

Emotion Norms and International Securitization in Foreign Policy Analysis: The Official Russian Narratives on the Ukrainian-Russian War

Mustafa Gökcan KÖSEN

PhD Candidate, The Institute of Political Science, University of Technology Chemnitz, Chemnitz
& Department of International Relations, İstanbul Bilgi University, İstanbul
E-Mail: gokcan.kosen@bilgi.edu.tr
Orcid: 0000-0001-5949-1615

Ş. Gökçe GEZER

PhD, Department of International Relations, İstanbul Bilgi University, İstanbul
E-Mail: gokce.gezer@bilgi.edu.tr
Orcid: 0000-0002-8222-0749

Abstract

Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) literature overlooks the role of emotion norms and narratives towards international audiences in the securitization process. This article addresses these two under-explored aspects of the securitization framework in FPA. First, it investigates the role of the international audience, a crucial yet largely under-theorized component in securitizing moves. Second, it analyzes the emotion norms intertwined with speech acts that construct the Russian Federation's position towards international audiences by leveraging various emotions. In doing so, this research deconstructs the speeches of Russia's permanent representative to the United Nations (UN), Vasily Nebenzya, on the Ukraine-Russia war, targeting international audiences, particularly at the UN. It also explores how securitizing moves are linked with emotion norms to frame the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Russophobia in Nebenzya's narratives at the UN in 2022, before and after the Battle of Kyiv.

Keywords: securitization, international audiences, emotions, Russophobia, NATO

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Introduction

Securitization, a key tool for understanding foreign policy dynamics, transcends political rhetoric by framing issues as national security matters and justifies extraordinary measures. However, a crucial gap exists in understanding how emotions influence securitization, especially in differentiating between domestic and international audiences. These audiences have distinct perspectives and interests, significantly affecting the securitization processes. Emotions play a pivotal role in this process, shaping how security issues are perceived and accepted (Mercer 2010). From this perspective, a broader emotional range enhances a

narrative's ability to resonate with audiences, creating diverse meanings and captivating them more effectively (Cupac 2021). Thus, the different characteristic features of emotions play an impactful role in understanding how security policies are framed. Securitization appears to be closely linked to the interaction between narratives and emotions, as it often involves the use of emotions to shape how threats are framed for a particular audience.

This research examines the relationship between emotions and narratives in securitization, focusing on how they are utilized in targeting specific audiences. It argues that the emotional dimension, intertwined with narrative construction, is critical in shaping security dynamics and framing perceived threats. By examining the narratives of the permanent representative of Russia to the United Nations (UN) on Ukraine since 2020, particularly surrounding the Kyiv battle, this article explores two underexplored aspects of Russia's international security narrative: 1) how the permanent representative of the Russian Federation to the UN, at the time being, constructs Ukraine as a security threat and 2) how this narrative is tailored for an international audience. This study aims to dissect the emotion norms underpinning this process, offering insights into the complex relationship between emotions and securitization in foreign policy. This analysis will focus on identifying the emotional norms embedded in securitizing moves of security actors and how these norms are conveyed. Additionally, it challenges the literature that views securitization as solely targeting domestic audiences, proposing instead a broader perspective that acknowledges the complex interplay between domestic and international audiences in shaping foreign policy outcomes.

From this perspective, the war between Ukraine and the Russian Federation serves as a compelling example of how securitization can be constructed for an international audience. This research scrutinizes how Russia's securitizing moves incorporate emotion norms to delineate boundaries in the context of the conflict. Specifically, it examines how Russia leverages emotion norms to influence international audiences, encouraging them to align either with Russia or against it. The securitizing moves by Russian elites, particularly the permanent representative to the UN, play a crucial role in demonstrating how emotion norms are strategically employed in shaping narratives for an international audience, thereby offering insight into the broader use of emotions in securitization efforts toward international audiences. This research argues that Vasily Nebenzya, Russia's permanent representative to the UN, constructs emotion norms through securitizing moves, but how these norms resonate with international audiences is beyond the scope of our discussion here. Instead, the analysis centers on how Nebenzya employs emotions to advance Russia's securitization agenda, leaving the audience's reception as a separate research agenda beyond the scope of this study.

This paper first develops a theoretical framework that connects security, emotions, and narratives, emphasizing the concept of emotion norms as socially constructed expectations. It then explores the underexamined role of international audiences in securitization, emphasizing how the United Nations serves as a platform. The last part analyzes the selected speeches by Russia's UN representative through qualitative discourse analysis method, focusing on how recurring themes are strategically constructed to influence international perceptions and establish emotional norms.

A Theoretical Intersection: Security, Emotions and Narratives

Security is closely linked to emotions, extending beyond immediate responses to threats. This relationship involves a wide spectrum of feelings that influence perceptions of security issues before and after securitization. Emotions may reveal underlying beliefs, justify policies, and shape political perspectives. This perspective allows us to argue that emotions are a crucial component that informs and shapes the concept of security. Research shows that emotions significantly impact views on political developments (Widmann 2021), influence identities (Mercer 2014; Solomon 2015), affect political and security practices (Danchev 2006; Åhäll and Gregory 2013), and even shape the use and perception of hard power tools and political instruments (Löwenheim and Heimann 2008). Policymakers can leverage the socially constructed nature of emotions (Koschut 2018a) to cultivate specific emotions within their audiences, such as humiliation (Fattah and Fierke 2009), anger (Linklater 2014), and threat (Van Rhythoven 2015). This manipulation fosters shared meanings and norms around specific phenomena closely intertwined with establishing and enforcing social norms.

