

Alona Shestopalova

# From Screens to Battlefields

Tracing the Construction of Enemies  
on Russian Television



Ukrainian Voices, vol. 48

*ibidem*

Alona Shestopalova

## **From Screens to Battlefields**

Tracing the Construction of Enemies on Russian Television

# UKRAINIAN VOICES

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Collected by Andreas Umland

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Alona Shestopalova

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Verlag

## **Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek**

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

ISBN (Print): 978-3-8382-1884-7

ISBN (Ebook [PDF]): 978-3-8382-7884-1

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# Foreword

In early 2023, after a long travel hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I packed into a baroque ballroom in downtown Brussels with hundreds of other academics, researchers, bureaucrats, and diplomats for the launch of a new European Commission report on “Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference” or “FIMI”, a new acronym the body was introducing to help coalesce the international community toward action against what it had previously deemed, interchangeably: disinformation, hybrid warfare, propaganda, and fake news.

As a speaker at the conference, I was engaging with the online conversation about the event and started to notice harassing messages appearing in my Twitter replies and email inbox. One alleged I was a Nazi and leered, “We’re watching you.”

Where were these messages originating from? Of course, any European Commission-sponsored event is likely to attract some criticism or conspiracy theorists, but nothing in my notifications or a quick search on the web seemed to indicate any adversarial attention.

Just then, the moderator answered my question: RT—formerly Russia Today, Russia’s international broadcasting arm, known for amplifying all manner of falsehoods and even extremist content—had shared the livestream of the event. I tried to look up their tweet, but couldn’t find it; a few months earlier, after Russia had launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the EU had taken the step of banning RT within the borders of the bloc. Even its Twitter feeds were inaccessible.

The path to that decision had been long and circuitous. Since the American presidential election of 2016, RT had occupied a special place in the Western consciousness. At once blamed for electing Donald Trump and birthing Russian disinformation in and of itself, RT became the embodiment of a “Russian troll” in media outlet form. Few journalists, policymakers, or citizens sought to learn more about the reality of the coverage RT broadcast or its effects.



As is typical, Western interest in RT and other Russian media came with a certain degree of hubris, focused only on the effect of Russian propaganda and falsehoods on Western government. It was described as the sole and most grievous vector of Russian interference in the American electoral process, a stature it almost certainly did not deserve; more surreptitious means of communication, including online influence campaigns, likely were more effective than their “mainstream media” counterparts, at least in the Western context. The influence of Russian autocracy-controlled media and online environments echoing them within the audience of millions inside Russia as well as Russians living abroad was not even mentioned: it was off the radar of most of the decision-makers and experts for decades.

Then came the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and as images of Ukrainian civilians fleeing the war filled most of the airwaves, some Western governments took the decisive step of coming down hard on RT, banning it in the EU. Broadcast service providers like DirecTV dropped it within a week of the full-scale invasion. At that time and up until now, Channel One Russia has been informing millions about Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine, supporting it and calling it nothing more than a ‘special military operation’.

As Alona Shestopalova argues in *From Screens to Battlefields: Tracing the Construction of Enemies on Russian Television*, RT and its domestic counterpart Channel One Russia had a nefarious role to play ahead of the full-scale Russia’s war in Ukraine: fertilizing the informational ground and creating enemies of Ukrainian politicians and the Ukrainian people. For anyone who has ever wondered “what exactly does Russian television do that’s so bad? Is lying illegal now?” Shestopalova lays out precisely the dehumanizing, enmifying arguments that RT and Channel One Russia broadcasters made to turn their audiences at home and abroad against Ukrainians, their leaders and those that were searching for safety.

Where others did a cursory examination, relying on only a few headlines or a short time period, Shestopalova does much more. She examines all RT and Channel One Russia weekly news stories relating to Euromaidan, Russian annexation of Crimea and the first months of the war in the Donbas over 42 weeks, demonstrating that

over time, those actors that were portrayed negatively were more likely to be understood as enemies over time. The channels “offered their viewers black-and-white news coverage creating a clear dichotomy between positively depicted Russian and Russia-affiliated actors and negatively depicted Ukrainian and Western actors”, Shestopalova writes. They regularly eschewed covering events that might be viewed as critical of Russia to instead promote narratives that hostilely portray Western powers, and more importantly, Ukraine.

