UA: UKRAINE ANALYTICA

SOCIAL NETWORKS REASONING NATIONALISM INVASION LEGITIMIZATION AUTHORITARIANISM DEMOCRACY LEADER DISCOURSE BALTICS DIPLOMATIC WAR RUSSIA POST-SOVIET PROPAGANDA CYBER INVASION POST-SOVIET CONFLICT EASTERN EUROPE CONFLICT REGIONAL UKRAINE ALLIANCES RULES-BASED NARRATIVES

- **WORLD ORDER**
- **RUSSIAN WAR**
- **POLICIES AND PROPAGANDA**

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RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE: A TURNING POINT IN THE WORLD ORDER?

Javad Keypour
Law Department, School of Business and Governance, Tallinn University of Technology

Júlia Csáderová
Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences, Comenius University in Bratislava

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has sparked debate over its implications for the world order. Although there is no unanimously accepted perception of 'world order', one can assume that the existing one can be described as a system of actors and their relations, developed after World War II as a combination of liberalist and realist elements. This could mean that the order stands for a liberalist international political economy, in addition to liberal internationalism establishing international institutions. At the same time, the importance of realism-based elements, i.e. nuclear deterrence and sovereignty, should not be neglected. The Russian invasion may have smashed the world order; but Russia lacks the required power elements for constructing what it desires to replace it with.

Introduction

The rise in international issues in recent years, from the financial crisis to climate change and, more recently, the COVID pandemic, has impacted the international system more than at any time before. The coincidence of these issues with those political events where major powers are engaged, like the rise in Euro-scepticism, the Sino-US trade war, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and now the Russian invasion of Ukraine, have made some scholars assume the emergence of a new world order[1]. Such an idea has also been reflected in Moscow and Beijing's discourses, including when Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, in his meeting with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, said that Russia and China, together with their sympathisers, "will move towards a multipolar, just, and democratic world order"[2]. However, the question of whether the war in Ukraine is actually the beginning of a new world order has remained open due to the ambiguities around the concept of world order itself. The new order is being discussed, but there is no unanimity about the definition of «world order». This essay discusses whether the Ukraine War will result in a new world order considering the abovementioned required clarities.

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1   Haass, Richard. Liberal world order, RIP. Project Syndicate, 2018, p 21.

2   Russian FM hails China as part of emerging 'just world order', france24, https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220330-russian-fm-hails-china-as-part-of-emerging-just-world-order,

From the World Order to the New World Order

Without falling into a cycle of quasi-philosophical discussion of concepts, we must first outline the meaning of the 'order' before delving into the war's repercussions. The world order as we know it now is generally referred to as the liberal one[3]. In the later years of World War II, the United States, in cooperation with the United Kingdom and other major powers, worked on the model of the international order, which would secure the absence of conditions that caused world wars in the past[4]. Even though multiple sources have mentioned the start of this liberal world order as during World War II, according to Andersen[5], the development of this model took a little bit of time at first, and it only started working properly at the beginning of the 1990s when the Cold War ended. Subsequently, Kaiser[6] clarified that even though we can ascribe the start of the liberal world order to the time when the Soviet Union collapsed, its roots stretched back to the start of the 20th century. We can say that the current, Western-oriented world order has been here for thirty years at least[7].

Although we are calling today's world order 'liberal' and putting the United States at its centre, according to Ikenberry (2018), the way the world is working today is a result of two international projects. One of them is the Westphalian Project which, since the beginning of the 17th century, has been based on concepts such as sovereignty, territorial integrity, self-determination, and non-discrimination. Initially, the Westphalian Project was a European one, but due to capitalism and the strong and significant values and ideas it provided, was adapted globally. The other significant project underpinning the current order is that of liberal internationalism. It brought about ideas of openness, cooperation, common institutions, shared sovereignty, and the rule of law.

A specifically important feature of international order is reflected in common institutions, which are supposed to promote peace and provide economic development, trade, and investment for the whole globe. These are the United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and World Trade Organization. The connection between these organisations is also known as Charter liberalism[8]. Finally, the definition of order in international society theory cannot be neglected. Hedley Bull defines the international order as "a pattern or disposition of international activity that sustains those goals of the society of states that are elementary, primary or universal"[9].

Nevertheless, these assumptions have not escaped the attention of critics. Charles Glaser argued that since any international situation that accepts national sovereignty as a norm can be considered an international order, it does not look like a conducive

3   Erslev Andersen, Lars. The desire for order: A theoretical approach to (world) order. No. 2019: 6. DIIS Working Paper, 2019.

4   Ikenberry, G. John. "The end of liberal international order?" International Affairs 94.1, 2018, pp 7-23.

5   Erslev Andersen, Lars. The desire for order: A theoretical approach to (world) order. No. 2019: 6. DIIS Working Paper, 2019.

6   David Kaiser, Russian invasion could change the world order, "Responsible Statecraft", 15 May, 2022, [https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2022/02/28/with-russian-invasion-comes-new-world-order/]

7   Ikenberry, G. John. "The end of liberal international order?" *International Affairs* 94.1, 2018: 7-23.

8   Clunan, Anne L. "Russia and the liberal world order." *Ethics & International Affairs* 32.1, 2018, pp 45-59.

9   Robert H. Jackson, and Sørensen, Georg, *Introduction to international relations: theories and approaches.* Fifth edition. Oxford University Press, 2010. pp 133

term[10]. Given such criticisms, we believe that the description of the current international order cannot be flawless by relying solely on sovereignty and liberal terms, especially when it comes to the security structure. In fact, the five permanent member states of the UN Security Council have created a protective shelter since World War II but gradually, relying on the mutually assured destruction (MAD) doctrine and their nuclear arsenals.

Such a system cannot be described solely within liberalist terms. It is a hybrid order, which includes liberal and realist components. This perception can be added to by the international society theory's distinction between the states in a "system" or "society of states", while it considers order a vital element of both. Comparatively, the states in a society find themselves bound by common interests, values and a set of rules; they have only to consider others' influence as a necessary element in their calculations without being bound by common values and a set of rules[11]. Therefore, the interaction between world powers can be described more as a system than a society, since they have to consider others' potential for annihilation without having a common notion of values.

In addition, it is necessary to note that the world order is multi-layered and contains political, economic and security layers. While a realistic, MAD-based framework defines the global security that the UNSC supposedly safeguards, the world economic order is maintained by liberal ideas and liberal institutionalism frameworks, especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union. This means that even countries like China, which do not build their economic structure in accordance with free-market ideology, are trying to take full advantage of this framework internationally. Despite the gradual decline of dollar hegemony, the role and importance of the US economy have kept such an economic order in place. Moreover, such a structure has made it possible for the US to punish the so-called rogue states, e.g. North Korea, by imposing primary and secondary sanctions.

> **The other significant project underpinning the current order is that of liberal internationalism. It brought about ideas of openness, cooperation, common institutions, shared sovereignty, and the rule of law**

The current world order can be described as a system of states and international institutions through which political, security and economic relations are regulated by a combination of realist and liberal ideas. While the great powers maintain the whole framework, others can take a free ride in exchange for complying with the system. Otherwise, they can be eliminated (Saddam Hussein's Iraq) or isolated (North Korea). But given that Hedley Bull sees sustaining the international order – order between states – as a responsibility of the great powers[12], what if a great power, like Russia, indicates noncompliance with the world order? Can one argue that such behaviour will result in a new form of order, considering the great powers' direct participation in the current

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10 Deudney, Daniel; Ikenberry, G. John. "The nature and sources of liberal international order". *Review of International Studies*. 25 (2), April 1999, pp 179–196

11 Robert H. Jackson, and Sørensen, Georg, *Introduction to international relations: theories and approaches*. Fifth edition. Oxford University Press, 2010. pp 139

12 Bull, Hedley, Benedict Kingsbury, and Adam Roberts, eds. *Hugo Grotius and international relations*. Clarendon Press, 1990, pp 191-202

multi-layered world order architecture (for instance, the security order) and the simultaneous economic benefits they gain from the existing structure?

The Russia-Ukraine War's Impact on The World Order: Destroying or Constructing?

It is essential to remember that the current world order was never perfect. As with almost every topic regarding politics, the current world order also has its drawbacks. It has been on life support for a while now[13], and its fall was just a question of time. However, a relevant question is whether a crash in the international order could lead to a new world order. This can be answered with reference to historical examples.

> « *the UN Security Council has remained powerless to act for a long time and has not held Russia accountable to date. That has disturbed the essential elements of the liberal world order, international law, and the rule of law, which should hold states equally responsible for their actions*

In the recent past, major events other than war were violating the principles of the liberal international order, the attacks of 9/11 in the US in 2001 being one of them[14]. But did these events result in a new world order? Our brief answer is no. In fact, despite the Bush administration's efforts at coining a "preventative doctrine" as a broad interpretation of the self-defence concept by attacking Iraq, most international lawyers still do not believe in its legality. One can argue that the US unilateralism of the 2000s destroyed the international order but failed to lead it, especially given the other actors' resistance. Even invoking the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine could not result in unilateral intervention in Libya unless the UNSC showed its green light.

While comparing the significance of war to the importance of the 9/11 events is debatable, the repercussions of US unilateralism in invading Afghanistan and Iraq in the aftermath of 9/11 should not be ignored, as it actually paved the way for a later noncompliance by the Kremlin[15]. Similarly, one can argue that the Russian invasion of Ukraine has also violated the world order. Tisdall[16] has counted several different violations of international law. Russia has continuously broken the laws set up by the United Nations' Charter and avoided legal proceedings over Ukraine at the international court of justice. Through all these events, the UN Security Council has remained powerless to act for a long time and has not held Russia accountable to date. That has disturbed the essential elements of the liberal world order, international law, and the rule of law, which should hold states equally responsible for their actions. Another significant element is human rights, which have been violated. The bombing of the Mariupol maternity hospital, adolescents being raped by soldiers of the Russian army, and the torturing of civilians in Bucha are just a tiny fragment of how Russia has harmed people in Ukraine and violated their fundamental rights.

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13 Damien Cave, The War in Ukraine Holds a Warning for the World Order, "New York Times", 4 March 2022, [https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/04/world/ukraine-russia-war-authoritarianism.html]

14 Bacevich, A. J., The 'end of history' … again?, *Responsible Statecraft*, 7 March 2022

15 Bacevich, A. J., The 'end of history' … again?, *Responsible Statecraft*, 7 March 2022

16 Tisdal, S. How Ukraine has become the crucible of the new world order. The Guardian. 2022 [https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/12/how-ukraine-has-become-the-crucible-of-the-new-world-order]

Nevertheless, the critical question remains as to whether the Russian war against Ukraine will result in a new world order. Although some scholars have answered this question affirmatively, we believe the opposite. In short, the adverse impact of the Russian invasion in undermining the existing order is mainly being confused with the constructive force needed for building a new one. Although the current world order was formed initially in the aftermath of World War II, it was not the war itself that established it. Instead, the winners' efforts to build international institutions underpinned the order afterwards, accompanied by the very realist approach, i.e. nuclear deterrence. This system evolved in the already described hybrid world order, especially after the Soviet Union collapsed. This could mean that the war will not result in a new order, as the constructive element is noticeably missing. In fact, any transformation from the current world order to a hypothetically new one provokes resistance from the current order's stakeholders and beneficiaries.

> *Although the Kremlin has repeatedly pointed to its desired world order, it remains yet to be clarified what this consists of and how Moscow wants to achieve it*

Despite the threat that the Russian invasion of Ukraine has posed for the current world order, it should not be considered a turning point for building a new world order. In fact, Russian aggression has caused a wobble in the order; however, it is doubtful that it can also construct a new order. Although it is imaginable that the liberal world order is very likely to fall if Russia defeats Ukraine, this is unlikely to happen, given the facts on the ground. Even if Russia ends the war

unilaterally by occupying eastern Ukraine, their ability to keep the occupied territories and tolerate the consequences of sanctions is questionable.

This could mean that the invasion may push others to recognise Russia's ability to use force to achieve its goals, but this is not enough to build a new order. In other words, this will solidify Russian preventative (negative) power but not provide the affirmative (positive) power needed for constructing a new order. This is mainly because the United States, European Union, and NATO want the current liberal order to stay in place. They are trying to win over Russia by diplomatic and pragmatic means – sanctions, disconnecting Russia from SWIFT, and helping Ukraine in every way possible, to name just a few of them.

The Kremlin's New World Order: How Far Is It Clear and Achievable?

Although the Kremlin has repeatedly pointed to its desired world order, it remains yet to be clarified what this consists of and how Moscow wants to achieve it. For instance, Russian foreign minister Lavrov has already delineated three main features of this order: multipolarity, justice, and democracy. However, even achieving the first element looks problematic under the current war conditions.

Recalling the smart power concept theorised by Joseph Nye[17], a great power needs to develop all the power aspects, not just the military one. In other words, to establish the alleged multipolar world order, where Russia has equivalent power to others, Russia needs to demonstrate its military, economic and soft power at the same time, to impose its will on others. However, one can argue that Russia lacks the two latter elements.

17 Nye, Joseph S. The future of power. Public Affairs, 2011.

Statistics show that the war has had detrimental consequences for the Russian economy. The Russian ruble dropped in value by 22% over a period, and the inflation rate went up by 14%, making all of imported products more expensive[18]. Russia's central bank has been prohibited from utilising its foreign currency reserves, and major banks were cut off from SWIFT, the most extensive international financing system[19]. Moreover, it is predicted that by the end of 2022, inflation will rise by approximately 20%[20], and GDP is expected to get lower by 12.5% to 16.5%. Since sanctions are still evolving, the situation can worsen over time[21].

The EU has been working to consolidate such adverse impacts, with the US and its allies. While Russia is the third-placed producer of fossil fuels in the world, it is one of the two countries with the largest natural gas stocks and holds 6.4% of the world's stored oil. In 2021, these fuels constituted half of their exports of $490 billion, which contributed considerably to the state's economy[22]. According to Myllyvirta & Thieriot[23], only in the first half of April, Russia's exports lowered by 20%. With a total oil and gas embargo, this effect can get even larger, causing massive damage to Russia's economy. Although Russia had to make significant discounts to India on its oil exports, to stay in the market, the consequences of the EU's decision to cut gas imports need time to be compensated for, if it becomes operational.

In addition to the economic effects, the war has eroded Russia's soft power, especially its influence through the media. In early March, a few days after the war started, Europe restricted the broadcasting of state-owned and propaganda sharing media RT and Sputnik in all kinds of transmissions, including satellite, online space, or mobile apps[24]. Two months later, at the beginning of May, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen suggested banning other Kremlin-supported broadcasters. These steps from European Union are aimed at lowering the amount of fake news regarding the war[25]. At the same time, Russia had to block social media pages such as Facebook or Twitter to prevent its citizens from being able to support Ukraine openly[26]. Additionally, this goes hand in hand with "disarming" Russia from their opinion-shaping based on untruths, making them lose their soft power in Europe.

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18 Annabelle Liang, Russia's cost of living soars by more than 14%, BBC, 2022, [https://www.bbc.com/news/business-60856873]

19 BBC. What sanctions are being imposed on Russia over Ukraine invasion? BBC. 2022, [https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60125659]

20 Liadze, I., Macchiarelli, C., Mortimer-Lee, P., & Juanino P. S. The Economic Costs of the Russia- Ukraine Conflict. National Institute of Economic and Social Research. [https://www.niesr.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/PP32-Economic-Costs-Russia-Ukraine.pdf]

21 Pestova, A., Mamonov, M., & Ongena, S. The price of war: Macroeconomic effects of the 2022 sanctions on Russia. Zurich Open Repository and Archive, University of Zurich. 2022

22 Ibid

23 Myllyvirta, L., & Thieriot, H. Financing Putin's war on Europe: Fossil fuel imports from Russia in the first two months of the invasion. Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air. 2022 [https://energyandcleanair.org/publication/russian-fossil-exports-first-two-months/]

24 Kayali, L., & Goujard, C. EU officially boots Russia's RT, Sputnik outlets. Politico. 2 March 2022, [https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-rt-sputnik-illegal-europe/]

25 Gijs, C. Commission pitches ban on 3 more Russian broadcasters. *Politico*. 2022, [https://www.politico.eu/article/commission-pitches-ban-on-three-more-russian-broadcasters/]

26 Rohe, M. Russian propaganda effects beyond blind belief. UK in a Changing Europe. 2022, [https://ukandeu.ac.uk/russian-propaganda-effects-beyond-blind-belief/]

Russian plans have not been accomplished from a political perspective either, as the war in Ukraine has pitted a line-up of allies against Russia, while China's cautious stance accompanied it. Likewise, while Russia invaded Ukraine under the pretext of preventing NATO expansion to the east, it now has to consider NATO expansion into Sweden and even Finland more seriously. These examples show that Russia has failed to implement its plans against the international organisations as well.

Additionally, sanctions have been welcomed by the EU member states, which were known for their lenient stance on Russia before. While previous predictions indicated a slow decline in the EU's dependence on Russian oil and gas, the invasion of Ukraine hastened the EU's dependence reduction plans, even in Germany. Moreover, the rapid withdrawal of Western technologies from the Russian oil and gas sector is expected to influence Russian oil production[27]. This means that even Russia's position in European energy markets is being totally shaken up, which will have far-reaching consequences. The loss of Russia's footprint in the EU also undermines its power in the West.

Conclusion

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has stimulated debate around the situation of the world order recently. While some believe that the world is on the eve of a new order due to the war, we stress that it is not. This is mainly because the war has destroyed the world order. However, Russia does not have the potential to construct its desired replacement order, even if such an order is well-theorised. In fact, the current world order has been developed as a hybrid system that combines realist and liberalist elements, and any actor who dreams of an alternative should be equipped with all three of military, economic and soft power. Nevertheless, Russia lacks the two latter ones and has been harmed due to the war.

Neglecting such a systematic view has resulted in misperceptions that the world order would change, as only Russian military power is counted in the analysis. Moreover, Russia has failed to strengthen or apply its soft power to justify the war in Ukraine; instead, its soft power has been damaged. In the end, one can claim that Russian aggression has impacted the order in the same way as US unilateralism did after 9/11 (and even more destructively); however, it is incapable of providing the grounds for building a new order.

Javad Keypour, *a PhD candidate, is an early-stage researcher and lecturer at the Department of Law School of Business and Governance at Tallinn University of Technology (Taltech). He acquired his MA in International Relations from Taltech. His main research interests are EU-Russia gas relations, EU energy law and Middle Eastern studies.*

Júlia Csáderová *is an Erasmus student of International Relations at Tallinn University of Technology and a bachelor's student of European Studies at Comenius University in Bratislava. Her research interests are the consequences of the Russia – Ukraine war on citizens, feminism and disadvantaged communities.*

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27 IEA data is rigorous and objective, it says after being dropped by OPEC+, Euronews, [https://www.euronews.com/next/2022/04/01/oil-opec-iea]

THE RULES-BASED INTERNATIONAL ORDER AND THE GLOBAL DISCOURSE OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

Dr Iryna Bohinska
Vasyl' Stus Donetsk National University

The global discourse over the current situation in Ukraine includes many definitions of it, such as a conflict, aggression, war, special military operation, etc. Is it within the power of the rules-based international order to get a controlled level of escalation in the conflict on the territory of Ukraine and to find a compromise in limited local framing – as the "Russian-Ukrainian War"? There were two attempts to find such a compromise. During the Orange Revolution in 2004 it was formulated on the basis of Ukrainian domestic legislation. After the Euromaidan and subsequent Russian intervention, the compromise was found based on international law. Ukraine has de facto lost some of its territories, but it has remained as a democratic state. The global discourse of the Russia-Ukraine war in the UN Security Council and the 11th Emergency Special Session of the UN General Assembly reveal the potential of the concept of a rules-based international order.