Social norms, defined as widely accepted behaviors within groups (Cialdini et al. 1990; Cialdini and Trost 1998), strongly influence social and political change, often outweighing individual beliefs (Paluck 2009; Portelinha and Elchereth 2016), particularly in conflict-affected societies (Miller and Prentice 1996). Emotion norms, a subset of social norms, involve perceptions of the prevalence or desirability of emotions within a group regarding specific events (Hochschild 1979; Thoits 2004; Vishkin et al. 2023). Emotion norms play a particular role compared to group-based, collective, and socially appraised emotions. While group-based emotions are personally experienced due to an individual's membership in a group (Smith et al. 2007), emotion norms govern the expectations around how emotions should be expressed within that group (Koschut 2018b). Emotion norms can also be distinguished from collective emotions, which arise from shared experiences. While collective emotions reflect the feelings of a group (Goldenberg et al. 2020), emotion norms establish the standards for which emotions are deemed appropriate or acceptable within these collective contexts (Rose et al. 2006). This process often reinforces or challenges the existing emotion norms within the group. In this way, emotion norms play a significant role in shaping the emotional landscape by establishing standards for emotions across various social and collective contexts.

Understanding emotion norms offers an alternative lens for examining how these norms influence both personal experiences and public expressions, shaping what emotions are deemed appropriate in specific contexts (Hochschild 1979; Thoits 2004). Emotion norms arise from the confirmation or disconfirmation of behaviors and guide individuals in expressing emotions that align with socially defined situations (Rose et al. 2006). It also offers a framework for understanding how policies guide audiences. In other words, emotion norms establish societal rules dictating acceptable emotions within a group, defining boundaries and expectations (Hochschild 1979). Consequently, emotions can profoundly shape people's perceptions of emotion norms, influencing the understanding of prevalent and desirable emotions within a group concerning a conflict and opposition (Hochschild 1979; Thoits 2004; Vishkin et al. 2023).

Emotion norms are instrumental in fostering and maintaining cohesion and stability within a group. These norms function as an affective bond, reinforcing solidarity among members of a security community and contributing to the stabilization of the social order within such communities (Koschut 2014). Emotion norms might be shaped and enforced by political elites, who establish these norms as criteria for defining acceptable group membership. Adhering to such norms becomes essential for being recognized as a group member or feeling in the same way, directly influencing the construction of group identity, defining who belongs and who does not (Thomas et al. 2009). For instance, Koschut (2014) explores the implementation of emotion norms within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), depicting it as an emotional security community. On the other hand, appropriate emotions may become a facilitator of conflict-promoting policies. Emotions such as hate, anger, and fear are often linked to public support for aggressive or security-driven responses. Hate, particularly when fueled by a belief in the inherent evil of an outgroup, tends to foster backing for policies of expulsion or eradication (Halperin 2011; Fischer et al. 2018). Similarly, anger stemming from perceived injustices can lead to aggressive actions (Berkowitz 1989), while fear, triggered by perceived threats, frequently drives support for security-enhancing measures (Haner et al. 2019). Although anger and fear can be constructive in certain contexts, they are often intertwined with conflict escalation and the legitimization of hostile policies (Halperin 2015). These emotions, shaped and manipulated within political discourse, play a critical role in shaping public attitudes toward conflict and security.

Securitization theory merges foreign policy interests with a discursive framework, with discourse being the most effective method for studying securitization (Buzan et al. 1998; Lupovici 2016; Sjöstedt 2019). Performative functions, encompassing practices, context and power relations (Balzacq 2011), explain how an issue becomes extraordinary politics (Roe 2008). This perspective underscores that any threat can be constructed through emotions and narratives, as securitization requires framing and context. While language and practices shape context and construct threat perceptions (Balzacq 2011; Browning and McDonald 2013), emotions play a crucial role in shaping how these threats are presented and directed toward audiences. Emotions not only influence how an issue is characterized and justified but also interact with narratives that become central to the discursive process of securitization. Thus, both emotions and narratives work in tandem to frame threats and legitimize security measures.

The narrative components align with the four dimensions of securitization: the securitizing actor, the referent object, the securitizing move, and the audience. The securitizing actor functions as the narrator, effectively portraying the securitized issue's characteristics, akin to describing characters in a story and their roles as threats or reasons for securitization. This actor constructs the threat and guides emotions, both as a stimulus generator and transmitter, allowing for the instrumentalization or manipulation of emotions. By targeting specific emotions like fear, anger, or pride, the actor frames an issue as an existential threat. This actor typically possesses the platform, power, and authority to construct and disseminate the threat image (Sjöstedt 2024). While political leaders frequently act as securitizing actors, narrators similarly deliver speeches to audiences.