“As early as eight years before the beginning of the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian War,” Shestopalova explains, “Ukrainian political actors were the main targets of Russian state-controlled enmification compared to other actors including Western ones, and that Ukrainian actors were already being demonized and dehumanized.” This had effects not just within foreign audiences targeted by RT; Shestopalova finds that Channel One Russia, the flagship domestic news broadcaster, was even more extreme in its coverage than its international counterpart: where RT had to soften its rhetoric so as not to scare off Western viewers living in pluralistic media environments, Channel One Russia was free to lie and obfuscate as it chose.

Sceptics, look no further than this case study to understand the role disinformation and propaganda can play; months into a full-scale war that many are convincingly arguing is part of a genocide against Ukrainians, the ground was fertilized and prepared by encouraging Russians to be more accepting of violence and human rights abuses against those that they perceive as enemies.

Given that broad-based rejection of Russia’s war in Ukraine from ordinary Russian citizens would make it much less likely to continue, Shestopalova’s work underlines how critical it is that policymakers and communicators continue to attempt to pierce the Russian filter bubble and not just successfully deliver information to Russian audiences, but ensure that they trust that information as well. Similarly, ensuring that external audiences consuming high quantities of Russian state-sponsored media are receiving quality, trustworthy content is critical—otherwise audiences in the Global South, for instance, where information about the war in Ukraine

stems primarily from Russian and Chinese sources, will be more likely to buy into Russian lines about the war. It is research like Shestopalova's that will take us from broad brushstroke reactions that miss some of the biggest harms that campaigns like Russia's can perpetrate.

Nina Jankowicz, author of  
*How to Lose the Information War: Russia, Fake News, and the Future of Conflict?*

# Introduction

I'm writing these lines in 2024, more than 800 days after the beginning of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine. Today, Russian missiles and artillery systems attack Ukrainian cities, towns and villages. It was also happening yesterday and the day before yesterday. In the territories occupied by Russia, the occupation authorities torture and kill civilians. Millions of kids wait for their fathers and mothers to come back home: numerous civilians joined the Ukrainian army to prevent the invading Russian army from reaching their homes. Multiple cases of killings and rape by Russian soldiers in formerly occupied Bucha have already been uncovered. The world also already knows about hundreds of graves in the forest in Iziurm and multiple torture chambers established during the Russian occupation of Kherson. The Ukrainian army managed to push the Russian army from the Northern regions of Ukraine, from most of the Kharkiv region and the right bank of the Dnipro river in the Kherson region. Hundreds of Ukrainian settlements are still under Russian occupation. The world still does not know the complete picture of Russian crimes committed in occupied Mariupol, Donetsk, Crimea, etc. The International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for the Russian president and Russia's Commissioner for Children's Rights for their roles in the deportation of Ukrainian kids to Russia. Nowadays, scientists and lawyers discuss possible framings of Russia's actions in Ukraine as genocide.

I did not know all of these would happen when I started working on this book.

It was at the end of 2018. What did I know back then? That Russia and Russia-controlled forces occupied approximately 7% of Ukrainian territory. That more than a million civilians had to flee from those territories to other regions of Ukraine, among those civilians were indigenous inhabitants of Crimea—ethnic Crimean Tatars—many of whom were forced to leave their homes after the Russian occupation. I knew that a long wall in the city centre of Kyiv had an uncountable number of photos of Ukrainian soldiers

and volunteers killed since 2014 and that sooner or later, Russia will launch a full-scale invasion.

Was I shocked on the morning of February 24, 2022? Yes, shocked but not surprised. By that time, I researched the construction of enemies on Russian TV long enough to avoid being surprised.

I submitted the dissertation that later formed the core of this book in 2022, shortly after the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. When I received the initial documents proving the successful defence, a representative from my university's faculty asked me when I had changed the research topic to make it so relevant in the context of the ongoing Russia's war against Ukraine. I replied that this had been the research topic of my doctoral dissertation from the very beginning, and that I had started working on it a couple of years before 2022, observing Russia's attempts to instil hatred and fear towards Ukraine and Ukrainians through state-controlled hostile communication. For the faculty member that reply was surprising, for me it was clear that the hostile communication against Ukraine was omnipresent on Russian TV long before February 24, 2022.