Perception of War and World Order

The current escalation of the conflict in and around Ukraine is not limited to the framework of the Russian-Ukrainian war or just to the problem of European security. Since 24th February, 2022, the voices of politicians and experts who link the conflict with issues of world order have become louder and clearer.

There are two designations of the ongoing conflict in the global discourse: as a "Special Military Operation", the version insisted upon by the Russian Federation (RF), and as "aggression", the name recorded in the United Nations General Assembly resolution on 2nd March 2022, which was supported by 140 member states.

The current situation is different from what happened in 2014. The annexation of Crimea and the unleashing of the conflict in Donbas were not seen as part of an effort to form a completely new world order. On the contrary, efforts were made to artificially fragment and localise the conflict in "Eastern Ukraine". This was possible for a few reasons. Firstly, Russia blocked unwanted resolutions in the UN Security Council, which created a situation of political and legal impunity for the aggressor, which had annexed part of the territory of a neighbouring state. Second, they sought to act in the conflict with Ukraine through proxies rather than directly. After Euromaidan, the Russian authorities intended to regain their lost influence over Ukrainian politics without sliding into a large-scale conflict with the direct involvement of the West. Third, although before 2022, Russian media and experts had been talking about the "West's hybrid war against Russia", the main efforts

of Russian propaganda were aimed at discursively marginalising the conflict as an "internal Ukrainian civil one"[1].

Quite different things are heard from the same Russian politicians now. For example, after talks with Ukrainian Foreign Minister D. Kuleba (March 10th, 2022, Antalya), Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov said: "we are not planning to attack other countries; we did not attack Ukraine either"[2]. At a meeting (March 23rd 2022, Moscow) he explained to MGIMO students and professors: "what is happening in the world right now, of course, is not only and not so much about Ukraine, it is about attempts to form a new order"[3]. After his meeting with UN Secretary-General Guterres (April 26th, 2022, Moscow) S. Lavrov stressed: "the moment of truth" in international relations has arrived: "Will humankind live on the basis of the UN Charter?"[4].

A similar situation with an emphasis on the global consequences of Russia's war against Ukraine can be observed in the interpretations of the conflict by other politicians. The previously dominant narrative "Russian-Ukrainian war" in official Ukrainian discourse is giving way to the broader theme of a "war for freedom". In his address on March 24th 2022, exactly one month after Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine started, President Zelenskyy pointed out that "Russia's war is not only a war against Ukraine. It is much broader than that. Russia has started a war against freedom as such... It seeks to show that only brute and brutal force matters"[5]. U.S. President Biden, in his Warsaw Speech on March 26th, 2022, outlined his vision: "But we emerged anew in the great battle for freedom: a battle between democracy and autocracy, between liberty and repression, between a rules-based order and one governed by brute force"[6].

As can be observed, "the conflict in Ukraine" in the discursive field refers to competing projects of international order – the rules-based international order, on the one hand, and the so-called world order based on international law, on the other hand. The first concept emerged from liberal peace theory. While the term rules-based order (RBO) may be technical, compared to the ideologized term "liberal order", critics find it more ambitious. Obviously, the RBO goes beyond international law, with the UN

1 Что это было? Зачем нужна была война на Украине (What was it? Why was the war in Ukraine necessary). [https://www.lenta.ru/article/2014/12/25/ukraine], *Lenta*, December 25, 2014; В.Путин: гражданская война на Украине продолжается, несмотря на "минские договоренности". (Putin: The civil war in Ukraine continues despite the "Minsk agreements"), UNN, November 5, 2014, [https://www.unn.com.ua/ru/news/1403580-v-putin-gromadyanska-viyna-v-ukrayini-prodovzhuyetsya-nezvazhayuchi-na-minski-domovlenosti]

2 Лавров заявил, что Россия не нападала на Украину (Lavrov said that Russia did not attack Ukraine). Korrespondent, March 10, 2022, [https://korrespondent.net/ukraine/politics/4455845-lavrov-zaiavyl-chto-rossyia-ne-napadala-na-ukraynu]

3 Лавров считает украинский кризис попыткой создать новый миропорядок (Lavrov considers the Ukrainian crisis is an attempt to create a new world order), Kommersant, March 23, 2022, [https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5271215]

4 Гуттериш в Москве: Россия развязала войну против Украины, виновные должны быть наказаны (Guterres in Moscow: Russia unleashed a war against Ukraine, the guilty must be punished). Gazeta.ua, April 26, 2022, [https://gazeta.ua/ru/articles/politics/_gutterish-v-moskve-rossiya-razvyazala-vojnu-protiv-ukrainy-vinovnye-dolzhny-byt-nakazany/1084651]

5 «Вони нічого не знають про нас, про українців»: повний текст звернення Зеленського рівно через місяць після вторгнення Росії («They know nothing about us, the Ukrainians»: full text of Zelensky's appeal exactly a month after the invasion of Russia). TSN, March 23, 2022, [https://tsn.ua/politika/voni-nichogo-ne-znayut-pro-nas-pro-ukrayinciv-povniy-tekst-zvernennya-zelenskogo-u-misyachik-viyni-z-rf-2018206.html]

6 Remarks by President Biden on the United Efforts of the Free World to Support the People of Ukraine. [https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/03/26/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-united-efforts-of-the-free-world-to-support-the-people-of-ukraine/]

Charter at its heart. U.S. diplomats often use the phrase "rules-based order", with the view to strengthening it. They call it "a world in which might makes right and winners take all, and that would be a far more violent and unstable world for all us" as the alternative to such an order[7].

And that describes what is happening in Ukraine right now in terms of Russian aggression. Russia really behaves as if there are no rules. Simultaneously, its representatives constantly talk about the need to comply with international law. Foreign Minister Lavrov repeatedly uses the rostrum of the General Assembly to deny any rules other than the UN Charter and UN Security Council resolutions. He has even suggested launching a new hashtag for social networks in support of the UN Charter #OurRulesUNCharter. A detailed criticism of the RBO is contained in his article "On Law, Rights and Rules", in which the minister focuses on the fuzziness of the rules and their selective application by the West[8]. For the minister, the injustice of the RBO, which protects the interests of a narrow group of countries and does not consider the diversity of the modern world, seems obvious. In addition, Lavrov emphasises the instrumental role of the RBO, which, in his opinion, helps the West to restrain its competitors. The latter includes not only Russia but also China. In this case, the rule-based world order is seen by the minister as an instrument for the restoration of a unipolar world[9]. Notably, criticism of the RBO concept by Russian officials increased markedly as the large-scale invasion of Ukraine approached, and it continues in the face of the conduct of the war.

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The "Russian view" of the world order leaves little room for Ukraine as a political actor. Complemented by rhetoric about the current Ukrainian government as a puppet of the West, it undermines the intentions of those who think that an end to the war with Russia can be negotiated, i.e., resolved diplomatically. Russian President Putin has so far refused to meet Ukrainian President Zelenskyy. For Putin, a personal meeting would mean "legitimization" of the "anti-Russia" project and refusal to perceive Ukraine as "an instrument for suppressing Russian independence"[10]. That's why an

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7   Secretary Antony J. Blinken, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, Chinese Director Yang and State Councilor Wang at the Top of Their Meeting. State Department, March 18, 2021, [https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivan-chinese-director-of-the-office-of-the-central-commission-for-foreign-affairs-yang-jiechi-and-chinese-state-councilor-wang-yi-at-th]

8   Лавров: концепция порядка, основанного на правилах, затрагивает полномочия ООН (Lavrov: the rules-based order concept affects the UN authority). TASS, September 29, 2019, [https://tass.ru/politika/6906987?utm_source=google.com&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=google.com&utm_referrer=google.com]; Лавров С. О праве, правах и правилах (Lavrov S. About Law, Rights and Rules). Russia in Global Affairs, June 28, 2021, [https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/o-prave-pravah-i-pravilah/]

9   Лавров: Запад и сейчас вмешивается в дела Украины, мешая переговорам с Россией (Lavrov: Even now the West interferes in Ukraine's affairs, preventing negotiations with Russia). RG.ru, March 23, 2022, [https://rg.ru/2022/03/23/sergej-lavrov-vystupil-v-mgimo.html]

10   Лавров назвал Украину инструментом подавления российской самостоятельности (Lavrov called Ukraine a tool for suppressing Russian independence). RG.ru, March 23, 2022, [https://rg.ru/2022/03/23/lavrov-nazval-ukrainu-instrumentom-podavleniia-rossijskoj-samostoiatelnosti.html]

important precondition for the search for a compromise, as well as the very possibility of a diplomatic approach to the settlement, is the recognition by Putin of Zelenskyy as the legitimate president of Ukraine. Without it, the possibilities of diplomacy are sharply reduced, and military means remain the obvious alternative. This conclusion is not a surprise, given the current (third) phase of the conflict, which (the conflict) has been going on for almost 20 years.

Conflict Phases

Russian-Ukrainian bilateral relations have not been free from problems since the collapse of the USSR. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the parties tried to keep all the nuances secret (as much as possible). Under the guise of a formal "strategic partnership", periodic gas wars ended with the signing of new gas agreements. However, as the resource of a post-Soviet identity was exhausted in Russian-Ukrainian relations, and different politicians came to power in Ukraine, while electoral cycles in the RF were not accompanied by new faces in politics, a conflict was inevitable.

The first phase of the conflict involved the recognition of the 2004 presidential election results in Ukraine. During the presidential race, Russia supported Yanukovych, the leader of the Party of Regions. The other candidate for the presidency, Yushchenko was perceived as a pro-Western politician. Based on the results of the two rounds of elections, the Central Election Commission announced that Yanukovych had won, which caused a mass wave of protests in Kyiv. Yushchenko's supporters claimed serious violations in the electoral process and falsification of the voting results. The Orange Revolution in 2004 ended in a compromise and did not go beyond the "crisis in Ukraine" in which the problem of the transition of power was resolved with the participation of foreign mediators. The Constitutional law of December 8th, 2004,

provided for the weakening of the institution of the presidency, and redistribution of his powers between the government and the parliament. The independence of the judicial branch was strengthened.

Even though Ukraine's transition from a presidential-parliamentary to a parliamentary-presidential republic was not easy, the internal political crisis did not turn into an international conflict. The major outcome of the crisis in 2004 was the prospect of Ukraine's gradual transformation into a European democracy. Even Yanukovych's accession to power in 2010, with his obvious refusal to seek NATO membership, did not close the door to European integration for Ukraine. Negotiations on signing the Association Agreement with the EU began over time. At the final stage of preparation of the document, the Russian Federation proposed a trilateral negotiation format on the possible consequences of signing the Association Agreement for Ukraine. It seemed to be simultaneous with the intention of the Customs Union countries (Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan) to close their free trade regime if Ukraine signed the Association Agreement with the EU. The Ukrainian government's decision to suspend preparations for association with the EU (although explained by tactical considerations and the desire to restore normal relations with Russia) triggered a political crisis in Ukraine.

The feature of this crisis was the greater involvement of external actors. The failure of EU mediation between the government and the opposition in late February of 2014 opened the prospect of a large-scale civil conflict. But the unexpected flight from power by President Yanukovych, against the backdrop of the Euromaidan events, was used by Russia to annex Crimea. After the Euromaidan victory, the Kremlin refused to recognise the legitimacy of the new Ukrainian government, which was the reason for its failure to comply with

the Budapest Memorandum of 1994. The Kremlin agreed to OSCE involvement in the Trilateral Contact Group. However, this did not affect the state of Russian-Ukrainian relations after 2014. The Minsk agreements were interpreted differently by the parties, and the Minsk negotiation process failed to make progress in resolving the conflict.

In the next years, the media, experts, and official political discourse used different words and phrases to describe the conflict: Ukrainian crisis, simmering conflict, military aggression, war, etc. The narrative of the main actors was more polarised, in that descriptions of "Russia's war against Ukraine" were contrasted with those of a "civil conflict". The war of narrative was waged in the desire to carefully package one's own vision under the wrapper of a problem relevant to the participant, and to quickly legitimise it through the adoption of laws, decrees, regulations, and resolutions at various levels of government.

War of Narratives

The war of narratives was possible because the actual violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity was not assessed legally, on the basis of international law, from the very beginning. Globalisation and the universalisation of the discourse of "Russia's war against Ukraine" depended on whether the aggressor state could be held accountable for violating international law, and for its selective use and manipulative interpretation. From the RBO perspective, it was not beneficial to develop this discourse exclusively in the propaganda field without obvious results in the form of resolutions adopted by international organisations and international court decisions. The UN could have played a more decisive role in this.

An attempt to adopt a resolution in the UN Security Council (UNSC) in March of 2014, which condemned the Crimean referendum as illegitimate, was blocked by Russia. For the aggressor country, permanent UNSC member status was an advantage that could be used to influence the course of the conflict, the process of resolution, and promotion of the idea that the war was "just". In this sense, the conflict in Donbas was predetermined by the annexation of Crimea. Impunity, resulting from the inability of the UNSC to maintain international peace and security, enabled the continuation of the conflict. The UNSC was unable to resolve the conflict in the de-escalation phase, which opened with the signing of the compromise Minsk Agreements in 2014-2015. It is important to emphasise that the UNSC permanent members managed to reach consensus only on Resolution 2202 (2015), which approved the "Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements". A few days before the meeting on February 17th, 2015, the document, known as Minsk-2, was agreed in the Normandy Format. The negotiations in the Belarusian capital took place against the backdrop of ongoing hostilities and the threat of the encirclement of Ukrainian armed forces near Debaltseve. The ceasefire, which had been agreed upon the day before, had not yet been observed when the draft resolution was being discussed at the United Nations[11].

The approval of Resolution 2202 (2015) resulted in a contradictory situation. On the one hand, the UNSC declared full respect for Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity and legitimised a peaceful solution to the conflict. On the other hand, the resolution did not mention the state that had unleashed the conflict. Therefore, Russia was left without any obligations within the

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11 Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2202 (2015), Security Council Calls on Parties to Implement Accords Aimed at Peaceful Settlement in Eastern Ukraine. United Nations, 2015, [https://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc11785.doc.htm]

framework of the settlement but retained its ability to influence the peace process. On every occasion, its representatives rejected any options for resolving the conflict that would reduce Russian influence and insisted on "no alternative to Minsk-2", referring to Resolution 2202 (2015).

> « **The return of geopolitics does not mean that the decisive point of the current phase of the conflict will take place on the battlefield. The issue of the aggressor's responsibility for abusing the status of a permanent member of the UNSC remains relevant**

There is a contradiction between the concepts of RBO and order based on international law. Whereas Resolution 2202 (2015) reflects the narrow approach promoted by the Russian Federation to understand international law as a system with the UN at its centre and Security Council resolutions having the force of higher-order law, the RBO broad approach also involves systems independent from the UN, consisting of decisions and agreements reached outside the UNSC framework. In this case, the RBO covers the resolutions on Crimea and Ukraine adopted in the General Assembly (GA), the OSCE, and the Council of Europe; the decisions of international courts (for example, the decision of the International Maritime Tribunal on the Kerch incident, which the RF refused to implement). The UNGA adopted 11 resolutions in the context of the

international response to the annexation of Crimea. The latest, adopted on December 16, 2021, defines Crimea and Sevastopol as temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. This means that the problem of the return of the Crimean Peninsula is recognised as unresolved and remains on the UN agenda. The RBO was projected into the Council of Europe when, in April 2014, the Russian delegation was deprived of the right to vote in the PACE. The OSCE PA adopted a resolution "Restoration of Ukraine's Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity" in August 2017, with wording that did not match the Russian propaganda stance[12]. An important factor which the RBO strengthens is the idea of a democratic, European Ukraine. The "special military operation" announced by the Russian president on February 24th, 2022, is in fact a new phase of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Disguising the war with the term "special military operation" looks like an attempt by the Russian authorities to avoid responsibility for war crimes in Ukraine.

The return of geopolitics does not mean that the decisive point of the current phase of the conflict will take place on the battlefield. The issue of the aggressor's responsibility for abusing the status of a permanent member of the UNSC remains relevant. A step towards the strengthening of the RBO is the call for the 11th UNGA Emergency special session after the Russian representative blocked a resolution in the UNSC on February 25th, 2022. It condemned the Russian aggression against Ukraine[13]. The UNGA has already approved three resolutions on Ukraine, laying out a common approach to resolving the conflict

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12 В. Шрамович, *Как ОБСЕ признала «российские гибридные силы» на Донбассе*. (Vyacheslav Shramovich, How the OSCE recognized «Russian hybrid forces» in Donbass), BBC, July 10, 2017, [https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-russian-40554241]

13 Россия наложила вето на резолюцию Совета Безопасности, осуждающую ее действия на территории Украины (Russia vetoed a Security Council resolution condemning its actions in Ukraine)., United Nations, February 25, 2022, [https://news.un.org/ru/story/2022/02/1418872]

in the future[14]. These steps have made it possible to restrain Russia's efforts to distort the concept of peacekeeping, and qualified its actions on the territory of Ukraine as a violation of the UN Charter.

Today, the UN remains the platform for discussing the problems of conflict management and resolution. Three humanitarian operations to evacuate civilians from Mariupol and the besieged Azovstal factory have already been conducted under the auspices of the organisation. After a trip to Moscow and Kyiv, Secretary-General António Guterres offered to mediate a peace settlement. Although there is no mention of mediation in the text of the UNSC statement of May 7th, 2022, all permanent members expressed support for efforts to find a peaceful solution. Multilateral diplomacy (as a characteristic feature of the RBO) resists unilateral attempts to solve "the Ukrainian crisis".

In addition, the Russian Federation has refused to execute the UN International Criminal Court ruling of March 16th, 2022 on the cessation of hostilities in Ukraine. Of course, this does not mean the cessation of court hearings or the search for new tools to bring perpetrators of crimes to justice. Already, 43 states have filed allegations of violations of the laws of war in Ukraine.

The protracted conflict between Russia and Ukraine since the early 2000s cannot be resolved on a bilateral level. It may seem that the grounds for the conflict were created by territorial claims related to the consequences of the collapse of the USSR.

For example, back in 2003, Russia attempted to seize the Ukrainian island of Tuzla. The construction of a dam in the straits crossing over to Tuzla was seen as a direct threat to Ukraine's territorial integrity. However, the roots of the conflict are deep in history and its solution cannot be found within the framework of the idea of one world order as a special case.

