereignty must be defended
Tactics	Undermining attempts of change	Applying procedures to the letter
Linguistic games	• Emphasising the authority and dignity of the council • Limiting discussions to 'traditional' security issues and 'high politics'	• Protecting countries' 'internal' affairs • Accusing western countries of undue interferences
Coups	• Blocking discussions on human rights • Maintaining traditional etiquette	• Blocking resolutions on chemical weapons in Syria • No compromise until further instructed • Refusing more robust peacekeeping

UNSC: United Nations Security Council.

can sometimes misestimate his own room for manoeuvre. On at least three different occasions, compromises over resolutions related to Syria were found, only for the Russian Ambassador to be overruled by Moscow in the end, which instructed him to veto the resolutions: this is an excellent example of how the Ambassador competently performed his duties within the site-specific community of practice but misread the background knowledge about the national interest within his national diplomatic community of practice.

Syria is a major issue being discussed at the UNSC, which also reveals strong political oppositions. An important game-changer occurred in 2017 when Russia successively vetoed a resolution renewing the mandate of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to investigate chemical attacks in Syria, and circulated a draft resolution seeking to overturn procedures on how OPCW inspectors worked and how their findings were shared. This coup surprised many members of the UNSC, particularly other P5 members. As one diplomat explains: 'Russia had always been a serious partner in the fight against chemical and biological weapons. With those decisions, they seem to put their defense of traditional sovereignty above the shared interest of protecting the non-proliferation regime'[20]. The same situation occurred in April 2018 when Russia vetoed a US resolution asking for an investigation after a chemical attack in Duma (Syria) caused several dozen civilian casualties. Russia supported a concurrent resolution, the main difference with the US one being that Moscow wanted to ensure that it would have control over the selection of the investigators, and that the UNSC (and not the investigation team) should be in charge of establishing responsibilities for the attack. This is consistent with preventing any inference in Syria's 'internal' affairs and maintaining the pre-eminence of the UNSC (which is a major element of Russia's great power status), here at the cost of further undermining the regime regulating chemical weapons (Wirtz, 2019) (see Table 4).

Conclusion

This article has shown the value of combining Adler's understanding of change in social orders with De Certeau's approach to subversive tactics. Adler points to the fact that change occurs through the action and practices of practitioners, which shape the

background knowledge of a specific community of practice, and De Certeau is useful to study what those actions and practices might look like.

In the case of Russian delegates in multilateral security organisations, there is first a cohesive narrative being implemented across all organisations, according to which western countries are trying to contain Russia and undermine the sovereignty norm: Russia would then be forced to play the role of the gatekeeper of the international order. This narrative is revelatory of a broader strategy and ultimately of the fundamental motives of Russian foreign policy. It is consistent with analyses arguing that Russia actually retains what most western states consider an outdated understanding of the international system (Krickovic and Weber, 2018) and places an important emphasis on status considerations. The importance of US–Russia bilateral relations on the Russian delegates' willingness to cooperate, and the Russian attention to decorum, combined with an undermining of arms control regimes, signals that being taken seriously is currently a more important concern than strategic stability for Moscow, and that specific tactics are part of a broader effort to change the social order within multilateral organisations towards carving a special place and role for Russia. This attempt to shape the background knowledge of the communities of practices (making it closer to the background knowledge of Russian diplomats) is implemented through specific tactics: Russian delegates are regularly angry when they perceive their 'indispensable' role as being contested. This is particularly the case against former Warsaw Pact countries having joined western organisations, Russian delegates consistently using derogatory (and sometimes openly threatening) language. They also reject accusations by trying to find dubious moral equivalencies on human rights issues and express frustration towards the human rights agenda in general. All this is consistent with explanations emphasising the traditional 'great power' concerns (and background knowledge) of Russian elites combining a highly hierarchised understanding of the international system (in which spheres of influence are considered normal), a geopolitical mind-set of zero-sum game, and an identity narrative organised around an opposition towards the 'West'. The consistency of the narratives and tactics employed in various multilateral security organisations thus signal a clear attempt to change social orders through specific tactics. Future work in this area could use this theoretical approach in order to observe key attempts at transforming social orders in multilateral settings, ultimately leading to the evolution of international orders themselves, such as the diplomacy of the countries part of the non-aligned movement during the Cold War, or the rise of US unipolarity after the Cold War. It can also be used to study how changes are resisted by other actors and how diplomats use delaying tactics to maintain existing orders.

Russia's priorities since at least 2014 are then concentrated on status concerns, Moscow demonstrating that it is willing to undermine strategic stability (and thus its own security) in order to satisfy those ambitions. The consequence is that western countries have to face a massive dilemma when interacting with Russia. Since status satisfaction is established as the primary motivation for Russia's current behaviour, the classical means used to mitigate security dilemmas (transparency, arms control) are unlikely to influence Russian foreign policy. But accommodating the Russian concerns for great power status is equally problematic. First, those concerns are never explicitly stated, and there is no such thing as a list of potential accommodations that would have to be satisfied to appease the relations. Second, even if western countries were willing to adopt some policies designed to appease

Russia concerns (probably a combination of veto power given to Russian in some western organisations, drastic weakening of NATO, abandon of human rights advocacy), the likely implications would be grim. Considering the nature of Russia's definition of 'great power status', the risk would be different from a traditional security dilemma in the sense that adopting policies of accommodation would not necessarily invite a Russian military aggression, but would nevertheless de facto undermine western states' security through a decline of their material power and their normative influence.

Looking at Russian diplomatic practices is then important in order to contribute to the assessment of Russian motivations. This analysis shows that most forms of engagement with Russia which western countries would be willing to initiate will likely fall below Moscow's expectations to be treated as it feels it deserves. Therefore, the current tensions are likely to be a normal mode of interaction, with brief improvements being rapidly reverted as they will not be considered sufficient by Moscow to alleviate its status concerns.

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Notes

1. The United States has accused Russia of violating the INF Treaty, and announced it would quit the agreement by August 2019.
2. In the context of this article, 'western' refers to a configuration of countries identifying each other as close partners (because of historical or institutional settings and shared international practices) but are also identified by Russian representatives as 'western'. The list thus depends on the context, including all NATO members at the NRC, NATO+EU members and countries such as Switzerland at the OSCE, and those countries plus Australia or New Zealand at the UN.
3. Interview, Brussels, June 2017.
4. Interview, Brussels, June 2017.
5. Interview, Brussels, June 2017.
6. Interview, Brussels, June 2017.

7. Interview, Brussels, June 2017.
8. Interview, Brussels, June 2017.
9. Interview with a western diplomat, Brussels, June 2017.
10. Interview, Vienna, November 2017.
11. At the OSCE, EU member states coordinate their positions in advance of the PC and of the FSC.
12. Interview, Vienna, November 2017.
13. Interview, Vienna, May 2018.
14. OSCE, 'Statement by the Delegation of the Russian Federation', 834th Plenary Meeting, FSC Journal No. 840, 9 November 2016. Emphasis added.
15. Interviews, OSCE, March 2017.
16. The author has also witnessed such refusals to discuss Russia's military posture in track 1.5 events.
17. Interview, New York, April 2018.
18. Interview, New York, November 2017.
19. Interview, New York, April 2018.
20. Interview, New York, April 2018.

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