When I started working on the construction of enemies on Russian TV, both my topic itself and my research questions seemed a bit too alarmist to many. Luckily, there were also people who supported my understanding of the case and my theoretical idea of revisiting the concept of enemy and the construction of enemies – the significant topic from the turbulent past – and were eager to see fragments of the analysed data that were relevant for the autocracy-controlled construction of enemies in the 21st century.

Due to the mood of those years, I had to proceed cautiously, taking one step at a time. The academic standards required avoiding building any arguments on statements like 'everybody knows that Russia is ...' and substantiating every single interpretation of research finding. I am extremely glad that I had to take that path.

Because of what I explained in the previous paragraphs, from today's perspective, some of the observations and conclusions of this book might seem too obvious to argue. However, even if we feel that we know something by heart, to make it solid, someone

has to sit down and document how exactly we have come to those conclusions based on findings – not on beliefs, feelings or general knowledge. This is what I’m doing in this book: systematically tracing the construction of enemies on Russian TV during the Euro-maidan, occupation of Crimea and the first five months of the war in Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine to explain how it helped Russia to make the full-scale war against Ukraine possible.

As early as 1945, the Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization stated “[t]hat since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed” (p. 1). However, almost 80 years later, there are still numerous wars around the world, one of them in the centre of Europe. Each of those wars repeatedly brings up the question of how exactly a situation arises in which people take up arms to attack and kill those whom they see as enemies. I try to answer this question using the example of Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine.

The book consists of four parts. In the first part, the reader will not see many references to Russia’s war against Ukraine as Russia’s atrocities in Ukraine are only a new manifestation of what hatred and fear lead to for millennia. To understand this manifestation better, I take a step back to conceptualize the very ideas of us vs. them, enemies, hatred and fear, as they are those leading to wars and genocides at all times with the help of respective mass communication.

Only after revisiting and updating the most fundamental concepts of the topic, I dive deep into the second part, examining Russian media and their role during previous Russia-led wars of recent decades with the focus on wars against Chechnya and the war against Georgia. The second half of this part is focused on Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, its chronology and possible framing. In particular, I argue why the understanding of Russia’s war against Ukraine cannot be complete without understanding its imperial and colonial nature.

The third and fourth parts are entirely devoted to the hostile Russian communication in the context of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. In these parts, I explain how exactly I’ve analysed

the Russian state-controlled news coverage of the Euromaidan, occupation of Crimea and the first five months of the war in Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine, reveal my main findings and put them in the context of further developments in an attempt to explain how we found ourselves where we are now and where we might be going if other autocracies learn from Russia's experience.

An important note on terminology has to be made: throughout the book, I refer to the new stage of Russia's invasion of Ukraine that started on February 24, 2022, as Russia's full-scale invasion, Russia's full-scale war, full-scale Russian-Ukrainian War, etc. to underline that the war has not started on that day. On the contrary, by that time almost a decade has passed since the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine including the occupation of Crimea and the war in Donbas. As the time frame of the news coverage I analyse includes Euromaidan, Russia's occupation of Crimea and the first five months of the war in Donbas, I refer to that period (November 2013 to September 2014) as the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Notably, I avoid using the word 'conflict' or 'crisis' in this book when discussing the period after February 24, 2022. The reason for this is that nowadays, Russia tends to use these words in its international communication to downplay the scale of its war against Ukraine, despite the fact that it has already become the deadliest war in Europe since the end of World War II.

**Part I**  
**How to Create an Enemy**





# The Enemy as a Social Construct

To understand how to construct an enemy, one must start with the question of why human beings and the entire social reality can be seen as constructs. Otherwise, it becomes difficult to comprehend why the formation of hostile or friendly attitudes is also a constructivist practice that is rarely rational. For this reason, I begin with a concise overview of the core ideas of constructivism. This overview will aid in better understanding the construction of enemies in people's minds.

The starting point of constructivism as a theoretical framework is that there is no objective social reality understood the same way by everyone (von Glasersfeld, 1982; Wendt, 1995; Pörksen et al., 2011; Onuf, 2013).<sup>1</sup> Even if everyone had the same information about social events, we would still see things differently. This is because each person perceives the world uniquely. Specifically, our individual socialization experiences give us different outlooks on the same things.