> *For Ukraine, it would be undesirable to supplant it with the discourse of world order, as well as to localise it as a particular case in international relations. This means that the settlement of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine should be designed within the framework of the rules-based order strengthening and/or abandoning yet another attempt to combine the approaches of different models of world order*

The current phase of escalation in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia has revealed the essential problem in finding a normative basis for world order. Both the RBO and the narrower international law-based world order approaches do not exclude the role of the UN. The opposition of the RBO to international law is not just a manipulation. Choosing one conceptual approach would mean weakening the other, while compromise involves mutual concessions and is temporary in nature.

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14 Resolution ES-11/1. *Aggression against Ukraine*. United Nations, March 2, 2022, [https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/293/36/PDF/N2229336.pdf?OpenElement]; Resolution ES-11/2. *Humanitarian consequences of the aggression against Ukraine*. United Nations, March 24, 2022, [https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/LTD/N22/294/07/PDF/N2229407.pdf?OpenElement]; Resolution ES-11/3. Suspension of the rights of membership of the Russian Federation in the Human Rights Council. United Nations, April 7, 2022 [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/a_res_es-11_3.pdf]

In the context of Russia's war against Ukraine, the initiatives coming from Ukrainian negotiators are aimed at finding a compromise solution. They can be seen as the diplomats' attempts to create two documents simultaneously – a multilateral treaty on security guarantees for Ukraine (to avoid a new war with Russia in the future) and a separate bilateral agreement between Russia and Ukraine. In the latter case, it is still unclear whether the parties will accept discussion of a cease-fire agreement as creating the conditions for normal work on a basic document on security guarantees.

After negotiations in Istanbul on March 29th, 2022, the Russian representative unexpectedly declared a significant reduction in military activity in the Kyiv and Chernihiv regions, while the head of the Ukrainian delegation Davyd Arahamia confirmed that security guarantees for Ukraine would temporarily not apply to the occupied Crimea and the non-controlled ORDLO. The absence of new rounds of negotiations amid ongoing hostilities speaks volumes about the difficulties diplomats have encountered in trying to combine the two approaches to resolving the conflict and finding a compromise acceptable to both parties.

Meanwhile, the UN GA special session on April 7th approved Resolution ES-11/3, suspending Russia's membership of the Human Rights Council. That was another step towards isolating Russia from the RBO. The resolution was adopted by 93 votes to 24, with 58 abstentions. Compared to the two previous resolutions on Ukraine, adopted by the special session on March 2nd and March 24th, 2022, the number of votes "in favour" was down by almost 50. The debate and voting results on the resolution show that the issue of human rights in solving international problems has not yet found support among half of the UN member states.

The global consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian war are already shaping the global discourse on the conflict. For Ukraine, it would be undesirable to supplant it with the discourse of world order, as well as to localise it as a particular case in international relations. This means that the settlement of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine should be designed within the framework of the rules-based order strengthening and/or abandoning yet another attempt to combine the approaches of different models of world order. The experience of settlement based on UN international law has already shown its limitations. The new phase of conflict escalation once again demonstrates the lack of existing norms of international law, which allow for situations of substitution, manipulation, and double interpretation. The existing system of norms must likely be supplemented by rules and procedures aimed at eliminating such situations. If the Russian Federation can emerge from the de facto war against Ukraine unpunished, it will reinforce the assumption that the "rules-based order" is just a mirage.

Iryna Bohinska, *Ph.D., Associate Professor at the Department of International Relations and Foreign Policy at Vasyl' Stus Donetsk National University. Being the author of more than 40 academic and analytical publications, she focuses on international relations, international communications, negotiations, conflict resolution, mediation, and the foreign policy of the Russian Federation. Her latest publications are Mediation in the grey zone, Memory conflicts in international relations, The academic discourse of the world order as a foreign political resource (case of the Russian concept of multipolarity), The "Ukrainian Issue" in Russian identity policy, "Concept «Democracy" in Russian official discourse as an indicator of the relations of the RF with the West.*

RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE: REASONS AND CHALLENGES

Prof Dr Olga Brusylovska
Odesa I. I. Mechnikov National University

Both the political elites and society at large in Russia are obsessed with Ukraine because of, firstly, Russia's perennial quest for a strong state; secondly, the struggle of the Kremlin with the colour revolutions; thirdly, the perception of Ukraine as a mirror image of Russia; fourthly, "East Slavic" ideology; finally, Putin's belief that Ukraine is "an artificial country". In the 2022 war, Putin wants to make progress towards all these aims through toppling the pro-Western government of Ukraine, making the country a vassal state like Belarus, and signalling that further expansion of NATO to the east will not be tolerated. The status of a buffer state for Ukraine would become a factor that affirms the tumultuous situation not only in Ukraine but in the whole region.

The Goals of the Russian Federation in Ukraine

The development of Russian-Ukrainian relations is overburdened by socio-economic, political, and ideological problems. The sense of unity generated by their common Soviet past gradually disappeared and has been replaced by the search for a new identity – which has been dramatic for both societies. After 1991, the goal of Moscow was 'a friendly and neutral Ukraine'. The relations were built primarily on an economic basis, but even then, Russia widely used a ban on the import of some goods as a political instrument. In Ukraine, there has been a struggle between liberal Europe-oriented ideas and the traditional nationalism of a smaller nation. In Russia, Putin received consensus on the base of both traditional patriotism and a new post-imperial nationalism. After 2004, problems in Russian-Ukrainian relations related to the Russian Black Sea Fleet base in Crimea were aggravated. Both countries had a high level of mutual distrust, especially noticeable because in the past they had been so close.

> **In Russia, Putin received consensus on the base of both traditional patriotism and a new post-imperial nationalism**

Since 2000, when Putin was first elected president, the Kremlin has adopted a Tsarist imperial nationalism towards Ukraine and Ukrainians that denies the existence of the country and its people. In the eyes of the Kremlin, Ukraine is a 'Russian land' and Ukrainians are one of three (alongside Russians and Belarusians) branches of a pan-Russian nation. Putin's Russian nationalism views Ukrainians as "Little

Russians" – as was clear in his July 2021 article[1]. President Putin views his historical legacy as a "Gatherer of Russian Lands". The first territory to be "gathered" was Crimea in 2014 and the second was Belarus in 2021. Ukraine is the third and last part of the "Russian lands" which Putin seeks to "gather."

> « ***This sense of having a special mission has contributed to Russia's paucity of formal alliances and reluctance to join international bodies, aside from as an exceptional or dominant member***

Maybe the biggest driver of Russian foreign policy has been the country's perennial quest for a strong state. Many Russian politicians considered that in a dangerous world with few natural defences, the only guarantor of Russia's security was a powerful state willing and able to act aggressively in its own interests. Russians have always had an abiding sense of living in a providential country with a special mission – an attitude often traced to Byzantium, which Russia claims as an inheritance[2]. This idea has been expressed differently over time – the Third Rome, the pan-Slavic kingdom, the world headquarters of the Communist International. Today's version involves Eurasianism, a movement launched among Russian émigrés in 1921, that imagined Russia as neither European nor Asian but a sui generis fusion[3].

This sense of having a special mission has contributed to Russia's paucity of formal alliances and reluctance to join international bodies, aside from as an exceptional or dominant member. This furnishes Russia's people and leaders with pride, but it also fuels resentment towards the West for supposedly underappreciating Russia's uniqueness and importance. Therefore, there is psychological alienation added to the institutional divergence driven by relative economic backwardness. As a result, Russian governments have generally oscillated between seeking closer ties with the West and recoiling in fury at perceived slights, with neither tendency able to prevail permanently.

Yet another factor that has shaped Russia's role in the world has been the country's unique geography. It has no natural borders, except for the Pacific Ocean and the Arctic Ocean (the latter of which is now becoming a contested space, too). Buffeted throughout its history by often turbulent developments in East Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, Russia has felt perennially vulnerable and has often displayed a kind of defensive aggressiveness. Whatever the original causes behind early Russian expansionism – much of which was unplanned – many in the country's political class came to believe over time that only further expansion could secure the earlier acquisitions. Russian security has thus traditionally been partly predicated on moving outward, in the name of pre-empting an external attack. Today, too, smaller countries on Russia's borders are viewed less as potential friends than as potential beachheads for enemies. In fact,

1   *Статья Владимира Путина «Об историческом единстве русских и украинцев»* [Article by Vladimir Putin "On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians"], Президент России, 12 июля 2021. [http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181].

2   Н. А. Бердяев, *Национализм и мессианизм* [Nationalism and Messianism], «Судьба России. Кризис искусства», М., 2004; К. Н. Леонтьев, *Византизм и славянство* [Byzantism and Slavism], «Избранное», М., 1993; В. С. Соловьёв, *Русская идея* [Russian Idea], «Соч. в двух томах», Т. 2. М., 1989.

3   *Исход к Востоку. Предчувствия и свершения. Утверждение евразийцев. Книга 1*, «Библиотека первоисточников евразийцев: 20–30-е годы» [Exodus to the East. Premonitions and Accomplishments. The Approval of the Eurasians. Book 1], [http://nevmenandr.net/eurasia/1921-isxod.php].

this sentiment was strengthened by the Soviet collapse. "Unlike Stalin, Putin does not recognize the existence of a Ukrainian nation separate from a Russian one. But like Stalin, he views all nominally independent borderland states, now including Ukraine, as weapons in the hands of Western powers intent on wielding them against Russia."[4].

> **Russia has shown the breadth of its geopolitical ambitions, and intends to act from the standpoint of "Russian civilization" versus the West. Putin explained back in 2008 the origin of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in terms of the haste with which the USA promoted the expansion of democracy and the EU sought association with Ukraine**

Russia has long been engineering a pretext to invade Ukraine by conducting a false flag attack – blaming Kyiv for actions Moscow in fact instigated – and alleging that the government of Ukraine poses a threat to Russian speakers in the country's east[5]. For example, leaders of the so-called "Luhansk People's Republic" and the "Donetsk People's Republic", the regions of Ukraine that Russia has propped up since 2014, have constantly blamed Ukraine for a series of explosions and attempted acts of sabotage, such as a supposed attack on a water treatment facility, which seem to be staged provocations. The Russian military mobilisation on the borders with Ukraine, combined with the Russian-Belarusian military exercises and hundreds of violations of the ceasefire by the administrations of the Ukrainian separatist territories[6], kept Kyiv on high alert during January-February 2022. Ukraine's concerns were seen to be valid, after Putin signed documents recognising the independence of the two breakaway Ukrainian regions of Luhansk and Donetsk.

On the political, diplomatic, military, and financial front, the West took Ukraine's side. At the same time, efforts were under way to bring Russia to the negotiating table to avoid a conventional Russo-Ukrainian war[7]. By January 2022, Russia had positioned more than 150,000 troops on Ukraine's borders – this figure did not include Russian-led forces in the occupied territories of the Donbas (which might number 15,000), the Russian national guard or other auxiliary forces. Counting those, Russia had more than 190,000 troops near the Ukrainian border. These numbers implied that Moscow was not planning a

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4   S. Kotkin, *Russia's Perpetual Geopolitics. Putin Returns to the Historical Pattern*, "Foreign Affairs", 2016. [https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2016-04-18/russias-perpetual-geopolitics?utm_medium=promo_email&utm_source=special_send&utm_campaign=ukraine_russia_022422&utm_content=20220224&utm_term=all-special-send#author-info]

5   M. Kofman, J. Edmonds, *Russia's Shock and Awe. Moscow's Use of Overwhelming Force against Ukraine*, "Foreign Affairs", 2022. [https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-02-21/russias-shock-and-awe?utm_medium=promo_email&utm_source=special_send&utm_campaign=ukraine_russia_022422&utm_content=20220224&utm_term=all-special-send#author-info]

6   *Press Statement of Special Representative Kinnunen after the proposed Meeting of Trilateral Contact Group on 19 February 2022*, OSCE. [https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/512623]

7   D. Cenușa, *Russian crisis 2.0: Ukraine's demands towards the West in the face of new scenarios in Moscow*, "IPN", 2022. [https://www.ipn.md/en/russian-crisis-20-ukraines-requests-to-the-west-7978_1087988.html#ixzz7LokzKKxv]

limited incursion, but intending to attempt to seize to substantial tracts of Ukrainian territory, including the capital[8].

Russia has shown the breadth of its geopolitical ambitions, and intends to act from the standpoint of "Russian civilization" versus the West. Putin explained back in 2008 the origin of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in terms of the haste with which the USA promoted the expansion of democracy and the EU sought association with Ukraine: it was perceived by Russia as an invasion of the West of their territory, which was considered as a space within its vital interests[9]. Russia seeks to acquire an unofficial right of veto to prevent the further expansion of NATO and the EU to the East. So, in the war of 2022, Putin's first order of business is to topple the pro-Western government of Ukraine and to make the country a vassal state like neighbouring Belarus. And thirdly, to signal to the world that any further expansion of NATO to the east will not be tolerated. The neutrality imposed on Ukraine at an international level, first of all, would mean Russia's ability to influence the situation in Ukraine much more than the EU could. The status of a buffer state would become a factor that affirmed the tumultuous situation, not only in Ukraine, but also in the whole region. Sudha David-Wilp, deputy director of the Berlin Office of the German Marshall Fund, said that "Putin seeks a significant expansion of Russian territory in the region; an increase in Russian influence globally; and a clear expression of Russia military strength relative to its neighbours (including in both the physical and cyber domains), as well as – and perhaps most importantly for Putin – yet another demonstration of Western impotence in the face of Russian aggression"[10].

Russia's demands during the 2022 talks showed Putin's intentions to revise history and change the post-1989 European security order[11]. Attacking Ukraine has probably assuaged his damaged ego from the claim that Russia is a declining power. On one hand, Putin wants to restore the notion of empire and does not recognise the legitimacy of the former Soviet republics. At the same time, military aggression against manufactured enemies is a way to deflect discontent at home and maintain his hold on power. Jamil Jaffer, founder and executive director of the National Security Institute, went on: "Essentially, having launched this war, unless it goes horribly poorly for Putin with massive Russian casualties – a highly unlikely outcome at this point given the limited weaponry, training, and intelligence support we've been willing to provide to Ukraine thus far – it is likely that he is once again going to walk away with a net gain for Russia, all at the expense of the system of international order that the U.S. and our allies have worked for decades to establish and nurture"[12].

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8   M. Kofman, J. Edmonds, *Russia's Shock and Awe. Moscow's Use of Overwhelming Force against Ukraine*, "Foreign Affairs", 2022. [https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-02-21/russias-shock-and-awe?utm_medium=promo_email&utm_source=special_send&utm_campaign=ukraine_russia_022422&utm_content=20220224&utm_term=all-special-send#author-info]

9   *Владимир Путин и Джордж Буш подводят итоги совместной работы* [Vladimir Putin and George W. Bush sum up joint work], «1tv.ru Новости», 6 апреля 2008, [https://www.1tv.ru/news/2008-04-06/193438-vladimir_putin_i_dzhordzh_bush_podvodyat_itogi_sovmestnoy_raboty].

10 M. Ward, *Why Putin chose war*, "POLITICO Nightly", 2022.
    [https://www.politico.com/newsletters/politico-nightly/2022/02/24/why-putin-chose-war-00011491]

11 *Лавров назвал требования России к соглашению по безопасности для Украины* [Lavrov named Russia's demands for a security agreement for Ukraine], «РБК», 1 апреля 2022.
    [https://www.rbc.ru/politics/01/04/2022/6246d13e9a79475188c9f750].

12 M. Ward, *Why Putin chose war*, "POLITICO Nightly", 2022.
    [https://www.politico.com/newsletters/politico-nightly/2022/02/24/why-putin-chose-war-00011491]

So, Putin's goals since February 2022 have gone beyond occupying the eastern regions of Ukraine. The Russian president's ultimate aims are delegitimising President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the government in Kyiv, and the occupation of all of Ukraine, and propping up a government supportive of Moscow. Therefore, ex-President Yanukovych was soon brought from Rostov-on-Don to Minsk[13], as Putin once again intends to put him in the chair of the Ukrainian Presidency.

On the Brink of War

Having outlined Russia's goals in Ukraine, let's look at the main milestones of the slide into the current war, in order to understand whether it was possible earlier to identify a threat to the Ukrainian state, and even to stop it with the help of non-military foreign policy tools.

Russian ex-President Dmitrii Medvedev's October 11th, 2021 article in "Kommersant" demonstrated that the Kremlin had lost patience with President Zelenskyy, who was ridiculed as a "US puppet". The Kremlin said it would no longer talk to Kyiv and would only negotiate with its 'puppet masters' in Washington. Medvedev warned that Russia would "wait for the emergence of a sane leadership in Ukraine" that "is aimed not at a total confrontation with Russia on the brink of war... but at building equal and

mutually beneficial relations with Russia"[14]. Medvedev's warning implied the Kremlin sought regime change in Ukraine.

On October 27th, 2021, the Kremlin was infuriated by Ukraine's first use of a Turkish drone to successfully eliminate Russian proxy forces in the Donbas region[15]. This suggested to the Kremlin that Ukraine's military had been becoming strong enough to prevent Russia using proxy forces to pressure Ukraine into accepting the Russian interpretation of the Minsk agreements that Moscow had pressed for. On December 17th, 2021, the Kremlin issued two ultimatums to the West demanding 'written security guarantees' – a "Treaty between the United States and the Russian Federation on Security Guarantees" and an "Agreement on Measures to Ensure the Security of the Russian Federation and the Member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO]"[16]. The tone of the two ultimatums suggested that the Kremlin never considered a compromise deal. The US sent a written response in late January 2022 that turned down Russian demands[17]. January-February meetings with the Russian leadership involving the US, NATO, OSCE, and bilateral ones failed to achieve diplomatic breakthroughs.

On February 11th, 2022, British Minister of State for Europe James Cleverly predicted that a wider war in Ukraine "would be a

13 *Ukraine's former President Yanukovych ousted in 2014 is in Minsk, Kremlin wants to reinstall him in Kyiv*, «Українська правда», 2 March 2022. [https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2022/03/2/7327392/].

14 Д. Медведев, *Почему бессмысленны контакты с нынешним украинским руководством* [Why contacts with the current Ukrainian leadership are meaningless], "Коммерсантъ", 11 октября 2021. [https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5028300].

15 *Kremlin says Turkish drones risk destabilising situation in east Ukraine*, "Reuters", 27 October 2021. [https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/kremlin-says-turkish-drones-risk-destabilising-situation-east-ukraine-2021-10-27/].

16 *Russia demands NATO roll back from East Europe and stay out of Ukraine*, "Reuters", 17 December 2021. [https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-unveils-security-guarantees-says-western-response-not-encouraging-2021-12-17/].