Another interplay lies in the relations between emplotment, characterization and the referent object. Both indicate the perceived threat, the entity being threatened, or the issues being securitized, along with the rationale behind the development towards security. For example, in the case of securitizing borders, emplotment, and the referent object may elucidate the reasons, attributions of credit or blame, and objectives such as waging war or declaring full mobilization to protect the referent object, the borders. This perspective highlights that framing the referent object delineates the boundaries of the securitized issue, another facet of narrative characterization. The securitizing actor connects the issue with others, providing insight into the decision-making process to construct the threat image. This constitutes the securitizing move. Characterization also clarifies the means employed concerning the referent object and its labeling. However, the result of the securitizing move and the specific audiences needed to deem the issue securitized remain ambiguous (McDonald 2008).

In this context, security policies are closely intertwined with emotions and how these emotions are communicated to an audience. Beyond mere narration, the integration of emotion norms suggests that emotions play a key role in delineating emotional boundaries when security issues are at stake. Policymakers strategically employ various emotions to position their groups in a conflict, and to influence allies or potential allies by prescribing how they should feel and express their emotions. In this regard, the audience becomes essential, as policymakers may select different audiences to tailor emotion norms with specific securitizing moves and objects. The relationship between the securitizing actor and the audience is central to determining which emotion norms are embedded within the securitization narrative. This research focuses on how emotion norms are constructed, rather than solely on how they resonate or achieve success with the audience. However, the role of the audience, particularly the international audience, may influence the securitization narrative that incorporates emotion norms. This further exemplifies how securitizing moves are directed toward international audiences, integrating emotion norms into the broader framework of security discourse.

An Underexplored Sphere of Securitization: International Audience

The securitization process is consistent across domestic and foreign policy contexts, but the role of audiences, especially international ones, and how narratives are tailored to them remains underexplored (Baysal 2020). The audience's role has drawn significant attention due to its contested importance in successful securitization. Buzan et al. (1998) emphasize the audience's pivotal role but lack clarity on its specific nature and scope. They suggest the audience should be "significant" and that an intersubjective relationship must exist between the audience and the securitizing actor. This relationship centers on normative "values", indicating that securitization is an active negotiation between the securitizing actor and the audience. However, they do not sufficiently address who constitutes the audience and whether there are limits to the target audience in identifying a securitization move.

Various articulations assess the audience's role in securitization, but flexibility in conceptualizing the audience remains central. Balzacq (2011: 2) distinguishes between

philosophical and sociological approaches. The sociological approach requires a contextual understanding of the audience, defined by the securitizing actor's target, allowing for multiple audiences and types of affirmation. Two types of audiences are identified: formal audiences, which adopt extraordinary measures and provide formal legitimacy (Balzacq 2005: 184), and moral audiences, which provide moral legitimacy (Dizdaroğlu 2023: 15). In domestic audience securitization, distinguishing between the two types is easier due to reliance on formal legislative institutions for decision-making, while public opinion provides necessary moral support. Internationally, the audience often acts as a moral audience providing a platform for delivering securitizing moves. But they also function as a formal audience, such as in UN Security Council (UNSC) decisions on interventions and decisions or NATO's protective measures. Recognizing this allows for analyzing securitization without automatically referring to domestic audiences. Considering international audiences this way, securitization as a foreign policy tool can be analyzed across multiple political levels, both domestic and international.

The audience plays a central role in legitimizing securitization, but its function differs between domestic and international contexts (Buzan et al. 1998). In domestic settings, audience approval is crucial for policy decisions and extraordinary measures. On the international level, audience acceptance influences compliance with actions, even those violating norms like military intervention. The last component of narratives, the setting provides context for the securitized issue by revealing its background, historical analogies, and stakes (Salter 2008; Oppermann and Spencer 2016). This is because the securitization process is inherently interactive, with threats and responses being shaped by the interplay between actors and audiences (Sjöstedt 2019). The power to frame any entity as a threat (Sjöstedt 2019) further highlights the audience's crucial role in securitization.

From this perspective, the audience is not merely a passive recipient but a central player in securitization. The success of securitization hinges on the audience's characteristics, as the securitizing actor tailors narratives and emotional appeals to resonate with specific groups. This deliberate construction of narratives and emotional targeting can legitimize the securitizing move or the broader securitization process. Only through the audience's validation and acceptance of the securitizing actor's framing of an issue as an existential threat can the issue ascend the security agenda, allowing for implementing extraordinary measures otherwise deemed unwarranted (Buzan et al. 1998). On the international level, while the audience's role can be limited in terms of approval as a moral audience, enclosing a securitization narrative on an international platform is crucial for countries. Especially, major global powers like Russia are integral in shaping the global security agenda and their foreign policy choices are debated on these platforms.

The UN, as an international audience, provides an ideal context for analyzing how securitization narratives are constructed and communicated to international audiences, particularly within the General Assembly and the UNSC. Both can be considered as international audiences because they reflect the interests of various national representatives. These platforms offer insights into how the audience's role can vary by dividing into three distinct streams; problem, policy, and politics (Leonard and Kaunert 2011: 65-68). In the

problem stream, the audience comprises other decision-makers involved in the policy-making process. The policy stream consists of specialists and technocrats, who are influenced by arguments rooted in knowledge, rationality, and efficiency. Lastly, in the political stream, the audience includes decision-makers and the public, with factors such as public opinion playing a crucial role in shaping and influencing policy outcomes.