Traditional socializing agents like families, schools, religious institutions, and the mass media teach us how to see and engage with the social world (Oppenheimer, 2005). These agents cannot have the exact same impact on everyone because they are quite diverse themselves. Together, they shape what is called "cognitive maps" in our minds (Herrmann & Fischerkeller, 1995). These cognitive maps help us simplify information about social reality. They allow us to categorize events, facts, or individuals in our personal perception of the world by labelling them as positive, negative, dangerous, and so on. Throughout life, we reflect on our upbringing and reproduce these cognitive maps, though often with changes.

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1 Here and further in the book, the surnames and years in brackets denote the surnames of authors of the texts (such as scientific articles) I used while working on a respective fragment of my book and the years denote when the mentioned texts were published. You can see the full list of references at the end of the book.

This mechanism of attitude creation is strengthened by our self-perception, values, and interests, and is inseparable from them. Obviously, each person's identity, values, and interests are also unique and are socially constructed (Grusky & Szelényi, 2011; Gregg, 2012). Their formation begins with infants' first social interactions and, more or less intensively, lasts throughout their whole life (Feinman, 1992). As can be seen, any human being is a textbook social construct in terms of their perception of self and the world around them.

The consumption of information about social reality also has constructivist elements determined by human features (Hacking, 1999; Demeritt, 2002). This could be explained in the following terms. There are facts, but even when faced with them directly, we consume them along with other facts. Then, we put them into a broader context—in other words, we make sense of the facts by assigning particular meaning to them. The next unavoidable step is to reduce information, i.e. to decide which facts are more important than others, and this requires even more cognitive effort. As a result, we form our own understanding of an issue using the above-mentioned cognitive maps. It is clear that in such conditions, our understanding is *a priori* far from being objective (Eisenberg, 1995).

Selecting some facts and ignoring others distances us from what is indeed happening over there, but it is the only way of perceiving a complicated and multifaceted world that is impossible to embrace fully (Lachman et al., 2015). Partly, the selection is made for us by media outlets performing the role of mediators between the audience and the facts. They make decisions about what we should know and what not (Bennett, 1990). Media outlets organize thousands of events into the media agenda and only then a recipient comes into play to customise, select, and reduce the information further.

At the same time, media companies also do not simply mirror reality. They inevitably transmit only versions of reality while telling us stories about the world (Pörksen et al., 2011). The best journalistic practices seeking objectivity try to work with facts instead of opinions, frame information neutrally and give word to all con-

flicting sides if they exist. From a positivist perspective, such an approach would be considered as objective (Wien, 2005). However, “the truth” is never the whole truth, “the importance” of an event is not an objective criterion, and the problem of balance is even more complicated. Journalists face it whenever they try to decide which proportion of conflicting ideas should be in their work: 50:50? Proportionally, considering the weight of the arguments in the public discussion? Or is it enough just to mention that there is another view of the issue?

After the invention of the photo-camera and its advent to journalism, there were hopes that it would finally show the world as it was. The idea “do not tell me—show me” looked persuasive. Professional photographers were considered technicians rather than storytellers, people “pushing the button” rather than interpreters of reality (Brennen, 2010). Those hopes vanished when it became clear that photos are not objective either. Factors such as the usage of different perspectives or attention to different details contributed to the diverse framings of the same issues (Woo, 1994; Bowers, 2008).

Therefore, we have examined the arguments for the constructivist essence of humans as well as of the information created and consumed by them. The third element to consider is social interactions. Wendt writes that “a fundamental principle of constructivist social theory is that people act toward objects, including other actors, on the basis of the meanings that the objects have for them” (1992, pp. 396–397). Thus, the interaction between humans or social groups is based on the information they possess about each other.

A limitation (or maybe an advantage) of the fact that humans acquire information only through the frames of their world perception becomes decisive when it comes to the dimension of international interactions. States are created by humans and their imagined communities—nations (Anderson, 2006). Therefore, the subjectivity of humans is transmitted to macro and mega levels influencing inter-state interactions; the inconsistency between “reality” and people’s perceptions of it becomes even more striking. That is if we accept the postulates of epistemological constructivists who believe that reality exists independently of those who try to understand it (Raskin, 2002).