17 *Blinken announces US has delivered written responses to Russia over Ukraine crisis*, "CNN", 27 January 2022. [https://edition.cnn.com/2022/01/26/politics/us-russia-ukraine/index.html].

quagmire" for Russia. In a rational cost-benefit analysis, the thinking went that the price of a full-scale war in Ukraine would be punishingly high for the Kremlin and would entail significant bloodshed. The United States has estimated as many as 50,000 civilian casualties. Along with undermining Putin's support among the Russian elite, who would suffer personally from the ensuing tensions with Europe, a war could endanger Russia's economy and alienate the public. At the same time, it could bring NATO troops closer to Russia's borders, leaving Russia to fight a Ukrainian resistance for years to come. According to this view, Russia would be trapped in a disaster of its own making[18].

Kyiv urged Western partners to introduce sanctions without waiting for negative scenarios to materialise, believing that sanctions would discourage Russian aggression. The Ukrainian side saw little point in post factum sanctions, given that Western partners had evidence of an impending war. Zelenskyy also hinted that if the sanctions were not applied pre-emptively, they should at least be announced, to increase pressure on Russia[19]. The sanctions list was coordinated between the US and the EU, along with some other G7 states[20]. However, they were rejected, to secure a strategic advantage over Moscow. In addition to the economic costs of sanctions, the West warned Russia of a serious blow to its prestige on the international stage, which

could make it a "global pariah". "It might be useful because Russia's reputation is one of Putin's main sensitivities"[21].

Ukraine's request for sanctions at that moment was not supported by the allies for several reasons. The West considered that expressing the political will to impose sanctions was already exerting pressure. Unanimity was also needed to impose sanctions, which was not unambiguous in two critical areas: disconnecting Russia from the Information System for International Financial Transactions (SWIFT) and sanctioning the energy sector. This was due to the exposure of the European financial sector, mainly in Austria, Italy, France and the Netherlands, which credited the Russian economy with tens of billions of euros. The situation in the energy sector also required surgical attention from the EU. The heavy dependence on Russian gas (40% of EU imports) could only be resolved in the long term[22], and EU countries such as Italy opposed energy sanctions. This opposition was also fuelled by the gas market crisis.

But the worst-case scenario was enacted by the Kremlin: on 24th February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine. Several officials and analysts immediately called the invasion the largest conventional military attack in Europe since World War II[23]. Moreover, the Russian occupying forces have used

18 L. Fix, M. Kimmage, *What if Russia Wins? A Kremlin-Controlled Ukraine Would Transform Europe*, "Foreign Affairs", 2022. [https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-02-18/what-if-russia-wins#author-info]

19 *Санкції проти Росії після того, як станеться ескалація на кордоні, неефективні – Зеленський*, «Радіо Свобода», 15 грудня 2021.
[https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-zelenskyi-sanktsiyi-rosiya-eskalatsiya/31610967.html].

20 *U.S. Details Costs of a Russian Invasion of Ukraine*, "The New York Times", 2022.
[https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/08/us/politics/us-sanctions-russia-ukraine.html].

21 D. Cenușa, *Russian crisis 2.0: Ukraine's demands towards the West in the face of new scenarios in Moscow*, "IPN", 2022.
[https://www.ipn.md/en/russian-crisis-20-ukraines-requests-to-the-west-7978_1087988.html#ixzz7LokzKKxv]

22 *Speech by President von der Leyen at the Munich Security Conference 2022*, An official website of the European Union, 19 February 2022. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_22_1221]

23 *Ukraine conflict world reaction: Sanctions, refugees and fears of war*, "BBC", 24 February 2022.
[https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60507016].

methods that violate the rules of war[24]. They have attacked civilian infrastructure, which causes the death and injuries of civilians including children and can have regional and even global effects.

Conclusions

The destruction of Ukraine's democracy through a Russian invasion and installation of a pro-Kremlin puppet regime would energise the anti-democratic onslaught of autocratic regimes, such as China and Iran, around the world and send a signal that the democratic West is in decline. A successful overthrow of democracy in Ukraine would increase the threat to the three Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, all of them NATO members, and encourage China to consider the military conquest of Taiwan.

There is an impression that in Russia both the political elites and the society as a whole are obsessed with Ukraine. There are several reasons for this: the struggle of the Kremlin with the colour revolutions in an effort to prevent the same scenario in Russia; the perception of Ukraine as a mirror image of Russia; 'East Slavic' ideology; Putin's beliefs that Ukraine is 'an artificial country' and 'a failed state'. So, two countries that had once declared themselves to be strategic partners entered a period of protracted conflict because of differences in their development models. The two states have a high level of mutual distrust, especially noticeable because in the past they were so close.

In the 2022 war, Putin's first order of business is to topple the pro-Western government of Ukraine and to make the country a vassal state like neighbouring Belarus. And thirdly, to signal that any further expansion of NATO to the east will not be tolerated. Russia always interpreted "neutrality" in a different manner to that of Finland or Austria during the Cold War. As witnessed by the Kremlin's aggressive policies towards Ukraine in 2012-2014, Russia understands the "neutral" status of Ukraine as the country returning to Russia's sphere of influence. Russia seeks not only Ukraine's formal renunciation of NATO membership. The Kremlin would also apply pressure on Ukraine to renounce all forms of military cooperation with NATO[25]. The neutrality imposed on Ukraine on an international level would mean Russia's ability to influence the situation in Ukraine much more than the EU could. The status of a buffer state would become a factor that enhanced the tumultuous situation, not only in Ukraine, but also in the whole region.

> **There is an impression that in Russia both the political elites and the society as a whole are obsessed with Ukraine**

The consensus in Russia that Ukraine was "really" part of Russia meant that there was always a benefit to Russian politicians in making claims on Ukraine, while there was risk in openly accepting its independence. It seems unlikely that Putin would have ordered the annexation of Crimea if it had not been massively popular. This raises a point that has been underappreciated: as much as analysts have focused on the erosion of democracy in Russia as a source of the conflict, a more democratic Russia may not have had a more benign attitude towards Ukraine.

24 *The Law of War and the Russian Invasion of Ukraine*, "Legal Sidebar", 16 March 2022. [https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/LSB/LSB10710].

25 T. Kuzio, *Vladimir Putin's Imperialism and Military Goals against Ukraine*, "E-IR", 2022. [https://www.e-ir.info/2022/02/24/vladimir-putins-imperialism-and-military-goals-against-ukraine/]

The essence of the security dilemma is that either pursuing new security measures or not doing so can leave one feeling vulnerable. In this perspective it is the situation, or the system, which is to blame, not the individual actors, who find themselves trapped in this dynamic. Escaping the security dilemma would have required one side or the other – or both – to abandon its understanding of what was acceptable as the status quo after the Cold War. Either the West and Ukraine would have to give up on the idea that in the new Europe democracy was the norm and democratic institutions were free to grow, or Russia would have to give up on its claims over Ukraine. And this can only be achieved through the victory of Ukraine in this war, which it did not unleash, but which today is capable of changing the global security situation.

Olga Brusylovska, *Professor, Chair of the Department of International Relations at Odesa Mechnikov National University. Author of more than 100 academic articles. Academic Editor of the journal "International and Political Studies".*

SOME EPISTEMOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR IN 2014-2022

Dr Ihor Lossovskyi
Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Envoy
of Ukraine of the First Class

Iryna Prykhodko
Non-executive Director of the Mountain Seed
Foundation (USA)

Some ideas on the political nature, causes, motivations of the parties, and essence of the Russian-Ukrainian war are presented. The ideological preconditions, reasons for, and current consequences of the Russian armed aggression against Ukraine, as well as the evolution of the formation of political and security doctrines of the ruling political regime of Russia, from quasi-liberal views to the expansionist concept of the «restoration of historical Russia» and justification for an aggressive war against Ukraine, are considered. The theoretical discourse of the authors is based on the provisions of the classic military theory. These fundamental ideas are gaining new relevance in the context of this war. Conclusions are based on the analysis of a number of Russian conceptual documents over the past 15 years.

The Weaponisation of History as Justification for Russia`s Aims

"Nationalist leaders often weaponize the past to justify their present aims… V. Putin is not the only world leader who has harkened back to an ahistorical past to justify his decisions in the present" [1]. The evolution of Putin's historical revisionism can be seen throughout his public statements over more than 22 years of his authoritarian rule.

The principles and practical implications of Putin`s foreign policy towards the post-Soviet states before the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24th, 2022, were presented earlier by one of the authors of this article[2]. On the basis of Russia's domestic legal and regulatory documents, as well as public statements by the leadership, it was concluded that the Kremlin has laid out a new foreign policy strategy and a corresponding foreign policy doctrine – "the new doctrine of limited sovereignty" (the "Putin Doctrine"), the main element of which is the concept of "limited sovereignty". During the Cold War, that was also a major component of the

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1 Y. Serhan . Who is Vladimir Putin's Revisionist History For? The Atlantic. February 27, 2022, [https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2022/02/putin-russia-ukraine-revisionist-history/622936/].

2 I. Lossovskyi Russia`s strategy toward post-Soviet states as implementation of the new doctrine of limited sovereignty (Putin doctrine) // Ukraine Analytica. № 4 (22). 2020. p.8-17, [https://ukraine-analytica.org/wp-content/uploads/Lossovskyi1-1.pdf].

"Brezhnev Doctrine" – the USSR's foreign policy doctrine regarding the states of the so-called "People's Democracies". It was emphasised that for more than 20 years now, the form of government in Russia has been a personal dictatorship. Its aggressive military and international activity, especially regarding Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries, as well as other manifestations of foreign policy for at least 15 years testify to the conformity of its actions to the criteria defined in the article for the implementation of the "new doctrine of limited sovereignty."

> « *In his numerous interviews, President Putin liked to emphasise that the criminal St. Petersburg gateway played an essential role in his teenage upbringing. The political behaviour of the Kremlin dictator fits into the stereotype of the behaviour of the criminals of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union*

In 2005, in his annual state of the nation address, Vladimir Putin called the collapse of the Soviet empire "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century"[3]. The first stage of escalation in Russia's policy can be traced to Putin's speech at the 2007 Munich Security Conference[4], which smacked of Cold War rhetoric. One year before the end of his second presidential term, already an ingrained politician but still a relative "democrat,"

although he may have already decided on the future scenario of his authoritarian transformations in Russia, Putin accused Washington of attempting to force its will on the world. He blamed the US for making the world a more dangerous place, by pursuing policies to make it unipolar. Demonstrating the ambitions of a resurgent energy superpower, Putin was making unfounded claims that Russia should be treated as a separate pole of power in world politics.

The reaction of the international political community to that speech was unambiguously negative and adverse. Some opinions were expressed that the speech was provocative and marked by rhetoric that made it sound more like a Cold War ultimatum[5]. At the same time, Kremlin spokesman Peskov denied the Russian president was trying to provoke Washington: "This is not about confrontation. It's an invitation to think"[6].

Although they made a negative impression on the West, such ultimatum statements by Putin were nevertheless ignored. The "trial bowl" for the current aggressive policy of the Russian Federation turned out to be the war in Georgia in August 2008, which led to human casualties, destruction, and the actual partition from Georgia of about 20% of its legitimate territories recognised by international law as an integral part of this country – Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region (so-called South Ossetia). Russia illegally recognised these Georgian territories as "independent states." The continued sluggish reaction of the collective West and,

3   V. Putin: Soviet collapse a "genuine tragedy". NBC NEWS. April 25, 2005, [https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna7632057].

4   A speech delivered at the MSC 2007 by the President Vladimir Putin, [https://is.muni.cz/th/xlghl/DP_Fillinger_Speeches.pdf]

5   Transcript: 2007 Putin Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy. Johnson`s Russia List. March 27, 2014, [https://russialist.org/transcript-putin-speech-and-the-following-discussion-at-the-munich-conference-on-security-policy/].

6   Charbonneau L. Putin says U.S. wants to dominate world. Reuters. February 10, 2007, [https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-usa-idUSL1053774820070210]

above all, the United States, as well as virtual impunity for the presumptuous aggressor allowed President Putin to raise the stakes of his external aggression further and "tighten the screws" to the bitter end, regarding the restriction of elementary human freedoms in Russia itself.

A further ideological escalation was reflected in a number of Putin's official speeches, as well as programs and conceptual documents on foreign policy, security, and defence, published in 2014. Those were accompanied by occupation by Russian troops of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, which began on February 20th, 2014, and certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Russia's ongoing hostilities in Donbas alone have resulted in the deaths of some 15,000 Ukrainians[7], and massive destruction of this Ukrainian region's infrastructure and residential sector, even before the start of a full-scale Russian military invasion of Ukraine launched on February 24th, 2022.

In his numerous interviews, President Putin liked to emphasise that the criminal St. Petersburg gateway played an essential role in his teenage upbringing. The political behaviour of the Kremlin dictator fits into the stereotype of the behaviour of the criminals of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union of the 20th century, the so-called "gopniks." Their basic principle is "If the fight is unavoidable, you gotta hit first,". It has become the ideology of the foreign

and security policy of Putin's autocracy. He stated this during a speech at the Valdai International Discussion Club in Sochi in the autumn of 2015, at the height of Russia's military operation in the Donbas[8].

Further radicalisation of political rhetoric at the highest level began in the mid-summer of 2021, when Putin, following the traditions of Soviet leader Stalin, turned to the epistolary amateur-historical genre, publishing on July 12th in two languages, a rather lengthy article "On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians"[9], which even then was seen as the declaration of a real war, or at least as a final ultimatum. Despite controversial and biased provisions, the article received considerable publicity in Ukraine and Russia, as well as further afield. It has become mandatory to read and study it, among the Russian Armed Forces (AF)[10]. However, it was not taken seriously by the academic community, even in Russia. As befits a KGB officer, Putin did not resort to scientific research methods. The Russian president formulated his conclusions without relying on a set of facts, so to say, *a priori*. He laid out his postulates in advance before conducting any research. Among them are the following: Russians and Ukrainians are "one people"; foreign and anti-Russian conspiracies of Western countries are to be blamed for the collapse of bilateral Russian-Ukrainian relations; a significant part of the modern territory of Ukraine covers "historically Russian lands"; even such an accusation was made that "Russia was robbed". Claims

7   Conflict-related civilian casualties in Ukraine, United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, January 27, 2022, [https://ukraine.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/Conflict-related%20civilian%20 casualties%20as%20of%2031%20December%202021%20%28rev%2027%20January%202022%29%20 corr%20EN_0.pdf]

8   Bender J. Putin: 'The streets of Leningrad taught me one thing'. INSIDER. October 22, 2015, [https://www.businessinsider.com/putin-the-streets-of-leningrad-taught-me-one-thing-2015-10].

9   Domańska M. Putin's article: 'On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians'. OSW. Centre for Eastern Studies. Analysis. 13.07.2021, [https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2021-07-13/putins-article-historical-unity-russians-and-ukrainians]

10 Статья Путина "Об историческом единстве русских и украинцев" стала обязательной для изучения в российской армии [Putin's article became he must to study in the Russian Army], Настоящее время, July 16, 2021, [https://www.currenttime.tv/a/statya-putina-stala-obyazatelnoy-dlya-izucheniya-v-armii/31361220.html]

were made for new territorial annexations: "I am becoming more and more convinced that Kyiv simply does not need Donbas". Ukraine was denied the right to statehood independent of Moscow: "I am confident that the true sovereignty of Ukraine is possible only in partnership with Russia."[11]

Speaking about Ukraine moving from the concept of «not Russia» to «anti-Russia», Putin actually declares war on Ukraine: «We will never allow our historical territories and people close to us living there to be used against Russia. And those who will make such an attempt, I want to say that in this way they will destroy their country»[12]. By manipulating real historical facts, Putin pulled out only those that fit into his concept, completely ignoring the rest.

Another attempt but at a lower political level, was made in the article by the former President of Russia, and now Deputy Secretary of the National Security Council Dmitry Medvedev, entitled "Why Contacts with the Current Ukrainian Leadership Are Meaningless", and published on October 11th, 2021 in the *Kommersant* newspaper[13]. "Ukraine is headed by weak people who only seek to line their pockets...There was no leader who could sacrifice himself for the sake of Ukraine, and it looks like there won't be one yet... negotiations with such people are absolutely pointless". Such a statement by a former leader of Russia is similar to actually threatening war. Because, if the need and possibility to negotiate with the

current democratically elected leadership of Ukraine are denied, only war is left. Real war or hybrid war, it is no longer of fundamental importance. A former professor at Leningrad University, Medvedev even allowed himself to make anti-Semitic statements in relation to the President of Ukraine.

Besides the series of belligerent and xenophobic political statements that appeared in the Russian media in the six-month period preceding February 24th, 2022, one cannot fail to mention the notorious article by T. Sergeytsev "What Russia Should Do with Ukraine"[14] which was published on April 3rd on the website of the state agency RIA Novosti. It was on the same day as the whole world saw terrible evidence of the crimes of genocide by the Russian military against civilians in the town of Bucha near Kyiv[15]. The author describes how the "denazification" of Ukraine should be carried out. It should be imposed on "the Nazified mass of the population, which technically cannot be subjected to direct punishment as war criminals." The servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine should be "destroyed to the maximum on the battlefield". "Denazification" should be carried out with the help of "ideological repression and strict censorship." The process of "denazification" should cover at least one generation of Ukrainians and last 30 years and would be "de-Ukrainization", that is, the rejection of "artificial inflating of the ethnic composition of self-identification of the population of the territories of

11 Article by Vladimir Putin "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians", The Kremlin, July 12, 2021, [http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181]

12 Dickinson P. Putin`s new Ukraine essay reveals imperial ambitions. Atlantic Council. Ukraine Alert, July 15, 2021, [https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/putins-new-ukraine-essay-reflects-imperial-ambitions/].

13 Medvedev wrote an article about Ukraine and said that negotiations with its leadership are "pointless". Perild. October 11, 2021, [https://www.perild.com/2021/10/11/medvedev-wrote-an-article-about-ukraine-and-said-that-negotiations-with-its-leadership-are-pointless/]

14 Что Россия должна сделать с Украиной, RIA news, April 3, 2022 [https://ria.ru/20220403/ukraina-1781469605.html]

15 Manifesto published in Russian media reflects Putin regime's ruthless plans in Ukraine. The Conversation. April 14, 2022, [https://theconversation.com/manifesto-published-in-russian-media-reflects-putin-regimes-ruthless-plans-in-ukraine-181006].

historical "Little Russia" and "New Russia"." The very name "Ukraine" should not be preserved. That is nothing but a clearly declared manifesto of the chauvinistic ideology of the "Russian world" and an action plan for the destruction of the entire Ukrainian nation, designed for the next 30 years. At the same time, the authors do not even bother to at least formally attempt to cover up their neo-Nazi ideology with at least some kinds of "argument".

Putin's claims of Nazis and the genocide of Russians and Russian speakers in Ukraine are completely unfounded. They are part of a propagandistic false narrative repeated by the Russian media and politicians for years. Moscow even made allegations that Ukraine was building a plutonium-based dirty bomb, and possessing special NATO laboratories for producing chemical and biological weapons. But it is Russia that is now accused by the international community of carrying out atrocities in Ukraine. Several countries including the US and Canada go further and call it genocide.