Within the UN framework, three audience streams can be identified. The “problem” stream remains constant, consisting of government officials and political elites. The “policy” stream, often shaped by national representatives, varies, while the “politics” stream includes governments whose decisions in the UNSC directly affect public opinion worldwide, beyond institutional boundaries. This shows how UNSC decisions influence international perceptions. These streams, within the structure of the General Assembly and UNSC, facilitate the pursuit of different security narratives, with nations aiming to explain and justify their positions (Hultman 2013). Securitizing moves are aimed at other nations, with the international audience playing a crucial role in legitimizing stances and delineating allies and adversaries. The following section examines Russian political discourse in 2022 to analyze how emotion norms were strategically employed in securitizing Ukraine for international audiences.

Method and Data

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which began in 2014, escalated significantly with Russia’s full-scale attack in February 2022. The assault on Kyiv drew widespread international condemnation and led to numerous sanctions against Russia. This escalation transformed the conflict into a full-scale war, setting the stage for the instrumentalization of emotions in official narratives aimed at international audiences. In response, Russian political elites have increasingly sought to justify their actions globally. This research analyzes how these elites have framed Ukraine as a security threat in their speeches directed at international audiences, particularly in UN General Assembly and Security Council.

This study utilizes a dataset of 45 speeches delivered by Vasily Nebenzya, Russia’s Permanent Representative to the UN, within the UNSC (n=36) and General Assembly (n=9) from January to December 2022. These speeches, obtained from the official UN website, were manually selected based on their relevance to the topic of the Ukraine-Russia war. The official English translations were gathered using Python and qualitatively analyzed in NVivo, focusing on recurring themes of NATO and Russophobia in relation to Western perceptions, identity, and international stability. As our analysis focuses on thematic references rather than specific keywords or their translations, ensuring no limitations arise from using translated speeches in exploring emotion norms in securitization narratives.

This research employs qualitative discourse analysis (Ostermann and Sjöstedt 2022; Oppermann and Spencer 2022; Sjöstedt 2024) to deconstruct the securitizing moves within Russian official discourse, particularly in the context of the UN General Assembly and UNSC. Through this method, we analyze how securitizing moves are framed by narratives and emotions for an international audience. By doing so, we examine how securitizing moves are

articulated in narratives to justify behaviors and decisions (Oppermann and Spencer 2022), often by exploiting emotions. This method also offers insights into how emotion norms are constructed by Russia's Permanent Representative to the UN. Through this method, we identify the strategic use of historical analogies, emotional appeals, and various narrative components that shape securitizing moves. By tracing recurring themes and patterns, such as the framing of identity and threats from NATO and the West, we aim to reveal how themes contribute to the construction of emotion norms within the securitizing move. This approach also sheds light on the securitization of identity through Russophobia and the portrayal of the West as a threat, both of which are critical themes in Russia's discourse aimed at influencing international audiences.

The Securitization of the West through NATO

Russia's relationship with NATO is central to its foreign policy, framing NATO as an existential threat to justify military actions and elevate Russia as a defender of global morality and regional stability (Bartosh 2018). NATO's policies are portrayed as hypocritical and manipulative, undermining Russian interests and influencing former Soviet states (Wilhelmsen and Hjermann 2022). This narrative, exemplified in the Ukraine-Russia war, securitizes Russia's existence while appealing to international audiences. A strategic use of emotions guides this process, setting emotion norms that frame the threat and shape audience responses (Rose et al. 2006). These norms enable Russian policymakers to align emotional resonance with political objectives, reinforcing the legitimacy of their securitizing moves on a global stage.

In this manner, the components of securitization, intertwined with emotions, can be observed. Vasily Nebenzya, as the securitizing actor, frames NATO as possessing a "cherished plan" to "defeat or at least weaken Russia," triggering fear and anxiety within the international audience and raising concerns about regional stability and potential wider conflict. Russia, as the referent object, is characterized as a victim of Western aggression, with Ukraine depicted as a mere instrument in NATO's geopolitical ambitions. Furthermore, the securitizing actor constructs narratives that attribute blame and justify their policies, a process known as emplotment in narrative construction. This securitizing move evokes historical analogies surrounding proxy wars and amplifies the perceived threat. The role of Ukraine as a pawn in NATO's geopolitical ambitions is key in the securitization process. By constructing a narrative of Russian victimization, the securitizing actor aims to undermine Western legitimacy:

"NATO, which is what we have really come up against in Ukraine, only needs the escalation of the conflict to get closer to fulfilling the cherished plan it has been nurturing and preparing for years — defeating or at least weakening Russia as much as possible. [...] today it is a testing site for NATO weaponry and for a proxy fight against Russia down to the last Ukrainian. They are trying to involve as many countries as possible in their geopolitical projects, which are designed to preserve the domination of Western States and maintain the well-being of the so-called golden billion." (10.10.2022, UN General Assembly)

The securitization move leverages fear of a “third world war” and “nuclear disaster”, framing Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelenskyy’s calls for preemptive nuclear strikes as “reckless” and an attempt to draw NATO into direct conflict with Russia. Nebenzya labels specific actions and behaviors as inappropriate, utilizing narrative elements such as setting and characterization to construct a broader narrative. This securitizing move aims to position Ukraine as an irresponsible actor threatening global security by provoking fear and anxiety but also securitizing the conflict by limiting it to Ukraine. Nebenzya also contrasts Ukraine with Russia by indicating “inevitable defeat” and evading accountability for “crimes,” characterizing Russia as the responsible actor in the conflict:

“We call on the international community to pay attention not just to these criminal acts but also to the irresponsible steps and statements made by the Kyiv regime. Those steps are an attempt to directly involve the countries of NATO in the military activities against Russia. By this I mean the reckless calls of Zelenskyy to launch preventive nuclear strikes against Russia. Clearly, Kyiv expects that, should that happen, then it will avoid the inevitable defeat on the battlefield and avoid responsibility for all its crimes. However, what those appeals do is threaten us all with a third world war and nuclear disaster.” (10.10.2022, UN General Assembly)

The referent object often changes in the speeches, referring to different dimensions of the problem. This often employs comparison and historical analogies, such as accusing the West of hypocrisy and double standards in international law by highlighting the perceived discrepancy between the West’s past actions in Kosovo and its current inaction towards the alleged plight of Donbas, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhya. Nebenzya securitizes the population in Ukraine by evoking indignation and a sense of betrayal. The referent object is characterized as victims abandoned by the West. The employment of historical analogies and references to past decision-making situations further contributes to the construction of these narratives:

“Back then, our opponents argued that international law does not prohibit a declaration of independence. And what do we hear from them today? That Kosovo was different. In other words, NATO members were prepared to protect the Kosovo Albanians from threats that did not even exist at the time, whereas the populations of Donbas, Kherson and Zaporizhzhya are, in their view, second class citizens whose extermination by the Kyiv regime does not worry the civilized West one bit because they support Russia.” (12.10.2022, UN General Assembly)

The securitization move also exposes Western hypocrisy and double standards in international relations by highlighting the perceived inconsistency in the United States’ (US) stance on territorial integrity. The securitization of the principle of territorial integrity has been done by comparing the West’s vocal support for Ukraine’s territorial integrity with its willingness to use force to protect Taiwan, which China considers an integral part of its territory. This not only characterizes the West as a reluctant actor but also evokes distrust. This inconsistency, indicated by Nebenzya, questions Western legitimacy. Nebenzya’s speech

effectively employs multiple components of narrative construction. By attributing blame, describing character behavior, and providing explanations for decision-making situations, he utilizes setting, characterization, and emplotment to shape a compelling narrative:

“Another example is Washington, which today is the loudest to criticize us and cry out about the territorial integrity of Ukraine. Recently, Washington declared its readiness to use force to protect Taiwan, which is an integral part of the People’s Republic of China. It is clear that no sanctity of the principle of territorial integrity exists for the US and NATO member states. They support it only when it suits their interests.” (12.10.2022, UN General Assembly)

Claims have been made that Western states exploit the UN General Assembly, highlighting their alleged hypocrisy regarding international law and the “rules-based order”. This securitizing move fosters distrust and resentment towards Western powers, securitizing the international system. Nebenzya characterizes Western states as manipulative actors pursuing their own geopolitical goals at others’ expense, employing emplotment and characterization components of narratives:

“Western states are pursuing their own geopolitical goals and are once again trying to use the members of the General Assembly as bit players. The expressions of commitment to the protection of international law that the Assembly heard today from representatives of the UN and other NATO member states are a vivid example of hypocrisy and double standards. It is telling that they have temporarily even stopped using their pet phrase, “rules-based order”.” (12.10.2022, UN General Assembly)

Nebenzya securitizes the situation in Eastern Ukraine, particularly regarding the civilian population, framing the conflict in Donbas as an eight-year war initiated by the Kyiv regime and highlighting “crimes” committed by Ukraine. He evokes moral outrage and the “exhaustion of every peaceful and diplomatic means,” emphasizing Kyiv’s refusal to implement the Minsk agreements. This portrays Russia’s actions as a justified, last-resort intervention to protect civilians, fostering sympathy for the Donbas’ population. The narrative shifts blame onto Ukraine and its Western backers, portraying the population as victims of a conflict ignored or instigated by the West, amplifying the perceived threat and evoking anger. Nebenzya’s speech employs this narrative to frame Russia’s military operation as a humanitarian effort, using emplotment to justify the intervention.

“[...] after Kyiv’s Western sponsors, who were behind the 2014 Maidan coup, confirmed that they were not going to rein in the Ukrainian authorities; after President Zelenskyy not only confirmed Ukraine’s desire to join NATO, which is a direct threat to Russia’s vital interests, but also threatened to abandon Ukraine’s nuclear-free status [...]” (23.03.2022, UN General Assembly)

Vasily Nebenzya securitizes the situation in Ukraine and justifies the Russian “special operation” associating Ukraine with “Nazification” and “militarization” of Ukraine and

explains the reason for the operation as the need to protect civilians used as human shields. By emphasizing Russia's efforts to avoid civilian casualties and its willingness to support humanitarian resolutions, Nebenzya also contrasts Russia's supposedly responsible actions with Ukraine's alleged disregard for human life. This comparison casts Ukraine as a "Nazi" and positions Russia as the protector, thereby legitimizing the special operation in the eyes of the international allies by referring to their humanitarian resolutions offered to the UNSC. Nebenzya further develops characterization by associating the actor involved with other figures who evoke negative emotions and memories, thereby influencing the audience's perception:

"If Ukraine is no longer to pose a threat to us, it has to be de-Nazified and demilitarized, and those have become the main goals of our military operation. [...] the Ukrainian nationalists and radicals began using civilians as human shields, deploying heavy weapons in residential areas and preventing people from leaving cities through humanitarian corridors." (23.03.2022, UN General Assembly)

These securitization moves aim to shift blame onto the West and portray Russia as a responsible actor forced to intervene. The securitization of the situation in Donbas by accusing the West of enabling and exacerbating the conflict highlights the West's inaction towards Ukraine's alleged sabotage of the Minsk agreements. Through employing these narratives Nebenzya aims to evoke feelings of frustration and injustice toward the Russian audience. Thus, he portrays the West as untrustworthy. This narrative positions Russia as a protector, legitimizing the special operation and solidifying Russia's stance as a defender of regional stability:

"At the same time, the West, led by the US, instead of forcing Ukraine to fulfill its obligations, played along and ignored its sabotage of the Minsk agreements. Furthermore, NATO countries pumped Ukraine full of modern weapons and sent military instructors, thereby contributing to the militarization of the region in every possible way. Kyiv perceived the actions of its Western backers as a *carte blanche* to conduct military provocations in Donbas." (14.03.2022, UNSC)

Nebenzya also securitizes Ukraine's actions by characterizing the West as an active participant in the conflict, portraying Russia as a victim of Western aggression. He highlights the alleged targeting of civilian infrastructure with Western-supplied weapons, emphasizing the threat to Russian security and the unfolding humanitarian crisis. This narrative provides a framework for understanding the reasons, means, and objectives of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, demonstrating different dimensions of emplotment. The referent object, Russia's security, and international stability is thus presented as being directly endangered by the involvements of NATO countries, justifying Russia's response to a perceived existential threat:

"Since we are all gathered here, let me recall the involvement of NATO countries in the Ukrainian conflict. They continue to flood Ukraine with weapons, sending whole teams of instructors and foreign mercenaries to

operate them. At the same time, the US military has become actively engaged in the planning and de facto coordination of armed action, to which even the Pentagon recently officially admitted. We have no doubts about the use of Western military equipment, which is being used to target civilian facilities' (16.11.2022, UNSC)

This analysis shows that while the securitizing actor remains the same, the referent object of securitization shifts. The speech acts mainly evoke hostile emotions—anger, disgust, fear, and threat—targeting issues like violations of the rules-based order, hypocrisy, and Western double standards (Koschut 2017). In response, Russia's role as a protector and its exposure of Western injustices are securitized. The narrative constructs Russia's victimhood and purity, establishing emotion norms to garner support from those who adopt these emotions. Those who resist these norms are considered outside the framework. This demonstrates a link between successful securitization and emotion norms, as seen in Nebenzya's speeches on NATO during the Ukraine war, which manipulate emotions to shape public perception and influence international policy.

The Securitization of Identity through Russophobia

Phobia, rooted in fear and anxiety, significantly affects daily life by triggering distress and disruptive behaviors (Luc and Blanchette 2011). Emotions shape cognitive, behavioral, and physiological responses to phobias while offering adaptive solutions (Tooby and Cosmides 2008). Negative emotions linked to phobias, such as anxiety and anger, mediate attitudes and behaviors (Neuberg and Cottrell 2002; She et al. 2022). This concept fits well into the securitization framework and emotion norms in speech acts as Russian policymakers associate phobia with Russian identity, framing Russophobia as a Western-driven threat. This perceived threat affects out-group relations, fostering negative group attitudes through emotional responses like fear and anger (Riek et al. 2006). By invoking Russophobia, they justify securitizing moves and shape attitudes toward other nations.

Russophobia fuels distrust of Russia and prejudice against Russians, and Russian policymakers using it to protect Russian identity and justify actions in response. By securitizing Ukraine's weakened military and alleged Western manipulation, Nebenzya aims to legitimize Russia's special operation and evoke Russophobia. The dominant referent object is Russia's national security, threatened by Western exploitation of Ukraine for geopolitical gain. This narrative, emphasizing deception behind the Minsk agreements, portrays Russia's actions as a necessary response to Western inaction and Russophobia, garnering support while discrediting Western motives on the international stage:

"[...]The moment when the Kyiv regime would have stopped posing a threat to our country was therefore rapidly approaching. Such a scenario, however, did not sit well with our former Western partners. That is not why they carried out an illegitimate coup d'état in Ukraine in 2014, encouraged blatant nationalism and Russophobia and re-armed the Ukrainian military while pretending to monitor the

implementation of the Minsk agreements. In fact, that was all in service of their geopolitical plans to weaken Russia. The fact that the Minsk agreements were but a smokescreen for rearming the Armed Forces of Ukraine was confirmed quite cynically recently by former German Chancellor Angela Merkel.” (09.12.2022, UNSC)

Nebenzya frames Ukraine’s actions as a campaign of “Russophobia” and the “glorification of Nazi criminals,” securitizing Russian identity and the population of Russian-speaking Ukrainians. The referent object, the Russian-speaking population in Ukraine, is portrayed as a victim of systemic discrimination and cultural erasure by the Kyiv regime. This securitizing move, grounded in accusations of human rights violations and cultural oppression, aims to evoke outrage and empathy among the audience. By emphasizing the West’s alleged complicity in these actions, Nebenzya reinforces a narrative of Russophobia, portraying Russia as a protector of the Russian-speaking minority in Ukraine. This framing justifies Russia’s actions as necessary to safeguard the cultural and linguistic identity of a vulnerable population, discrediting the Ukrainian government and its Western supporters. It also includes emplotment:

“From the very beginning, the new Maidan authorities steadily led the country towards disaster, choosing the path of Russophobia and the glorification of Nazi criminals. [...] Their Western backers, blinded by the geopolitical goal of weakening Russia, made it clear from the outset that they would cover up any crimes committed by the Kyiv authorities and turn a blind eye to things they would never allow in their own countries.” (24.08.2022, UNSC)

The actions of the Ukrainian government and its Western backers aim to evoke moral outrage. The referent objects are the population in “the liberated territories” and Russian soldiers as “liberators”, portrayed as victims of “terror and intimidation tactics” by the Kyiv regime and its Western sponsors. Nebenzya utilizes a narrative of Russophobia, accusing the Ukrainian government of being an “anti-popular, anti-human regime” that engages in “neo-Nazism, extreme nationalism and Russophobia” and the West of ignoring these actions while pursuing a “proxy war” against Russia. This narrative, reinforced by comparisons to Nazi propaganda, portrays the West as engaging in a similar level of disinformation. This securitizing move aims to justify Russia’s operation and garner sympathy from other nations critical of Western hegemony:

“Ukraine is therefore resorting to terror and intimidation tactics in the Kherson, Zaporizhzhya and Kharkiv regions. But that cannot change the minds of people who have seen the true face of the Kyiv regime. Kyiv is losing the battle for minds, and its Western backers, who are waging a proxy war against Russia to the last Ukrainian, are getting mired deeper and deeper in support of that anti-popular, anti-human regime, turning a blind eye to examples of neo-Nazism, extreme nationalism and Russophobia. [...] Not since the propaganda of the Nazi Joseph Goebbels has the world encountered such a degree of fabrication, which

is being used by Western and Ukrainian experts of psychological operations.” (24.08.2022, UNSC)

Nebenzya securitizes Ukraine by referencing historical figures and alleged actions of nationalist groups during World War II. The referent objects are the Russian population in Ukraine and the concept of “Russophobia”. The speech act portrays Ukraine as a hotbed of antisemitism, racism, and Russophobia, inheriting a legacy of hate from historical figures like Mikhnovsky. This narrative aims to evoke fear and disgust among the international audience, potentially fueling animosity towards Ukraine by highlighting alleged discrimination and cultural erasure. By connecting historical events with current political tensions to justify Russia’s actions as a necessary measure to protect ethnic Russians and combat what they perceive as a dangerous ideology within Ukraine:

“One of the ideologues of Ukrainian nationalism, Mykola Mikhnovsky, monuments to whom can be seen all over Ukraine, left to posterity his concept of “Ukraine for Ukrainians,” whose essence he himself articulated as “All people are your brothers, but Moskals, Polacks, Romanians and Yids are the enemies of our people” [...] Is it any wonder that antisemitism, racism and Russophobia are currently flourishing in today’s Ukraine?” (21.06.2022, UNSC)

Nebenzya portrays Ukraine’s nation-building as a Western-backed project rooted in “Russophobia”, securitizing the identity and well-being of Russian speakers in Ukraine. The referent objects are the Russian-speaking population and their cultural heritage is presented as threatened by Ukrainian nationalism. This securitizing move frames Russia’s actions as justified defense of cultural and linguistic rights while portraying the West as complicit in weakening Russia. This narrative fosters a sense of victimhood among the Russian speakers in Ukraine:

“However, given the fact that when Ukraine became independent, Russians and Russian speakers made up at least 60 percent of the population, the Ukrainian authorities had to postpone the realization of their Russophobic agenda. [...] It is important to point out that the US and its Western allies were very interested in the establishment of this Russophobia-based Ukrainian nationalism, which they saw as an excellent opportunity to sever the historical ties between Ukraine and Russia in the service of their geopolitical needs. As a result, the new statehood of once-multicultural Ukraine was modeled according to Western bidding on a foundation of primitive Russophobia and therefore imbued with the ideology of hatred from the very start. [...] The vain attempts of a well-known Russophobe and multi-term Verkhovna Rada deputy, Iryna Farion, who repeatedly declared that all Russians were mentally retarded, are a case in point. Following the Maidan anti-constitutional coup, this Russophobe, who as it happens was in charge of language and humanitarian issues in the Ukrainian Parliament, complained in an interview.” (21.06.2022, UNSC)

In this narrative, Russian people, culture, and language are treated as referent object, endangered by the rising tide of “primitive Russophobia and racism” in Ukraine. Nebenzya evokes feelings of discrimination and threat against Russian speakers in Donbas and the glorification of historical figures associated with “anti-Russia” emotions. This securitizing move positions Russia as a protector of Russian identity against radical nationalism by mentioning “burgeoning neo-Nazism and nationalism, undisguised Nazis”. By contrasting this alleged “Russophobia” with Russia’s positive attitude towards Ukrainian culture, he creates a narrative of betrayal, accusing the Ukrainian government of being a Western puppet instead of protecting its people’s true desires and seeking “someone else’s geopolitical agenda”. Nebenzya attempts to garner sympathy and justify Russia’s actions by claiming Ukrainian government promoting “Russophobia” as its “main domestic national product and export commodity”. Nebenzya evokes disgust and indignation by highlighting alleged discrimination and hatred towards Russians, emphasizing the manipulation of historical narratives and indoctrination of a generation to hate Russia as “hate Russia on the basis of absurd Ukrainian history textbooks”. This securitizing move aims to establish a narrative of victimhood for Russians in Ukraine while demonizing the Ukrainian government and its “Nazi” elements, further legitimizing Russia’s intervention as necessary to protect cultural heritage and counter a hostile ideology.