Thus, humans and international relations, as well as all intermediate elements between them, can—and will in this work—be viewed from a constructivist perspective. Human self- and world-perception, information that makes humans unite into communities, those communities and their identities, and, lastly, information about other communities used to create interaction strategies, are all social constructs. Further, this chapter examines how the constructed identities and interests of political actors lead to the perception of other actors as enemies.

### **“We” and “Our” Enemies**

The concepts of “we” and “others”, denoting groups with different identities, had already been used in social sciences more than a century ago (Sumner, 2007). Yet in the 1950s, a new stage of in- and out-groups research began—scholars became interested in the connections between group self-perception and social conflicts (Rinder, 1954; Rose, 1960; Himes, 1966). In the beginning, it was quite widespread to qualitatively analyse real-life conflicts, but that approach did not provide answers to the question of why people actually start hating and fearing each other.

The solution was sought in a series of social experiments devoted to the interaction between in- and out-groups (Sherif, 1958; Ferguson & Kelley, 1964). The grand aim of those experiments was to understand which factors made people from one group discriminate against people from another group and express enmity towards them (Tajfel, 1970). Interestingly, the experimental studies mentioned above have shown that the mere fact of dividing people into groups is already enough for a slightly hostile attitude. Moreover, that pattern was evident even if experiment participants were aware that the group categorization was made randomly (Billig & Tajfel, 1973).

Despite some critique of those studies highlighting their ignorance of the impact of competition (Rabbie & Horwitz, 1969), oversimplification of intergroup interactions, and underestimations of socio-cultural factors (Yamagishi et al., 1998), there were numerous later attempts to replicate the experiments considering different

mediating variables (Brewer & Silver, 1978; Mullen et al., 1992; Fischer & Derham, 2016). For instance, scholars were trying to understand if factors such as self-esteem (Abrams & Hogg, 1988), cultural biases (Yuki, 2003) or the migrant status of certain group members (Rubin et al., 2014) were influencing intergroup interactions. The research referenced above has moved the topic at hand beyond the borders of Social Psychology and contributed to the formation of Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Brewer, 1979; Tajfel, 1979; Hogg, 2000; Turner, 2010).

In a nutshell, SIT claims that different social groups have different identities, those identities could be activated by some means, and the mere existence of an in-group provokes its members to be prejudiced towards an out-group (Stets & Burke, 2000). Both communication and International Relations scholars have benefited from SIT as it has given them a foundation for intergroup interaction research.

At the same time, it is not only scientists who make use of the psychological patterns described by SIT. Among the main communicators constantly underlining the group's identity are political actors. For them, it is hard to avoid group categorization as politicians often appeal to some particular social group. The practice of political communication shows that an in-group could be created based on formal criteria such as citizenship, in which case it is possible to avoid the creation of an out-group. The examples of this widespread method are, for instance, the following addresses: "My fellow citizens" (Merkel, 2018); "Dear Ukrainians" (Zelensky, 2019), and so on.

Formally created in-groups (as in the above-mentioned examples) are sometimes granted extra features that could strengthen their pride and group identification: "We will never forget that we are Americans and the future belongs to us. The future belongs to the brave, the strong, the proud and the free" (Trump, 2019). There is no particular out-group named in this statement but, as the speaker says that being American means being "brave, strong, proud and free", this implicitly suggests that an abstract out-group does not possess these characteristics (the future belongs to us, not to the others). It is also possible to unite people into a single in-

group in the cases when multiple and diverse groups are actually present: “There is no liberal America and a conservative America. There is the United States of America” (Obama, 2012). Or another example of a similar communicative strategy: “Wherever we live, whoever we are, we all share the same responsibility – to make our planet great again” (Macron, 2017).

In- and out-groups could also be created based on other criteria such as religion, social status, ideological preferences, etc. Such categorization is less formal as it allows individuals more freedom to decide which groups to relate to, which ones not to, and what meaning to attribute to those group identities (Stets & Burke, 2000). As a result, diverse group identities overlap in one human shaping a subjective personality structure. German citizen, father, Muslim, teacher – all these elements constitute the identity of many people but the mix of in-group identifications within one individual and the uneven strength of those identities is unique in each particular case.

All identities are social constructs formed under the influence of numerous factors. However, political actors also often deliberately influence people’s group identities (Ehrkamp, 2006; Kallis, 2015). A vivid example illustrating the political impact on group identity is the dual treatment of Muslims in today’s world.