Full-scale Total Warfare Versus "Special Military Operation"

However unjustified, this war is a pivotal and crucial moment. "Russia's future and its future place in the world are at stake," – stated Russian foreign intelligence chief Naryshkin[16]. After so much destruction and killings, Putin's words spoken on February 24th, 2022, on the day of the full-fledged invasion in Ukraine sound cynical: "It is not our plan to occupy the Ukrainian territory. We do not intend to impose anything on anyone by force."[17] The purpose of the so-called "special military operation" was deceitfully declared as *"to protect people who, for eight years now, have been facing humiliation and genocide perpetrated by the Kyiv regime…We will seek to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine, as well as bring to trial those who perpetrated numerous bloody crimes against civilians, including against citizens of the Russian Federation"*.[18]

> *Putin's claims of Nazis and the genocide of Russians and Russian speakers in Ukraine are completely unfounded. They are part of a propagandistic false narrative repeated by the Russian media and politicians for years*

Even more cynical are the following words of the Russian leader, addressing the citizens of Ukraine after the start of the invasion: *"The current events have nothing to do with a desire to infringe on the interests of Ukraine and the Ukrainian people… I am asking you, however hard this may be, to understand this and to work together with us so as to turn this tragic page as soon as possible and to move forward together"*.[19]

On the eve of the invasion, Putin made it clear that he believes Ukraine has no legal rights and historical claim to independent statehood; and that modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russia. He has questioned the legitimacy of the former Soviet republics, claiming that Lenin planted a "time bomb" by allowing them self-determination in the early years of the USSR.

16 Why has Russia invaded Ukraine and what does Putin want? BBC, May 3, 2022, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-56720589

17 Full text of Vladimir Putin's speech announcing 'special military operation' in Ukraine. The Print, February 24, 2022, https://theprint.in/world/full-text-of-vladimir-putins-speech-announcing-special-military-operation-in-ukraine/845714/

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

The beginning of the full-scale phase of the war was in the early morning of February 24th, 2022. Putin announced the start of a "special military operation" on the territory of Ukraine, referring to Article 51 of the UN Charter, the permissive sanction of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the RF and the "treaties" of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance between Russia and the so-called "DPR" and "LPR". It is curious that the latter "came into force" only on February 25th and did not have any legal jurisdiction at the time of the outbreak of hostilities.

Is the Current Political Regime in Russia Fascist?

A discussion among political scientists and historians specialising in research on Russia and the USSR has recently unfolded around the following questions of whether the current political regime in Russia is Nazi, fascist, or totalitarian, and whether Russian culture is responsible for the acts of genocide and crimes against humanity that continue to be committed by the Russian military in Ukraine.[20] Putin`s regime has all the hallmarks of being Nazi, fascist, and totalitarian, as well as genocidal, chauvinistic and dictatorial. Differences are observed only in the individual terminology of some authors. But, as the famous saying goes: "If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it probably is a duck".

In history, it is difficult to find exact precedents, exact copies of events and regimes that have existed throughout human history. But if there are obvious parallels, coincidences, and similarities, why not call these events or regimes by similar terms. However, in the case of the current fascist regime in Russia, new terms, "Ruscism" (Russian fascism) and Putinism, are also gaining ground.

Since the answer to the second question seems to be more complex and ambiguous, and also goes beyond the scope of clear academic discussion, we will refrain from discussing it in detail here.

Postcolonial War for Ukrainian Identity and Future

This war is fundamentally a postcolonial war over Ukrainian identity[21]. It came about as the result of the inevitable clash of two opposing incompatible historical paradigms for the further development of Ukraine and the entire post-Soviet space. On the one hand, there is Putin's paradigm of the revival of the Russian Empire, based on the "non-statehood" of young nations formed as a result of the second stage in the dissolution of the Russian Empire in 1991 (the first stage took place as a result of World War I), based on the inability of their independent existence. First of all, it concerned Ukraine and Belarus. According to Putin's article, Russians and Ukrainians are one people, Ukraine never truly existed as a sovereign entity until the Bolsheviks mistakenly brought it into existence, and the territories of Ukraine are fundamentally Russian lands[22].

20 E.g., 1) Shorten R. Putin's not a fascist, totalitarian or revolutionary – he's a reactionary tyrant. The Conversation. – March 17, 2022, [https://theconversation.com/putins-not-a-fascist-totalitarian-or-revolutionary-hes-a-reactionary-tyrant-179256]. 2) Motyl A.J. Is Putin`s Russia Fascist? Atlantic Council. Ukrainian Alert. April 23, 2022, [https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/is-putin-s-russia-fascist/].

21 Kasianov G. The War Over Ukrainian Identity. Foreign Affairs. May 4, 2022, [https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-05-04/war-over-ukrainian-identity].

22 Dickinson P. Putin`s new Ukraine essay reveals imperial ambitions. Atlantic Council. Ukraine Alert, July 15, 2021, [https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/putins-new-ukraine-essay-reflects-imperial-ambitions/].

On the other hand, there is modern Ukrainian political nationalism, which is growing in strength. It has undergone difficult tests of practical state-building over the past 30 years, building an extensive liberal-democratic system of government, regularly modifying elected bodies, law enforcement agencies of state security and defence, etc.

> **A discussion among political scientists and historians specialising in research on Russia and the USSR has recently unfolded around the following questions of whether the current political regime in Russia is Nazi, fascist, or totalitarian, and whether Russian culture is responsible for the acts of genocide**

In a clash of the two paradigms, Ukraine's stakes are much higher. Putin's understanding of history denies the very right to existence of a Ukrainian nation separate from Russia. "There is a fundamental difference in positions *[of Russia and Ukraine]*. Russia turns to the past to justify expansion, aggression, and domination, to resurrect an empire. Ukraine does it in self-defence and self-determination to preserve and nurture an independent republic. Russia fights for the past. Ukraine fights for the future"[23].

In looking into the formation of the ideology of Russian fascism, it would be mistaken to bypass the role of the Russian Orthodox Church. It was almost completely destroyed in the 1920-1930s by the totalitarian regime in the USSR, and then revived by Stalin in 1943 as a structure accountable to the NKVD / KGB. For many years it has developed into an informer and conductor of the Kremlin's policy. Almost nothing has changed since the collapse of the USSR. Today, the Russian Orthodox Church, headed by Patriarch Kirill (Gundyaev), serves the Kremlin, supporting and blessing its aggressive policy towards Ukraine and the unleashed war. Sermons delivered by Kirill, calling for war and justifying it, were proclaimed at the beginning of the war in the new "military" temple of Russia – the Cathedral of the Armed Forces[24].

The views of Sergey Karaganov, one of the main ideologists and theorists of the concept of the "Russian world", can also be quoted: *"The war was inevitable. We made the very hard decision to strike first, before the threat becomes deadlier... Enlargement of the aggressive alliance...is a cancer and we wanted to stop this metastasis. We have to do it by a surgical operation... We are fighting a war of survival. This is a war with the West and people are regrouping around their leader. This is an authoritarian country...We have our doubts about the effectiveness of democracy... Kremlin decided to strike first. This military operation will be used to restructure the Russian elite and society. It will become a more militant-based and national-based society, pushing out non-patriotic elements from the elite...We are fighting an existential war... The war will be victorious... Demilitarization and denazification will be achieved. Like we did in Germany and in Chechnya. Ukrainians will become much more peaceful and friendlier to us...We know that article 5 of NATO, stating that an attack on a NATO member is an attack*

23 Snyder T. The war in Ukraine is a colonial war. The New Yorker. April 28, 2022, [https://www.newyorker.com/news/essay/the-war-in-ukraine-is-a-colonial-war].

24 Kelaidis K.The Russian patriarch just gave his most dangerous speech yet – and almost no one in the West has noticed. Religion Dispatches. April 4, 2022, [https://religiondispatches.org/the-russian-patriarch-just-gave-his-most-dangerous-speech-yet-and-almost-no-one-in-the-west-has-noticed/].

to all, doesn't work. There is no automatic guarantee that NATO would come to the defence of a member under attack" [25].

Peculiarities of the Modern Russian-Ukrainian War

In the Russian media and political narrative, the war, initially dubbed a "special military operation" eventually took on the form of a full-scale post-colonial war, which for Ukraine is an existential war. Ukraine is fighting for its right to exist, for its identity as a political and cultural nation. For Russia, Ukraine is "an inalienable part of our own history, culture, and spiritual space", whose independence was a product not of self-determination but rather "a mistake...It is a matter of life and death, of [Russia's] historical future as a nation."[26]

> **In a clash of the two paradigms, Ukraine's stakes are much higher. Putin's understanding of history denies the very right to existence of a Ukrainian nation separate from Russia**

For Putin's empire, Ukraine does not exist, since the very fact of its independent existence destroys the imperial myths about the "great and indivisible", about the "Russian civilization" and its "global mission". As the defeat of Russia in the war with Ukraine becomes more likely, the narrative that Russia as a "force for good" which is fighting against the "forces of world evil" in the guise of a coalition of the entire collective West is increasingly being promoted. At the same time, Russia allegedly defends traditional Orthodox Christian values of the "Russian world", and "Russian civilization" against a worldwide conspiracy.

This war, covering the entire territory of Ukraine, has become the largest in Europe since World War II. The front line of the war exceeds 1000 km, the daily casualties of full-scale military operations involving all branches of the armed forces on both sides amount to hundreds of people. While the anti-Hitler military-political coalition of the mid-1940s included 53 states, the kind of anti-Putin coalition, which is actively forming today, has already grown to include 47 countries. This was evidenced by the summit of the ministers of defence of the countries concerned, who gathered for the first and second meeting of the coalition in Ramstein, Germany on April 26th and May 23rd, 2022. There is also a danger of the war spreading to neighbouring countries.

In terms of the level and depth of online and live coverage of the military operations on TV, Internet and in other media, this war differs from the recent much smaller-scale military operations of Israel and Azerbaijan in the variety of active participants in the information coverage of events, and number of foreign journalists on the ground. In fact, all the events of this war, and evidence of Russia's war crimes immediately become known to the world. With this level of media coverage and thanks to the latest electronic means of information warfare, Russian criminals, murderers, marauders, and officers and generals who give criminal orders, become known to the whole world. All these should contribute to enabling

25 Fubini F. Sergey Karaganov: "We are at war with the West. The European security order is illegitimate". Corriere Della Sera. L`Economia. April 8, 2022, [https://www.corriere.it/economia/aziende/22_aprile_08/we-are-at-war-with-the-west-the-european-security-order-is-illegitimate-c6b9fa5a-b6b7-11ec-b39d-8a197cc9b19a.shtml].

26 Kessler G. Fact-checking Putin's speech on Ukraine, Washington Post, February 23, 2022, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/02/23/fact-checking-putins-speech-ukraine]

thorough procedural investigations to bring about the appropriate verdicts in the international criminal courts.[27]

Another feature of the modern Russian-Ukrainian war in the context of its conduct by the Russian side, concerns the methods of mobilisation and conscription. The Russian authorities carry out mainly covert mobilisation, as a rule, in backward depressed regions densely populated by national minorities, including Buryats, Dagestanis, Chechens, Tatars, etc. In the large, economically, and socially developed cities of Russia, where most of the population are ethnic Russians, military conscription is almost non-existent. By unleashing an unprovoked war against Ukraine, Russia destroyed the global security order that emerged after World War II, revealing the weakness and hopelessness of the leading international organisations designed to guarantee peace and security on the planet. This requires new collective efforts to create a new security system, which is equivalent to the tectonic processes in geopolitics that took place in the mid-1940s, which led to the creation of the UN. Today, the UN, OSCE, and other international security organisations will require fundamental changes and reforms.

A phenomenon unique in its danger to world peace and global consequences has been the outright nuclear blackmail and sabre-rattling of weapons of mass destruction, which Russia has resorted to. The world should no longer tolerate the fact that a nuclear state, a permanent member of the UN Security Council, openly threatens to turn the planet into "nuclear ashes." This nuclear blackmail by Russia has been going on since 2007. It is contrary to the norms of international law, primarily the NPT and an essential addition to it – the UN Security Council Resolution of June 19, 1968, and the Statement of the three nuclear powers (the USA, UK, and Russia) on issues of guarantees to non-nuclear states/participants of the NPT. The mere fact of such blackmail obliges the nuclear states to "immediately act in accordance with their obligations under the UN Charter ... provide immediate assistance to ... any non-nuclear weapon state"[28]. This resolution recognised that aggression using nuclear weapons or the threat of such attack against a non-nuclear-weapon state creates a situation in which the SC and, above all, its nuclear-weapon state permanent members have to act immediately.

This war became the first war in the last 70 years which led politicians, the expert community, and the military to seriously discuss the danger and likelihood of using weapons of mass destruction, notably nuclear weapons, both tactical and strategic. The possibility of using such weapons eliminates the validity of the famous thesis of Clausewitz that "war is a continuation of politics by military means"[29]. Since nuclear war is fraught with the complete annihilation of its parties and probably the whole of humanity, it loses any sense whatsoever to talk about the rationality of such a policy.

The fundamental ideas of Clausewitz are gaining new relevance in the context of this war, with the simultaneous presence of elements of military confrontation of yesterday's third-generation war and factors of the future new type of sixth-generation

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27 Ukrainian Parliament has recognized the actions of the Russian Federation as genocide against Ukrainians, [https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2022/04/14/7339618/], [https://itd.rada.gov.ua/billinfo/%D0%94%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%BA(eng).pdf].

28 UN SC Resolution S/RES/255 of June 19, 1968, [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Disarm%20SRES255.pdf], [https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/248/72/PDF/NR024872.pdf?OpenElement].

29 von Clausewitz C. On War. Oxford World`s Classics. Oxford University Press. 2008.

war. The Armed Forces of Ukraine actively use both a wide range of weapons that correspond to the latest military technology and modern NATO standards and modern tactical formations, and methods of conducting military operations. At the same time, the Russian Armed Forces continue to use mainly old Soviet weapons and the corresponding techniques and tactics of warfare from World War II. One should also consider the situation that is developing around the problem of the continued existence of Russia itself, as a result of its expected military defeat in the war against Ukraine with active assistance to the latter from the collective West. Russia is an existential threat to Ukraine and to the post-Soviet space and Central-Eastern Europe. A simple truce in this war without major consequences for Russia will only lead to a postponed war, which in future could become even more bloody and terrible than the current war.

The international community will have to provide for such a political solution regarding Russia's future political structure, which will guarantee the impossibility of a repetition of its aggression against its neighbours in the future. This is in line with the political statements of British Prime Minister Johnson and Foreign Secretary Truss, as well as US Secretary of Defence Austin, who stated that the United States wants "to see Russia weakened to the degree that it can't do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine."[30]

This situation requires the application of all the necessary political, economic, military, and intellectual efforts of the world community to resolve this global problem, to build a new, more secure world order that excludes future attempts at military aggression, and nuclear or any other blackmail of the planet with weapons of mass destruction.

***Ihor Lossovskyi**, Ph.D., Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Envoy of Ukraine of the First Class. He is currently Deputy Head of the State Service of Ukraine for Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience. He occupied different diplomatic positions in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine from 1993 to 2021. He was the Consul General of Ukraine in Toronto, Canada (2002-2006), Ambassador of Ukraine to Malaysia (2009-2010), and Ambassador at Large with the Ukrainian MFA (2014-2016). Has an M.Sc. degree from T. Shevchenko Kyiv National University (1979) and an MPA degree from Ukraine National Academy of Public Administration under the President of Ukraine (2006). In 1989 he obtained a Ph.D. from the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. Dr. Lossovskyi is the author of about 150 research articles and 3 monographs in the field of international relations, regional security, and foreign policy, as well as 30 pieces of research into the field of oil and gas exploration, and energy security.*

***Iryna Prykhodko**, Non-executive Director of the Mountain Seed Foundation (USA) and Vice-chair at the international charity fund "Way to the Dream". She graduated with a Masters in Law from Kyiv Higher Bank School of Kyiv University for Market Relations (2009) and with a Masters in Economics from the Crimean Agricultural University (1997). She is currently enrolled in the Masters program in International Relations at Webster Private University, Vienna.*

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30 Mauldin W. U.S. Wants to See Russia Weakened, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin Says After Ukraine Visit, Wall Street Journal, April 25, 2022, https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-to-return-embassy-to-ukraine-boost-military-aid-blinken-and-austin-tell-zelensky-in-visit-to-kyiv-11650859391

RUSSIAN WAR AGAINST UKRAINE: A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY FOR THE CEE AND BALTIC REGION?

Sergiy Gerasymchuk
Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism"

The Russian war against Ukraine and full-scale invasion that started on 24th February 2022 is both a challenge and an opportunity for the CEE and the Baltic States. It has triggered global attention in the region, enhanced the regional actors' solidarity with Ukraine and may eventually boost the regional initiatives, e.g. Three Seas Initiative or the Bucharest Nine. Also, it may inspire the creation of brand-new alliances. Nevertheless, the role of NATO and the EU is crucial in the region and their gravity remains decisive for the viability of the regional formats.

The region of Central and Eastern Europe (alongside the Baltic States) has often been called the site of geopolitical competition between the great powers. Indeed, the region's geographical location often made it a place of wars and rivalry where the international actors projected their influence. The long period under Soviet domination undermined the region's independence. Basically, the countries of the region were Moscow's satellites and served as Soviet proxies at the international level, whereas any kind of opposition was suppressed by the repressive Communist machine.

Further, after the end of the Cold War, in their search for security and economic stability and in order to escape from Russian revanchism, most of these countries joined NATO and the EU. The accession process was accelerated by the regional cooperation and joint efforts of like-minded countries in the region. The Visegrad Group (V4) – an alliance of four Central and Eastern European countries: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia launched in 1991 – allowed its members to get a

stronger voice in Brussels and Washington, to promote their European integration choice and to highlight regional interests on the European agenda. The Nordic-Baltic 8 Format (NB8), which includes Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, and Sweden came together in 1992 and formalized the historical ties between the Baltic States that re-gained their independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union and their northern neighbours, who were already members of the EU and/or NATO. Nowadays the group serves as a platform for Nordic-Baltic cooperation.

Despite being under the EU's normative and economic aegis, and NATO's security gravity, in addition to the influence of the countries which play leading roles in these organisations, and benefitting from the privileged relations that come with membership of both the European Union and North Atlantic alliance, the countries of the region still preserved their existing regional cooperation with the V4 and NB8, and they have also launched new ones. For example, in 2008 the EU launched the Eastern Partnership, which included Armenia,

Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The second example is China-CEE (China-CEEC), also known as 16+1, which in 2012 was created as a framework for cooperation between China and 16 countries of the region: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, The Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Slovenia (Lithuania withdrew from the group in 2021). These initiatives were aimed at ensuring the interests of their members vis-a-vis stronger partners. In some cases, like in the case of the EaP, it was a success[1]. In some other cases, like in the case of the CEEC, it did not work properly[2].