By securitizing Ukrainian children as both victims and perpetrators of “neo-Nazi and Russophobic ideology,” Nebenzya evokes a spectrum of emotions in his audience. The referent objects are moving to innocence of the children, and their alleged indoctrination into a violent and discriminatory mindset. He describes them as victims of “disgusting neo-Nazi and Russophobic propaganda” and “rabid Russophobia and antisemitism,” portraying their plight to elicit horror, disgust, and concern for their welfare. Fear and anger toward the Ukrainian government’s supposed indoctrination practices is narrated as “an entire generation of Ukrainian children and adolescents has grown up with a poisoned mentality and the belief that it is their job to kill anyone linked to Russia”. By demonizing the Ukrainian government, Nebenzya justifies Russia’s intervention as a necessary act to protect children from this harmful ideology, leveraging emotional appeals to validate his securitizing moves.

Russophobia offers a unique lens to explore the interplay between securitization and fear, portraying Russian identity as under threat that generates concern and inherits pre-existing emotions. Nebenzya securitizes Russian identity, culture, and its role as a protector by emphasizing Western double standards in international law and identity politics. He strategically employs emotions like pride and humiliation, framing Ukraine as a Western proxy and Russia as a solitary defender, often invoking historical parallels to reinforce Russia’s stance. Russophobia is positioned as the root cause of future threats, necessitating immediate action to uphold Russia’s protector role for humanity and stability. Through this narrative, Nebenzya not only justifies Russian policies but also establishes emotion norms that shape international perceptions, highlighting how emotions underpin the securitization process.

Conclusion

This research illustrates the role of speech acts in enabling policymakers to justify and explain their positions to the international audience. While this aligns with the concept of audience streams in securitization theory, it also reveals that securitizing moves are not solely determined by audience engagement. The deconstruction of policymakers' speech acts highlights the important influence of emotion norms and narratives in this process. Accordingly, this study suggests that securitizing moves may employ various instruments, including narrative strategies and emotion norms. Furthermore, it indicates that, regardless of the outcome, the speech acts of national representatives play a key role in defining their positions before the international audience. From this perspective, this research demonstrates that emotion norms can be established through a variety of emotions within securitization of West and Russophobia narratives, utilizing narrative components that play a crucial role in shaping discourse for the international audience.

In this regard, this research scrutinizes the deconstruction of speech acts in securitizing moves as observed in the speeches of Russian representative Vasily Nebenzya at the UN. Our findings show that the deconstruction of speech acts around the referent object of perceived existential threats actively frames different aspects of the Ukraine war, resonating with related topics. The recurring themes are specifically directed at the international audience by employing hostile emotions, often conveyed through historical analogies. These associations and characterizations emphasize that geopolitical policies are paramount, creating a narrative where other regional countries identify as the tools of Western countries. The Russian narrative frequently references emotions such as anger and injustice through claims of discrimination and hypocrisy against Russia, revealing the virtuous position of Russia. Additionally, Russophobia illustrates that perceived threats can be securitized through emotions like fear and anxiety, especially within identity-based claims. Through these narratives, the securitizing actor guides and navigates (in)appropriate emotions to form emotion norms.

The UN provides an ideal setting to examine how speech acts create a distinction between shared and divergent emotions within an international audience, shaping perceptions of "moral" versus "immoral" or "adherence to international norms" versus "deviation from those norms". This dynamic often frames Russia as a distinct entity opposed to "the others against Russia". In this respect, emotion norms act as a boundary, indicating where one stands within the international audience, essentially, which side one aligns with. While constructing emotion norms, the Russian representative not only employs various historical analogies but also explicitly conveys Russia's perspective and emotional stance on the events. In doing so, he sets emotion norms that others are expected to follow if they align with or know about Russia's position. This is also evident in the accusations against Western actors for diminishing Russia, promoting anti-Russian feelings, and empowering Ukraine to pursue the Western agenda. Thus, regardless of the securitizing move's outcome, the speech acts of the Russian representative offer a clear example of how the international audience can become a contested space for justifying and explaining a country's position.

This research illustrates how the Russian rationale is conveyed to the international audience, suggesting that Russian realities and perceptions extend beyond regional concerns. In this context, engaging with this audience demonstrates that speech acts play a crucial role in defining countries' positions across various contexts. The Ukraine-Russia war serves as a unique case for analyzing emotions, narratives, and the framework of securitization theory. Furthermore, the deconstruction of speech acts within securitizing moves, viewed through the lens of emotion norms and narratives, may provide an additional avenue for further research on the role of international audiences in securitization processes.

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