On one hand, extremist leaders attempt to radicalize the Muslim religious identity by associating it with Islamist political goals (Gunn, 2003; Rabil, 2011). For example, in a BBC interview, an Afghan militant named his in-group and aligned it with radical Islamist views: “Muslims are thirsty for Islamic Caliphate in the world” (BBC, 2014). Such statements not only distort the perception of Muslims by non-Muslims but also create a dilemma for non-radical Muslims. They might feel compelled to align with Islamist goals or risk being excluded from the Muslim in-group despite the fact that the proposed in-group characteristics apply solely to Islamists, not Muslims. Consequently, reducing the entire Muslim group to its minor radical faction (Islamists) confuses identities.

On the other hand, some politicians (e.g. right-wing populists) frame Muslims as a dangerous out-group (Kallis, 2015). One of them, Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orban, talks about the need

“to defend Christian nations against immigration, which [. . .] led to the virus of terrorism” (Al Jazeera, 2019). By spreading such messages, politicians instigate fear toward Muslims among the population. Consequently, Muslims face Islamophobia that results in a confrontation in different spheres of life (Allen, 2007; Wheatley, 2019).

These two examples demonstrate that stigmatization and its consequences are not solely experienced by out-group representatives. Being involuntarily assigned to an in-group can also provoke frustration among individuals who do not share some of the declared group attributes or do not feel part of that in-group at all. This rejection of an imposed group identification turns an individual from a representative of the in-group to one of an out-group.

As highlighted above, group categorization is often accompanied by the emergence of bias and prejudice, which manifest in the distortion of incoming information about the out-group’s features and actions. This, in turn, increases bias even more, creating a vicious circle. A series of studies featuring five-year-old children have shown their tendency to accept positive information about in-group members and negative information about the out-groupers (Dunham et al., 2011). Adults can even feel joy when something bad happens to the members of the out-group (Combs et al., 2009). However, categorization—even when it goes along with bias and prejudice—is still not enough for confrontation (Castano et al., 2002). The others have to be perceived as dangerous for the in-group members to feel threatened. In the theory of international relations, such an actor—one who is “viewed by someone with hostility” (Silverstein, 1992, p.145) and “is judged as a threat” (Eicher et al., 2013, p. 129)—is called an enemy.

Then arises the question of why an actor could be perceived as threatening. In contrast to the realist approach in International Relations, Rousseau argues that information regarding the actor’s affiliation to the in-group holds greater importance in determining whether they are viewed with hostility than knowledge about their military potential (2006). Consequently, even an actor with substantial military power could be regarded as a friend if they are per-



ceived as “one of us”. Buzan extends this argument further by asserting that non-material factors are also significant when considering an out-group actor (2009). He contends that, in the post-Cold War era, the absence of a military threat does not guarantee security (Buzan, 1997). In essence, an enemy may pose a threat not only due to their military might but also by challenging the actor’s interests by limiting their authority or causing humiliation on the international arena (Hast, 2014; Wolf, 2019).

Therefore, based on the literature discussed above, it can be concluded that the enemy is someone who threatens an actor’s sense of security. However, an actor cannot have a clear understanding of the boundaries of their security until they know what their interests are (Adler, 1997). That, in turn, is impossible before an actor has a clearly constructed in-group identity. Putting it the other way around, the following scheme can be drawn:

*Identity – Interests – Security – Threat – Enemy*

(Wendt, 1992; Adler, 1997; Rousseau, 2006; Buzan, 2009; Onuf, 2013). Importantly, each of the elements in this scheme can only be shaped on the basis of the previous one. Most of the time, changes in international relations are not crucial and do not lead to a change in the starting point of the scheme – the actor’s identity. So, even if extraordinary situations occur between political actors, they just need to adjust their behaviour in the new circumstances. This makes the described scheme relatively stable.

However, the given sequence is not fully linear and, in exceptional cases, changes in the last element can lead to changes in the first element. These would be situations that make the actor’s identity irrelevant and create a need for a new one. For instance, when your existential enemy “dies” you cannot stay the same either, as hostility towards them was a significant part of your own identity. When the threat is gone, and the interests are secured, there is no need for protection and resistance anymore. This is what happened in international relations with the collapse of the USSR. As Wendt describes it, “Without the Cold War’s mutual attributions of threat