> **Despite being under the EU's normative and economic aegis, and NATO's security gravity, in addition to the influence of the countries which play leading roles in these organisations, and benefiting from the privileged relations that come with membership of both the European Union and North Atlantic alliance, the countries of the region still preserved their existing regional cooperation**

Also, at the risk of being blamed for drawing up division lines in the EU and NATO, the countries of the region initiated internally oriented formats, which demonstrate high potential for success. The EU-centred Three Seas Initiative (3SI), launched in 2015, is composed of the EU member states located between the Baltic, Black, and Adriatic seas – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, The Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Austria, Croatia, Romania, and Bulgaria. It aims to promote cooperation, first and foremost, for the development of infrastructure in the energy, transport, and digital sectors.[3] It targets new investments, economic growth, and energy security. The EU was initially suspicious of the Three Seas Initiative. The so-called "old Europe" perceived it as a rival project within the organisation that may undermine the EU's unity. Poland in this regard was often perceived as a key trouble-maker, willing to use regional leadership as a tool to argue with Brussels regarding the implementation of the European norms and standards. Although initially perceived of with caution by the EU and Germany, 3SI summits now host the representatives of Germany and the EU as observers, and prioritise projects aimed at connecting the South and North of Europe. The 3SI leadership managed to persuade their European counterparts that the existence of the Initiative provides the EU with added value, since it not only aims to implement connections prioritised by the EU North-West, but also seeks alternative funding (including from private sources)[4].

No less important is the Bucharest Nine Initiative (B9) – a security formation of nine of NATO's Eastern flank member-states. These include Bulgaria, The Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland,

1   *The EU Eastern Partnership has been a success*, "Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden", 13 May 2019 [https://www.government.se/opinion-pieces/2019/05/the-eu-eastern-partnership-has-been-a-success/]

2   L. Poggetti, J. Weidenfeld, *China seems to tone down its 16+1 engagement: three possible explanations*, "Mercator Institute for China Studies", 14 March 2018 [https://merics.org/en/analysis/china-seems-tone-down-its-161-engagement-three-possible-explanations]

3   *The Objectives of the Three Seas Initiative in 2022*, "The Three Seas Initiative" [https://3seas.eu/about/objectives]

4   E.Kasprzyk, K. Mikulsk, *Growing stronger together. Increasing the Three Seas' connectivity*, "Paving the Digital Path in Central and Eastern Europe", 2021, [https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Paving-the-Digital-Path-in-CEE-report.pdf]

Romania, and Slovakia. Launched in November 2015 in Bucharest (Romania), upon the initiative of Romania and Poland, its members were brought together by the common geopolitical burden of being part of the "Soviet bloc", i.e. the Warsaw Pact, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance and the Soviet Union. Their common burden now is the fear of threats coming from "Russki Mir", regardless of NATO membership, the expansion of Russia's political control and domination, and its policy of imperial revanchism, which reached its high point on 24th February 2022 with Russia's full-scale unprovoked invasion of Ukraine.

Since the majority of the 3SI countries also belong to B9, synergy between the initiatives is highly likely, and the North-South connection routes may eventually serve for security purposes: both in terms of economic, energy, and digital security and for ensuring North-South logistical chains for NATO-led operations[5].

Russia – the Troublemaker for the Region

The Russian invasion, on the one hand, became a challenge for most of the countries neighbouring Ukraine. The full-scale war in their direct neighbourhood fuelled by Russia's ambition not to limit itself to Ukraine is perceived as a direct military threat by the countries of the CEE and the Baltic States. Such perception is being cemented by Putin's statements on his historical mission "to return (what is Russia's) and strengthen (the country)"[6] and the dubious initiatives of the State Duma e.g. a draft bill that calls

for repealing the Decree of the State Council of the USSR "On the Recognition of the Independence of the Republic of Lithuania".[7] The economic consequences of the Russian war against Ukraine have already had a negative impact on regional and global economics, and the situation may further deteriorate. Russia's attempts to undermine solidarity in the EU and NATO puts in question the cohesion and sustainability of both blocks, and indeed may create division lines between the countries that strive to deter Russia and those which are still influenced by Russian propaganda and Putinverstehers (which literally translates as «Putin understander» politicians, analysts and businessmen who try to understand Putin and to justify his policies).

> **The Russian invasion, on the one hand, became a challenge for most of the countries neighbouring Ukraine. The full-scale war in their direct neighbourhood fuelled by Russia's ambition not to limit itself to Ukraine is perceived as a direct military threat by the countries of the CEE and the Baltic States**

However, at the same time, the countries of the region have also gained momentum.

First, Central and Eastern Europe became "Central" indeed. Now the region is at the centre of the attention of the whole world. The problems often voiced by the

5   V. Kornis, *Poland's Perspective on the Three-Seas-Initiative*, "Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom", 25 April 2022 [https://www.freiheit.org/central-europe-and-baltic-states/polands-perspective-three-seas-initiative]

6   *Hailing Peter the Great, Putin draws parallel with mission to 'return' Russian lands*, "Reuters", 10 June 2022 [https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/hailing-peter-great-putin-draws-parallel-with-mission-return-russian-lands-2022-06-09]

7   G. Peseckyte, *Russian Duma questions Lithuania's independence*, "Euractiv", 09 June 2022 [https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/russian-duma-questions-lithuanias-independence/]

leaderships of these countries are now being discussed at the level of the G7, UN, and other international institutions and forums, and what is even more important are being taken seriously. The narrative of blaming the region's leaders for unjustified Russophobia is fading away. The window of opportunity for frank discussion and sober assessment of Russian behaviour is open.

Second, the unprovoked Russian aggression provided explicit evidence of the malign Russian influence on the EU member-states and its immediate neighbourhood, and is now being deterred not only at the national level but also on the EU level. The efforts to tackle Russian hybrid warfare, which were previously undertaken separately by countries in the region are now coordinated at the EU level and supported by the EU's tools. NATO has also intensified efforts to counter disinformation, following clear direction from the Allied Heads of State and Government in the 2018 Brussels Summit Declaration[8] and in the 2019 London Declaration[9].

The European Union has already limited the inflow of Russian propaganda.[10] European countries continue to shut down Russian propaganda channels and take other measures against them. The European Platform of Regulatory Authorities (EPRA) coordinates information related to the measures taken by the European National Regulatory Authorities. The EU has imposed sanctions on state media RT/Russia Today and Sputnik in the EU.[11] Sputnik and RT/ Russia Today (RT English, RT UK, RT Germany, RT France and RT Spanish) have been suspended from broadcasting in the EU.

Third, the agreement between the European Parliament and the member states on the Directive on measures for a high common level of cybersecurity across the Union (NIS 2 Directive) paves the way for enhanced cyber defence. The need for that enhancement is clear in particular in the Baltic States, The Czech Republic, Hungary, and Romania which were recently massively attacked by Russian hackers.

> **the unprovoked Russian aggression provided explicit evidence of the malign Russian influence on the EU member-states and its immediate neighbourhood**

On top of it all, at least 394 officials in Russia's diplomatic missions have been expelled by Western countries since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[12] That is one of the largest collective expulsions of Russian diplomats in modern history. The only similar precedent also related to Russia was in 2018, after Russia poisoned

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8   *Brussels Summit Declaration*, "North Atlantic Treaty Organization", 11 July 2018 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm]

9   *London Declaration*, "North Atlantic Treaty Organization", 04 December 2019 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_171584.htm]

10 *Europe ceases Russian propaganda – list of countries*, "National Council of Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine", 10 March 2022 [https://www.nrada.gov.ua/en/europe-ceases-russian-propaganda-list-of-countries-infographics]

11 *EU imposes sanctions on state-owned outlets RT/Russia Today and Sputnik's broadcasting in the EU*, "Council of the EU", 02 March 2022 [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/03/02/eu-imposes-sanctions-on-state-owned-outlets-rt-russia-today-and-sputnik-s-broadcasting-in-the-eu]

12 R. Gramer, M. Yang, *West Boots Out Hundreds of Russian Diplomats in Wake of Ukraine Invasion and War Crimes*, "Foreign Policy", 07 April 2022 [https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/04/07/us-europe-russian-diplomats-ukraine]

Sergey Skrypal – a former Russian military intelligence officer – using a chemical weapon on British territory. The expulsion of Russian diplomats also limited their malign influence on the national governments. The investigations following the expulsion were helpful for finding out the sources of leaks of classified information.[13]

> **"** *Solidarity between the CEE and Baltic States and Ukraine, with a high level of support, including military support, has not only resulted in closer relations between Kyiv and these states (with probably one exception - Hungary) but also made the voices of these countries stronger*

The Russian war against Ukraine also explicitly proved that Russia has already weaponised its gas supplies. And if earlier the EU and its leading countries were reluctant to accept this, and blamed the CEE states and Ukraine for exaggerating this threat, now the EU is fully aware of the risks, and is moving ahead with a green transition and seeking alternative supply routes. The CEE states are the pioneers in this regard. The Baltic States, Poland, and Bulgaria have already terminated their contracts with Russian Gazprom. The case of Bulgaria proves that it is not an unbearable burden for the national economy.[14] With the assistance of the US and Azerbaijan, the country has gained access to alternative LNG and pipeline supplies.

Also, the new solidarity and the accelerated launching of the interconnectors played their role in assuring resilience in facing up to Russian pressure in the energy domain. Gas Interconnection Poland–Lithuania (GIPL) was commissioned and started commercial operations on 1st May, 2022. The gas connection between Bulgaria and Greece will start operating on 1st July, 2022. This long-awaited launching became possible after the Bulgarian and Greek energy regulators took a joint decision to license the gas connection operator – ICGB.

The news from Romania may also have an impact on developments in the energy security domain of the region. Romanian gas transmission systems operator Transgaz has signed a roadmap agreement with the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund (3SIIF) for the development of greenfield gas infrastructure projects in the country[15]. Given Romania's extensive domestic oil and gas reserves, further investment in gas transmission infrastructure is anticipated to drive economic development in the region, while also supporting European energy security and the energy transition in the Three Seas region.

Solidarity between the CEE and Baltic States and Ukraine, with a high level of support, including military support, has not only resulted in closer relations between Kyiv and these states (with probably one exception – Hungary) but also made the voices of these countries stronger. While previously their support for Ukraine was often perceived as unjustified and irrational sentiment,

13 K. Nikolov, *Bulgarian ex-general accused of spying for Russia*, "Euractiv", 03 March 2022 [https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/bulgarian-ex-general-accused-of-spying-for-russia]

14 T. Wesolowsky, *Despite Doomsday Predictions, Bulgaria Proves There Is Life After Russian Gas*, "Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty", 20 May 2022 [https://www.rferl.org/a/bulgaria-life-after-russian-gas/31860510.html]

15 *Romania's Transgaz, 3SIIF agree to invest in new local gas infrastructure projects*, "Globuc", 26 May 2022 [https://globuc.com/news/romanias-transgaz-3siif-agree-to-invest-in-new-local-gas-infrastructure-projects/]

nowadays for the EU it is getting clear that such support is a necessary precondition for stabilising the region, and the way to deter further Russian aggression. Moreover, the emerging security cooperation of the countries of the region creates a pretext for shaping a sort of defence alliance that has the potential to strengthen NATO in the region and beyond the borders of the alliance. Moreover, the decision of Finland and Sweden to ensure their future security by joining NATO may also be followed by their desire to join 3SI, which will even further strengthen the Initiative economically and militarily.

Besides, even small countries like Estonia or Lithuania now not only serve as moral compasses for the more influential EU members, but also the voices of their leaders gain more attention and have higher chances of becoming mainstream. For example, extremely vocal statements from the leadership of Poland, the Baltic States, The Czech Republic and Slovakia, as well as their commitment to assisting Ukraine, alongside the pressure of European public opinion, are pushing the Western elites to further deter and sanction Russia and to shape the Eastern agenda of the EU.

A Window of Opportunity and Driver for Regional Initiatives

All the above circumstances open another window of opportunity. There is a clear need for security, energy cooperation, the creation of new sustainable logistical chains needed for the supply of energy resources, and ensuring Ukrainian exports and imports may eventually boost the existing regional initiatives. Both B9 and 3SI are well equipped for these tasks and have enough expertise, enhanced by cooperation with Ukraine.

Moreover, the important role of Ukraine as a contributor to security, and as the country that may eventually be an important participant in regional projects clearly points out that it should gain the status of a partner if not a full member of the mentioned initiatives. An additional argument in this regard is the fact that Ukraine will need lots of investment for reconstruction and adaptation to post-war reality, and the 3SI and B9 may serve as hubs for the reconstruction projects, to connect Ukraine to the security cooperation frameworks existing within these initiatives and supported not only by the EU and NATO but also by such players external to the region as the US and Japan, which are expressing a growing interest in the region.

Such a need is already realised by Ukraine's partners who already advocate Ukraine's membership of 3SI.[16] For example, this fact was explicitly pointed out by the President of Estonia Alar Karis, who has already proposed to create a new regional infrastructure on the basis of the 3SI, aimed at ensuring European energy security and grain exports from Ukraine. He discussed this issue with the President of Poland Andrzej Duda and President of Latvia Egils Levits on the margins of the Davos summit in May 2022 and said that the upcoming Riga summit of the 3SI may give an additional impetus to the infrastructure projects of the Initiative, considering the changes in the security situation in the Adriatic, Baltic, and the Black Sea.

Certainly, the growing role of the CEE and full-fledged inclusion of Ukraine into that space by means of closer cooperation with both NATO and the EU, in addition to membership in the formats of regional cooperation depend on numerous variables. The impact

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16 *Estonian president stresses importance of energy connections for European security*, "The Baltic Times", 25 May 2022 [https://www.baltictimes.com/estonian_president_stresses_importance_of_energy_connections_for_european_security]

of Ukraine's ability to deter Russia is crucial and the large scale, operational capacities of the Ukrainian Armed Forces depend not only on Ukraine itself and its neighbours but also on the support of the EU, NATO, the US and the UK.

> « *it inspired the leaders of the countries of the region to seek additional opportunities and actors who can be constructively engaged in regional affairs, and to promote the regional agenda on the global level*

Besides, granting Ukraine candidate status in relation to the EU is decisive. Not only will it reflect the new reality and formally recognise Ukraine as part of the European community, but also will open the way both for investments to rebuild Ukraine and to encourage even closer relations with the neighbouring EU states.

The EU's and NATO's failure to deliver and meet the expectations of Kyiv and the neighbouring CEE states may open the gate to other scenarios. Disappointment, a deficit of trust, and fear of being betrayed by the allies may eventually push the CEE and the Baltic States, as well as Ukraine, into searching for alternative formats of cooperation, and to rely on the other actors who may contribute to the security and stability of the region (be it the US, the UK or other actors powerful enough to deter Russia). There are a few formats of that type already sketched out: the alliance of Ukraine, Poland, and the UK, the Lublin Triangle, or the so-called European Commonwealth –

the recent initiative allegedly voiced by the British leadership[17]. The potential for such initiatives will be lower in comparison to the EU's or NATO's, and they will thirst for investments and they lack European normative power. But anyway, their existence and operationality will serve as a plan B in case of the inefficiency of the existing security and cooperation formats or the failure to provide adequate support to the region in the event of further Russian aggression (by applying article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, Article 42.7 of the Treaty on European Union or Article 222 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU). Moreover, trust among the participating parties will to some extent compensate for other weaknesses of the abovementioned blocks and initiatives.

If both the EU and NATO and the regional initiatives fail to deter Russia, and Ukraine is left alone in its existential war, this will pave the way for the scenario cherished by the Kremlin. Russian expansionism will be enhanced and the regional initiatives, as well as the small states, will be doomed.

Conclusions

The Russian war against Ukraine and the full-scale invasion that started on 24th February 2022 became a crash test for the CEE and Baltic States. The war is an existential threat not only to Ukraine but also to its neighbouring states. They are in a preferential position due to NATO and EU membership, but bearing in mind Russian revanchism and expansionism, this would not necessarily protect them from attacks, if not directly then by hybrid means. The threat has accelerated the processes of regional cooperation, which do not substitute but rather supplement cooperation with NATO and the EU.

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17 *UK proposes "European Commonwealth" with Poland, Ukraine, and Baltics*, "Kafkasesk", 30 May 2022
[https://kafkadesk.org/2022/05/30/uk-proposes-european-commonwealth-with-poland-ukraine-and-baltics]

Also, it inspired the leaders of the countries of the region to seek additional opportunities and actors who can be constructively engaged in regional affairs, and to promote the regional agenda on the global level by means of groups and initiatives like 3SI and B9. Simultaneously, they support Ukraine and also seek the chance to engage it in the EU and NATO, as well as in the existing regional initiatives.

If successful, that will further strengthen the region and make it more visible not only on the regional but also on the global scale. It will also provide regional organisations and groups of countries with the opportunity to become hubs for supporting and reconstructing Ukraine.

If Ukraine does not receive enough Western support: be it weapons, ammunition, financial support, or the status of candidate for EU accession, the chance given not only to Ukraine but to the whole region of the CEE and the Baltic States will be wasted. To some extent, the emerging initiatives may help to preserve local cooperation and regional projects, but only the security gravity of NATO and the normative and economic power of the EU, strengthened by enhanced solidarity may drive Central and Eastern Europe forward, and propel the development of the region to which Ukraine naturally belongs.

Sergiy Gerasymchuk is a Deputy Executive Director at the Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism" and Board Member at Strategic and Security Studies Group. He is a graduate of the National University "Kyiv-Mohyla Academy" and of the Estonian School of Diplomacy. Sergiy Gerasymchuk is a researcher in the domain of international relations with particular interest in CEE-related processes.

HOW RUSSIAN DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS SPREAD PROPAGANDA

Viktoriia Kravchyk
Ivan Franko National University of Lviv

Since the beginning of the full-scale war in Ukraine, the issue of information security has become acute for European countries. Russian propagandists use all available channels of communication to promote Russian narratives. The primary focus of this paper is to determine the main social media strategies used by Russian diplomatic agencies to disseminate propagandistic content in the Baltics and Eastern Europe. The countries examined are Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Romania, Moldova, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary.

Introduction

The field of propaganda studies has traditionally defined propaganda as being intimately connected to media channels such as radio, television, film, newspapers and, in our days – social media.[1] It is a distinctly contemporary phenomenon interwoven with channels of mass communication, which plays a crucial role in modern warfare.

Due to the war in Ukraine, Russia's propagandistic activity demands much attention. Russia has adopted increasingly advanced social media techniques, including sophisticated trolling of news sites, fake hashtags and Twitter campaigns, and close coordination between social media operations and other media.[2] Russian propaganda on social media appears to have multiple objectives. These include strengthening groups that share Russia's point of view, and creating alternative media narratives that match Moscow's interests.

Although Russian propaganda has a worldwide reach, its effect on the so-called near abroad is particularly interesting. The continuous war in Ukraine has created various security challenges, including informational, for all post-Soviet countries. Russia has launched its powerful propagandistic machine in this region for several reasons: to influence the political status quo, to ensure protection from what it calls Western influence, and to conduct a compatriotic policy. The countries of Eastern Europe and the Baltics have vast Russian-speaking communities, whose interests Russia claims to be protecting.

Russian propaganda in the Baltics and Eastern Europe has significantly intensified since the beginning of the full-scale invasion in Ukraine on February 24th, 2022. The social media pages of the diplomatic missions are one of the most direct sources of Russian misinformation. Moscow tends to use social media activists, website hosts,

1   J. Farkas, C. Neumayer, *Disguised Propaganda from Digital to Social Media*, [in:] J. Hunsinger (ed.) *Second International Handbook of Internet Research*, Springer Dordrecht: 2020, p.3.

2   T. Helmus, E. Bodine-Baron, A. Radin, M. Magnuson, J. Mendelsohn, W. Marcellino, A. Bega, and Z. Winkelman, *Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe*, Rand Corporation: 2018, p.3.

news sources, and others who spread its narratives without the direct command and control of the Russian state. These types of sources make it challenging to distinguish between the personal opinions of internet users and actual propagandistic content. Embassies' pages, on the other hand, fully mirror the central government's views and are, therefore, a suitable object for the analysis of the most common messages of Russian propaganda.

Vertical Propaganda

A logical starting point for this exploration of propaganda is to look at some definitions. Russian propagandistic attempts can be categorised as vertical propaganda. According to Ellul, vertical propaganda is the type that originates from the elites who rely on mass media to persuade an audience into submission and/or action. This type of propaganda is often effective in getting the audience to take ownership of the constructed narrative, amplifying and extending it. If successful, propaganda does therefore not necessarily rely on a continuous orchestration of the mass media, as "each person seized by it" can, in turn, become their own "propagandist".[3] In this case, social media is the perfect communication channel, as it can act as a tool for mass mobilisation and it grants easier reach to broader audiences.

Vertical propaganda is considered particularly effective in the propaganda of agitation, which is created to mobilise crowds against a portrayed enemy, a "source of all misery". History has seen many examples of its practical usage, like Hitler's campaigns against the Jews or Lenin's campaigns against the Kulaks. These days, Putin's Russia and its campaign against not only Ukrainians but the collective West and what it stands for, have taken their place.

There are many posts on the social media pages of the Russian embassies that focus on the problems of the West, and portray Europe and the United States as a threat.

> **« The social media pages of the diplomatic missions are one of the most direct sources of Russian misinformation**

A distinguishing characteristic of vertical propaganda is that it derives from the social elites. Considering this, diplomatic missions, which must fully comply with the rules and current policy lines set by the central government, are a perfect channel for spreading established messages.

Sources of Propaganda

There is very little direct communication between Moscow and the governments of the countries of Eastern Europe and the Baltics. Apart from infrequent public statements from Russian officials, the diplomatic missions seem to be their only fully functioning communicational channel in these countries. Even the ambassadors lack subjectivity: most of them do not have personal pages, and those who do have not updated them in years. Russian diplomats only rarely give comments to the media and do not make any statements that might reveal their own opinions. All recorded public communication is conducted via the social media pages of the diplomatic mission.

The posts on the embassies' pages, however, lack creativity. There is only a small amount of newly created content. On top of that, there is a clear tendency among Russian diplomatic agencies to use the same primary

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3   J. Ellul, *Propaganda*, Random House: New York 1973, pp. 3-4.

sources and repeat the exact same messages. To take the Russian Embassy in Romania as an example: in March 2022, out of 548 posts on the Embassy's page, 334 were reposted or simply repeated the statements of Russian governmental representatives, which amounts to approximately 61%.

Russian diplomatic agencies use so-called white propaganda. This is the opposite of disguised propaganda, which can be defined as the deliberate use of disguised sources to manipulate and shape perceptions, so as to achieve the desired outcome.[4] In other words, the posts on the pages of the embassies conduct manipulations without hiding or altering the source.

> **The narratives of Russian propaganda have not changed drastically since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. We can see the continuation of the informational campaign launched in 2014, with just a couple of alterations**

Interestingly, these sources are the same for the embassies in all the countries studied. Most of the contents rotates around the statements made by the representatives of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A perfect illustration of this tendency is what happened on March 11th, 2022, when every embassy shared the comment of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the possible provocations and usage of toxic chemicals by "radical Ukrainian groups under the control of US special services' representatives".[5] The most commonly published comments

are from the following individuals: MFA spokesperson Maria Zakharova, Foreign Affairs Minister Sergey Lavrov, President Vladimir Putin and MoD spokesman Igor Konashenkov. Among other popular sources are state-controlled news agencies, for example, TASS or RIA Novosti.

Another interesting example of the contents posted on all pages is a so-called study of the archives, called "Archives Remember". In all of the countries mentioned, Russian diplomatic missions quite often post the "real facts" about Ukrainian history, with their main focus on the activities of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army at the time of World War II. They provide "evidence" in the form of archive documents studied by Russian experts. All embassies in the countries under study have also shared a 46-page long document called "The Truth Behind Events in Ukraine and Donbas Final". This study examines the "crimes that Ukrainian nationalists committed in Donbas" in the last eight years.

Such orchestrated and almost simultaneous publication of the same contents on the embassies' pages all around Eastern Europe and the Baltics might indicate an order from Moscow to do so. Russian propaganda functions as a well-oiled system with all of its actors following the same line.

Main Narratives

The narratives of Russian propaganda have not changed drastically since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. We can see the continuation of the informational campaign launched in 2014, with just a couple of alterations. The main messages of Russian propaganda since 2014 have been the following: the violence in the East of Ukraine

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4   J. Farkas, C. Neumayer, *Disguised Propaganda from Digital to Social Media*, [in:] J. Hunsinger (ed.) *Second International Handbook of Internet Research*, Springer Dordrecht: 2020, p.6.

5   MFA Russia, *Radical Ukrainian groups under the control of US special services' representatives have prepared several potential scenarios of using of toxic*, "Twitter", 11 March 2022, [https://mobile.twitter.com/mfa_russia/status/1502310035799564292].

is all Kyiv's fault; Ukraine is crawling with Russia-hating neo-Nazis and fascists; it is the US government which is fuelling the crisis behind the scenes, while Russia tries to act as a peacemaker.

Now let us look at some of the posts on the Russian embassy pages from March-April 2022. On March 7th, 2022, the Russian Embassy in Romania posted the following information on Facebook: "The Ukrainian Security Forces and the nationalist Azov battalion are planning to blow up a reactor at the National Research Centre of the Kharkov Institute of Physics and Technology and accuse the Russian Armed Forces of launching projectiles at an experimental nuclear reactor, says Russia's Defence Ministry on Monday".[6] The Diplomatic Mission in Slovakia on March 20th, 2022 shared the following: «Members of the Ukrainian national battalion «Azov» planned to arrange a series of terrorist attacks in Lviv».[7] Interestingly, there seems to be no clear definition of "Ukrainian neo-Nazis". In most cases, Russian propaganda refers to the "Azov" battalion. Sometimes, however, the central government is considered nationalist, as well. In general, Ukraine is pictured as a failed state ruled by an illegitimate government.

The United States' importance for Russia has not changed either. On March 31st, 2022, the Russian Embassy in Slovakia shared an article that criticised American involvement in the conflict with the following comment: «The main reason for the crisis in #Ukraine is the ongoing policy of the #USA and #NATO, which pumped this country with weapons in violation of their obligations».[8] Russia is also pushing a narrative that the US is helping Ukraine develop biological weapons and has numerous laboratories on Ukrainian territory. Ukraine is generally being referred to as "the colony of the US".[9]

The broader picture of demonisation of the collective West is evident. Russian propagandists criticise Western countries for "fuelling the Ukrainian crisis, delivering weapons to the Kiev regime, and provoking a global food crisis and hunger in several states".[10] At the same time, the propagandists keep using "Western experts" to support their views on the war. For example, the page of the Embassy in Bulgaria shared a link to an article written by an American journalist with this comment: "A wonderful investigation was published by American journalists. The scale of the manipulations by Kiev and its Western supporters with public opinion is truly striking".[11]

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6   Ambasada Rusiei în România, *The Ukrainian Security Forces and the nationalist Azov battalion are planning to blow up a reactor at the National Research*, "Facebook", 7 March 2022, [https://m.facebook.com/AmbasadaRusa/posts/4141693269267013].

7   *Сдавшийся офицер СБУ сообщил о планировавшихся терактах во Львове* (Surrendered SSU officer reported planned terrorist attacks in Lviv), "LENTA.RU", 19 March 2022 [https://m.lenta.ru/news/2022/03/19/terakti/amp/?fbclid=IwAR1IYqNeLpfViOsKQKBfTKnKIJSyWuLzqZgbOQjVJx_bZ3qMmqiRyqMqcyw].

8   *Лавров назвал основной причиной кризиса на Украине политику США и НАТО* (Lavrov called the main cause of the crisis in Ukraine the policy of the United States and NATO), "TASS News", 31 March 2022 [https://tass.ru/politika/14235885?utm_source=google.com&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=google.com&utm_referrer=google.com&fbclid=IwAR3wg-q4HqLe64djXa7M-6VKneU6lDa1nUJhGptxnwXL1YRG_de8EST7ZOg].

9   Ambasada Rusiei în România, *Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolay Patrushev believes that the US had been hatching plans for the fate of Ukraine*, "Facebook", 29 March 2022, [https://m.facebook.com/AmbasadaRusa/posts/336838641817936].

10 MFA Russia, *Russian Permanent Representative to the UN Vassily #Nebenzia: Washington and its allies have a choice now*, "Twitter", 30 March 2022, [https://mobile.twitter.com/mfa_russia/status/1509052517031809026].

11 D. Cohen, *Ukraine's Propaganda War: International PR Firms, DC Lobbyists and CIA Cutouts*, "MintPress News", 22 March 2022, [https://www.mintpressnews.com/ukraine-propaganda-war-international-pr-firms-dc-lobbyists-cia-cutouts/280012/?fbclid=IwAR2rc55pr5JnYKt-v73Feefvr-1j9LevAxF8SnAUW8QObzpfsXKJlrU6Jcc].

Another interesting narrative is the stability of the Russian Federation and its place in the world hierarchy. The embassies post videos of the meetings of the Russian establishment with the representatives of other countries, share statements of the Russian leader about the stability of the currency and general resilience to Western sanctions, and praise Russian commitment to trade fairness and uninterrupted gas/oil supplies.

Propaganda on Social Media

Moving on to social media, there was a notable change of mind when it came to a preferred platform. Before the invasion, the profiles of the Russian embassies were almost exclusively on Facebook or Twitter. However, the activity of those pages in many of the discussed countries fell to the bare minimum in the middle of March. In some cases, pages even got deleted (for example, the Facebook page of the Russian Embassy in Moldova).

This sudden change might seem unjustified. After all, Twitter seems to have gained status among the public as the space to go to for political discourse. It is a popular tool for journalists and politicians, and public figures are easily accessible on Twitter, inviting discussion. Additionally, it is relatively easy for a regular person to use. There is no necessity for pictures and videos, the platform is a good discussion ground for live events, and importantly, comments can be brief. Twitter is popular among governmental bodies all around the world. So why abandon it?

The unwillingness of the Russian embassies to continue their propagandistic activities on Twitter can be easily explained by their strong associations with the Russian government. Russian propaganda on Twitter is, and for a long time has been extremely effective, but only because it was hardly identifiable as such. The Twitter accounts identified as part of the pro-Russia activist community are a perfect example. It is difficult to determine the degree to which these accounts are fake troll accounts or real Twitter users engaged in genuine dialogue, even though they certainly spread Russian propaganda themes and messages. In the case of the embassies' profiles, however, there is no doubt by whom they are controlled. The increase of attention to their tweets due to the war in Ukraine has made them a target for pro-Ukrainian users and has created serious complications.

> ❝ *Moving on to social media, there was a notable change of mind when it came to a preferred platform. Before the invasion, the profiles of the Russian embassies were almost exclusively on Facebook or Twitter. However, the activity of those pages in many of the discussed countries fell to the bare minimum in the middle of March*

Moving on to Facebook, the platform has initiated some efforts to address fake news. Facebook, for example, labels misinformation to warn users that online fact-checkers or Facebook algorithms have identified the contents as suspicious.[12] Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, Russia-backed media as well as Facebook pages associated with Moscow have become the main concern for the platform's fact-checkers. At the moment, Meta, the company that owns Facebook, has restricted Russian-backed outlets across the European Union

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12 Meta Business Help Center, *About Fact-Checking on Facebook*, "Facebook", [https://www.facebook.com/business/help/2593586717571940].

and has been globally demoting contents from state-affiliated media. This increased attention has not only further undermined the truthfulness of the contents posted by the embassies but also made it harder to attract "positive" attention from the users.

> **This change in the platform of communication raises another question: who is the target audience? There are several reasons to believe that the social media pages of the Russian embassies see Russian citizens or Russian speakers as the main focus group in the near abroad countries**

However, the main reason for the change in preferred platforms is the state policy of the Russian Federation. Roskomnadzor restricted the use of Facebook and Twitter on the territory of Russia after the Russian media regulator reported "26 cases of discrimination against Russian media and information resources by Facebook". According to a statement by the Russian media regulator, the blocking of Facebook platforms has been introduced «to prevent violations of the key principles of the free flow of information».[13] Diplomatic missions had to comply with the capital's new policy line. In most countries, Russian embassies' pages started disappearing from Twitter and Facebook, but significantly increased their activity on Telegram – a messaging service rarely used by Europeans regularly. More than 80% of Europeans have a Facebook account, slightly less than 6% use Twitter, while only about 1% of people choose other social media, like Telegram.[14] At the same time, Telegram has become increasingly popular among Russians and Russian speakers in different countries in the last few years. Its popularity has grown even greater since February 24th, 2022. Telegram's share of mobile internet traffic in Russia increased to 63% in the first two weeks of March, up from 48% in the first two weeks of February.[15]

This change in the platform of communication raises another question: who is the target audience? There are several reasons to believe that the social media pages of the Russian embassies see Russian citizens or Russian speakers as the main focus group in the near abroad countries. Their demographic, linguistic, and cultural spheres had been impacted significantly during the Soviet period. Those changes caused long-standing political consequences, including increased vulnerability to Russian influence still current almost three decades later, as Russian-language Kremlin propaganda in these bordering countries still draws on aspects of the shared legacy of the post-Soviet states.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, approximately 25 million ethnic Russians were residing outside of their homeland, creating sizable minorities in many countries. These Soviet-era migrants and their descendants who speak and understand Russian in the former Soviet republics, might be targeted and influenced by Russian-language propaganda. This can be illustrated well with the examples of

13 *Приняты ответные меры на ограничение доступа к российским СМИ* (Response measures taken to restrict access to Russian media), The Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media, 4 March 2022, [https://rkn.gov.ru/news/rsoc/news74156.htm].

14 *Social Media Stats in Europe – April 2022*, "Statcounter", [https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/europe].

15 S. Roach, In Russia, *Telegram has become the messaging app of choice*, "Protocol", 21 March 2022, [https://www.protocol.com/bulletins/telegram-whatsapp-meta-russia access: 10 May 2022].

Latvia and Estonia. When these countries regained independence at the end of the Cold War, they had substantial minorities of people whose families were not from Estonia or Latvia and who primarily used Russian as their native language. To this day, the Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia and Latvia make up almost 30%[16] and 25%[17] of the population respectively. Russian speakers mainly consume Russian state-controlled media and tend to be more likely to adopt the Kremlin's perspective about current events. [18] That is why Moscow focuses on their regional compatriots who speak Russian, hail ancestrally from Russia, and, in some cases, have not been eagerly adopted by their resident countries. They have become the easiest target for ongoing war-related propaganda.

In the specific case of Russian aggression against Ukraine, the information campaign was aimed primarily at the broad Russian-speaking diasporas (including those outside Ukraine) to consolidate it around the idea of a civilizational struggle between the Eurasian culture and the West, while substantiating Russia's push for the status of leading geopolitical actor.

There is evidence that social and economic problems can also offer an opportunity for Russia to exert influence.[19] In the modern context, the popular narrative that Russian speakers are being discriminated against in the West is actively being used as another tool by propagandists. Russia is trying to push the message that the West is losing its superpower status and therefore is not capable of offering the Russian speakers proper protection or prosperity. The " crisis of values" in Europe and the United States is another popular topic, with the so-called promotion of LGBTQ+ values through propaganda being presented as a threat to the conservative Russian society. Russia, on the other hand, must be associated with traditional values, such as the family and orthodoxy.

Conclusion

During the full-scale war against Ukraine, the Russian propaganda machine modifies the narratives and spreads the idea that the Western media are escalating and exaggerating the situation, and that the countries of the West are prolonging the conflict by providing Ukraine with weaponry. All of the countries in Europe and the United States are enemies that want to use Ukraine in their broader geostrategic game aimed at the destruction of Russia. Russia, on the contrary, is not guilty of anything because all of its interference aims at promoting peace and denazifying Ukraine. That is how the Kremlin legitimises both the informational war and full-on warfare against any other state.

In discussion of the means to deliver information, the diplomatic agencies, which have become a part of the broader state system propaganda, are being used to

16 Estonia. *Population: demographic situation, languages and religions*, "European Commission", 1 December 2021, [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/estonia/population-demographic-situation-languages-and-religions_en].

17 *Latvia. Population: demographic situation, languages and religions*, "European Commission", 1 December 2021, [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/population-demographic-situation-languages-and-religions-40_en].

18 T. Helmus, E. Bodine-Baron, A. Radin, M. Magnuson, J. Mendelsohn, W. Marcellino, A. Bega, and Z. Winkelman, Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe, Rand Corporation: 2018, p.66.

19 T. Helmus, E. Bodine-Baron, A. Radin, M. Magnuson, J. Mendelsohn, W. Marcellino, A. Bega, and Z. Winkelman, Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe, Rand Corporation: 2018, p.69.

spread the Kremlin's messages. The findings show a lack of differentiation in different countries: Russian propaganda tends to use the strategy "one-size-fits-all". There is no variety of narratives; the pages are likely to present information from the same sources, often using the exact same words. Telegram has become the primary communication platform – it has begun replacing other social media platforms, such as Twitter or Facebook, despite being used far less frequently in countries other than Russia.

Russia uses the Russian-speaking communities in the Baltic and Eastern European countries in order to promote its narratives, manipulate facts and try to divert attention from important events and its crimes abroad, as well as to influence the political status quo. The Kremlin tries to pressure those populations' host governments, and provoke unrest in the regions or countries concerned. Moreover, the mere existence of these compatriot populations can be used to legitimise Russia's status as a global leader whose protection is not only needed but welcomed outside of its borders.

In order to increase resilience to informational threats, it is crucial to study the main strategies of Russian propaganda. The fake stories and their sources must be identified and critically analysed. It is essential to understand the most common narratives and the broader aim of the Russian state-enforced propaganda.

Viktoriia Kravchyk is an MA student of International Relations at the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv and an intern at the Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism". Her main research interest is related to the EU's relations with its Eastern European neighbours, the EU's enlargement policy, and security studies.

RUSSIA'S WAR ON THE INTERNET

Verena Maria Wingerter
DCSO Deutsche Cyber-Sicherheitsorganisation

Russia's most recent aggression has resulted in its geopolitical, financial, economic, as well as online isolation. Russia's Internet is changing rapidly due to censorship and surveillance regulation; laws introducing technical requirements for the independent functioning of the Internet; Western sanctions; and the exit of key IT providers from the Russian market. But efforts to create a self-reliant Russian Internet are not new. Over the last decade, Russia has introduced regulations to shape a distinct online sphere. This paper provides an overview of Russian Internet governance, examines the cyber aspect of the ongoing war, and analyses the current developments and their effects on cyberbalkanisation.

Introduction

Russia has achieved a reputation for exploiting the open nature of the Internet by spreading misinformation, meddling in foreign elections, and conducting cyber-attacks, both for destructive purposes and espionage. While Russia exploits the open nature of the Internet abroad, at home the state is far more restrictive in its approach. Russian authorities are aware of the risks for regime stability associated with an open and free Internet, and have enacted increasingly restrictive regulations in order to maintain regime stability by preventing public uprisings such as the 2011 protests against Putin's regime, as well as controlling political narratives. As a result, the Russian Internet is characterised by censorship, surveillance, and state control. Moreover, Russia introduced legal and technical requirements to disconnect its infrastructure from the global Internet.

Russia's war against Ukraine has accelerated these critical developments: more repressive censorship laws create a distinct Russian online sphere. The exit of key international Internet infrastructure providers adds to the increased risk of cyberbalkanisation; the fragmentation of the global Internet into distinct online spheres.

> **Russia has achieved a reputation for exploiting the open nature of the Internet by spreading misinformation, meddling in foreign elections, and conducting cyber-attacks, both for destructive purposes and espionage**

This paper examines the effects of Russian and Western actions on the open and free nature of the Internet. It summarises the history of Russian Internet governance, highlights the online dimension of Russia's war, and evaluates its effect on the global Internet and the threat of cyberbalkanisation. While current developments indicate a disintegration of the global Internet, policy makers can still establish a common understanding of Internet regulation to safeguard global connectedness.

Russian Internet Governance: Overview

The Internet arrived in Russia in 1990 and developed freely throughout the 1990s and 2000s. However, already in 1998, the surveillance and wiretapping system used by the KGB to intercept phone communication, the System for Operative Investigative Activities (SORM), was expanded to cover Internet communication. The agency in charge of this new surveillance technology was the domestic intelligence service FSB, under its then director and the current president, Vladimir Putin.[1]

In 2011, disputed election results triggered the biggest political protests since the end of the Soviet Union. These 2011 protests were facilitated by the Internet and its ability to gather support and coordinate protest efforts.[2] To maintain regime stability, the Russian authorities shifted in their position towards the Internet, and enacted increasingly restrictive regulations. Within a year, a bill intended to protect children from harmful information was adopted, which introduced a blocklist operated by the federal communications regulator Roskomnadzor.[3] The blocklist required Internet service providers (ISPs) to block access to contents deemed inappropriate or harmful by courts, the legislature or Roskomnadzor itself.

Prior to the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, new security measures were introduced with significant effects for online privacy, such as the "blogger law" requiring all websites with more than 3,000 daily visitors to register with the government,[4] or regulations requiring identification of public Wi-Fi users.[5] More importantly, however, SORM was expanded to include social network monitoring, as well as the introduction of SORM-3, which differs from previous systems in that it consistently analyses all Internet traffic, while simultaneously storing and collating users' metadata to create individual profiles.[6]

In 2016, the anti-terrorism legislation[7] included highly controversial stipulations for internet service providers (ISPs), requiring them to store user communication for six months and related metadata for three years. These laws envisioned that all encrypted data had to be accessible for the government, either through government backdoors or encryption keys.[8] Further censorship measures saw the banning of virtual private networks (VPNs) in 2017[9]

1 A. Soldatov, I. Borogan, *The Red Web: The Kremlin's War on the Internet,* Public Affairs: New York 2017.

2 S. White, I. McAllister, *Did Russia (Nearly) have a Facebook Revolution in 2011? Social Media's Challenge to Authoritarianism*, "Politics", 2014 Vol 35(1), pp. 72-84, DOI: 10.1111/1467-9256.12037

3 D. Turovsky, *This is how Russian Internet censorship works*, "Meduza", 13 August 2015, [https://meduza.io/en/feature/2015/08/13/this-is-how-russian-internet-censorship-works].

4 N. Maréchal, *Networked Authoritarianism and the Geopolitics of Information: Understanding Russian Internet Policy*, "Media and Communication", March 2017: Vol5(1), pp. 29-41, DOI: 10.17645/mac.v5i1.808

5 *Passport now required to use public Wi-Fi in Russia*, "Russian Legal Information Agency (RAPSI)", 8 August 2014, [http://rapsinews.com/legislation_news/20140808/271879206.html].

6 J. Kerr, *The Russian Model of Digital Control and Its Significance, [in:] N.D. Wright (ed.) AI, China, Russia, and the Global Order*, Air University Press: Maxwell 2019, pp. 62-74.

7 The anti-terrorism laws of 2016 are commonly referred to as 'Yarovaya Laws' named after Irina Yarovaya, then Head of the Parliamentary Committee for Security and Anti-Corruption.

8 D. O'Brien, E. Galperin, *Russia Asks for The Impossible with Its New Surveillance Laws*, "Electronic Frontier Foundation", 19 July 2016, [https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2016/07/russia-asks-impossible-its-new-surveillance-laws].

9 A. Barbaschow, Putin bans VPN use in Russia, "ZDNet", 31 July 2017, [https://www.zdnet.com/article/putin-bans-vpn-use-in-russia/].

and the attempted blocking of the popular messaging app Telegram, which managed to evade the ban eventually lifted in 2020 by concealing its traffic source behind Google and Amazon's hosting services, thereby constantly changing its IP addresses. This cyber-dodging tactic resulted in collateral damage, such as the temporary blocking of VKontakte, Facebook, and Twitter.[10]

> « *To maintain regime stability, the Russian authorities shifted in their position towards the Internet, and enacted increasingly restrictive regulations*

Another regulation of the utmost importance is the Law on an Autonomous Internet, better known as Sovereign Internet Law, adopted in 2019. The law mandates a Russian Internet able to function independently, and does so via three key stipulations:

- It requires Internet traffic to be routed through special servers that can function as so-called kill switches, meaning they can disconnect Russia from the global Internet. These routing requirements allow Russian authorities to monitor and control cross-border traffic and react to severe threats impacting the stability, security, and integrity of Russia's Internet.[11]

- It requires ISPs to install "technical equipment for counteracting threats" (TSPU).[12] This TSPU system allows for deep packet inspection, an intrusive filtering method able to block specific contents. The system was reportedly used for the first time in March 2021 to "throttle Twitter traffic" for Russian users.[13]

- It requires the introduction of a national domain name system controlled by Roskomnadzor. The domain name system (DNS) is often described as the telephone book of the Internet and is the essential mechanism by which computers reachable through the Internet are identified.[14] The DNS is global in nature and the backbone of the connected, global Internet. It is unclear whether national domain name systems will be compatible with the global DNS.

In 2020, the Russian Ministry of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media introduced a new bill targeting encryption protocols to ensure the continued effectiveness of Russia's filtering methods.[15] In the wake of the war against Ukraine in 2022, freedom of speech has further been restricted both offline and online.

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10 I. Khurshudyan, *How the founder of the Telegram messaging app stood up to the Kremlin – and won*, "The Washington Post", 28 June 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/russia-telegram-kremlin-pavel-durov/2020/06/27/4928ddd4-b161-11ea-98b5-279a6479a1e4_story.html].

11 A. Epifanova, *Deciphering Russia's 'Sovereign Internet Law': Tightening Control and Accelerating the Splinternet*, "DGAP Analysis", 16 January 2020, [https://dgap.org/sites/default/files/article_pdfs/dgap-analyse_2-2020_epifanova_0.pdf].

12 Ibid.

13 C. Cimpanu, *Academic: Russia deployed new technology to throttle Twitter's traffic*, "The Record", 6 April 2021, [https://therecord.media/academics-russia-deployed-new-technology-to-throttle-twitters-traffic].

14 A. Epifanova, *Deciphering Russia's 'Sovereign Internet Law': Tightening Control and Accelerating the Splinternet*, "DGAP Analysis", 16 January 2020, [https://dgap.org/sites/default/files/article_pdfs/dgap-analyse_2-2020_epifanova_0.pdf].

15 C. Cimpanu, *Russia wants to ban the use of secure protocols such as TLS1.3, DoH, DoT, ESNI*, "ZDNet", 22 September 2020, [https://www.zdnet.com/article/russia-wants-to-ban-the-use-of-secure-protocols-such-as-tls-1-3-doh-dot-esni/].

The trajectory of Russian Internet governance shows a clear progression towards more surveillance, blocking, and user restrictions. The Kremlin further displays a preference for decreasing dependency on foreign actors and developing a Russian Internet sphere,[16] which could sustain itself independently from the global Internet, thereby increasing the risk of cyberbalkanisation.

Russia & the Internet: Fear of Cyberbalkanisation

Cyberbalkanisation applies the controversial term of balkanisation, understood as "the tendency of an area to divide into smaller parts, which are uncooperative or even hostile to each other,"[17] to cyberspace. Such cyberbalkanisation can refer to regulations concerning access to contents and business models, to specific software, or to hardware and network infrastructure. Developments in Russia indicate a decoupling on all three accounts:

- Regulations concerning access to contents and business models mean that different regulatory frameworks require organisations to adjust their business models. Censorship regulations and the law requiring the local storage of personal data, introduced in 2015, have led to a distinct Russian Internet experience.

- Regulations concerning specific software refer to a regional fragmentation of software usage, for example by banning certain software often on grounds of national security, or by demanding certain software to be deployed. For example, a 2019 law demands the pre-installation of Russian software on all IT devices sold in Russia, resulting in a fragmentation of business models and online experiences.[18] Another possible reason for cyberbalkanisation with regards to specific software is the market exit by a software provider.

- Regulations of specific hardware and network infrastructure highlight the risk of incompatible hardware and network infrastructure leading to cyberbalkanisation. While Russia relies on China for its 5G infrastructure, the Law on an Autonomous Internet clearly states the intent to develop their own Internet infrastructure. Namely, the efforts to introduce technical equipment into Russia's Internet infrastructure and to create a national Domain Name System, which guarantees the continued functioning of the Internet in case of global disconnection, prove that the risk of cyberbalkanisation is real.

Russia's War in Ukraine: The Online Dimension

Russia's war against Ukraine has not just affected global geopolitics, but also the cyberspace landscape. Long before the recent escalation, the conflict was already being fought online. Sometimes described as Russia's cyber testing lab, Ukraine has been a target of historically significant cyberattacks, most notably those targeting its power grid in 2015 and 2016.[19] Ukraine

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16 See also: *Doctrine of Information Security of the Russian Federation*, "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation", 5 December 2016, [https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/2563163].

17 S. Tanase, *VB2018 paper: Internet balkanization: why are we raising borders online?* "Virus Bulletin", 2018, [https://www.virusbulletin.com/virusbulletin/2019/02/vb2018-paper-internet-balkanization-why-are-we-raising-borders-online].

18 *Russia bans sale of gadgets without Russian-made software*, "BBC News", 21 November 2019, [https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-50507849].

19 A. Greenberg, *Sandworm: A New Era of Cyberwar and the Hunt for the Kremlin's Most Dangerous Hackers* Doubleday: 2019.

was also seriously affected by the NotPetya worm, which caused global losses of at least USD 10 billion.[20] Thus, it should come as no surprise that several Russian state-backed cyber actors launched over 200 coordinated cyber-operations immediately prior to the Russian ground invasion of Ukraine.[21] Private cybersecurity vendors also observed a correlation between cyberattacks and kinetic attacks, as well as a preference for primarily targeting critical infrastructure and Ukrainian government organisations with destructive campaigns.[22]

> « **Russia's war efforts not only focus on Ukraine but also target its own information sphere. New regulations have imposed strict censorship rules concerning reporting on the war**

As a consequence of attacks from Russian IP addresses, the world's largest certificate authority for digital certificates or TLS/SSL certificates, essential for secure and reliable Internet communication, announced that it would pause the "issuance and reissuance of all certificate types affiliated with Russia and Belarus."[23] In response, Russia announced the creation of a domestic

certificate authority,[24] which raises concerns about increased surveillance and censorship and increases the risk of cyberbalkanisation.

Russia's war efforts not only focus on Ukraine but also target its own information sphere. New regulations have imposed strict censorship rules concerning reporting on the war. This impacts not only Russian journalists but any Russia-based individual, as well as foreign media outlets operating in Russia. As a result, Russian media reflects the propaganda of the Russian state with the fear of retribution, while other reporting is being censored, and many foreign outlets have suspended their operations in Russia as a direct consequence of the new regulations.[25] Thus, the online experience of Internet users within and outside of Russia differs significantly.

Immediate Consequences of Russia's Invasion: Cyberbalkanisation

Russia's war against Ukraine has not only changed geopolitical realities but also had an impact on the isolation of the Russian Internet and its efforts at cyberbalkanisation. Most visible is the exit of many Western firms from Russia. Almost 1,000 firms across all business sectors have halted their Russia operation and are in

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20 Ibid.

21 T. Burt, *The hybrid war in Ukraine,* "Microsoft", 27 April 2022,
[https://blogs.microsoft.com/on-the-issues/2022/04/27/hybrid-war-ukraine-russia-cyberattacks].

22 Ibid.

23 SSSCIP Ukraine (@dsszzi), *In response to the evolving geopolitical situation in Ukraine DigiCert is pausing issuance and reissuance of all certificate types affiliated with Russia and Belarus.* "Twitter", 11 March 2022,
[https://twitter.com/dsszzi/status/1502204367784624130].

24 T. Brewster, *Big Web Security Firms Ditch Russia, Leaving Internet Users Open to More Kremlin Snooping*, "Forbes",
11 March 2022, [https://www.forbes.com/sites/thomasbrewster/2022/03/11/russiansexposed-to-more-surveillance-and-cybercrime-as-web-security-giants-leave-over-ukraine-invasion].

25 O. Darcy, *CNN, BBC, and others suspend broadcasting from Russia after Putin signs law limiting press*, "CNN Business",
5 March 2022, [https://edition.cnn.com/2022/03/04/media/bbc-cnn-russia-putin-media-law/index.html].

the process of withdrawing their assets.[26] This also applies to IT firms, such as Oracle, IBM, and Intel that all suspended their operations. While these companies provide products widely used in business settings, the suspension of operations by two key Internet backbone carriers has had severe effects on the available Internet bandwidth in Russia. Lumen (formerly CenturyLink) and Cogent are both top international transit providers for Russian telecom giants Rostelecom and TTK, as well as all three major mobile operators, MTS, Megafon, and VEON.[27] A disconnect on the scale of the Russian operations is unprecedented in the history of the Internet, and has increased fears for the decoupling of Russia from the Internet and for cyberbalkanisation.

To that end, Ukraine requested the revocation of Russia's top-level domain .ru, as well as its Cyrillic equivalent, thereby removing all Russian IP addresses and effectively disconnecting Russia from the global Internet. Revoking Russia's top-level domain equates to blocking its root server in the domain name system (DNS), thereby blocking access for Russian Internet users and creating significant risks for Internet traffic routed through Russia.[28] The non-profit Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), responsible for managing the top-level domains of the DNS, denied Ukraine's request, which would have split the Internet and set a dangerous precedent for further conflicts.[29]

Russia has also taken action increasing the likelihood of cyberbalkanisation. In particular, a leaked directive issued by the Russian Ministry of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media has stoked fears of decoupling Russia from the global Internet. The directive outlined technical measures that operators of state websites have to implement. These measures include switching to DNS servers located on Russian territory, switching to the .ru top-level domain, and removing all foreign hosted JavaScript code.[30]

Further, Russia's strict censorship regulations increasingly alter the Russian online experience.[31] Russia is also rerouting Internet traffic in occupied Ukraine, specifically in the Kherson region, through Russian Internet infrastructure, which also highlights this trend towards cyberbalkanisation.[32] Overall, Russia's activities indicate a perceived need for control of its online sphere.

26 *Almost 1,000 Companies Have Curtailed Operations in Russia – But Some Remain*, "Yale School of Management", 15 May 2022, [https://som.yale.edu/story/2022/almost-1000-companies-have-curtailed-operations-russia-some-remain].

27 D. Madory, *Cogent disconnects from Russia*, "Kentik", 4 March 2022, [https://www.kentik.com/blog/cogent-disconnects-from-russia].

28 S. Vaughan-Nichols, *Ukraine asks for Russia to be kicked off the internet*, "ZDNet", 1 March 2022, [https://www.zdnet.com/home-and-office/networking/Ukraine-asks-for-russia-to-be-kicked-off-the-internet].

29 S. Vaughan-Nichols, *ICANN rejects Ukraine's request to block Russia from the internet*, "ZDNet", 3 March 2022, [https://www.zdnet.com/home-and-office/networking/icann-rejects-ukraines-request-to-block-russia-from-the-internet].

30 NEXTA (@nexta_tv), *#Russia began active preparations for disconnection from the global Internet*, "Twitter", 6 March 2022, [https://twitter.com/nexta_tv/status/1500553480548892679].

31 A. Troianovski, *Russia Takes Censorship to New Extremes, Stifling War Coverage*, "The New York Times", 4 March 2022, [https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/04/world/europe/russia-censorship-media-crackdown.html].

32 M. Hunder, T. Balmforth, *Russia reroutes internet traffic in occupied Ukraine to its infrastructure*, "Reuters", 2 May 2022, [https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-reroutes-internet-traffic-occupied-ukraine-its-infrastructure-2022-05-02].

The Way Forward?

The Internet was designed to allow for the open and free exchange of information; however, developments worldwide are challenging this very idea. Russia's efforts to create an independently functioning Internet, even decoupling from the global DNS, pose the biggest threat to the global Internet infrastructure to date. While countries such as China and its Great Firewall have created their own Internet sphere, these states continue to subscribe to the internationally administered DNS. In comparison, Russia's recent attempts to establish a national DNS, which can function independently from the global DNS, would change the underlying structure of the Internet and allow for the complete segmentation of Russia's Internet.

However, it is important to note that it is not only authoritarian regimes that pose challenges to the global Internet. Also, Western powers such as the European Union, its member states, and the United States have enacted significant regulations, increasing the likelihood of cyberbalkanisation. Both data localization requirements and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) have impacted the business models of organisations active in the EU. Additionally, the EU requires the takedown and blocking of certain online content. This content moderation is justified on the grounds of countering disinformation and hate speech and alters the online experience of Internet users in the EU. The United States has also adopted measures in line with cyberbalkanisation, most prominently, its banning of Huawei on grounds of national security.

Regulating technologies is a difficult endeavour, and so, recommendations must be contextually aware and flexible. A one-size-fits-all approach rarely works in international politics, and the issue of cyberbalkanisation is no different. Nonetheless, policy makers can take action to improve the current situation with regards to Russia and its decoupling of the Internet.

- Russia is effectively shaping a distinct Russian online sphere. Western states criticise authoritarian measures such as surveillance or censorship readily, however, policies such as content moderation and surveillance also apply to their Internet infrastructure. Thus, an honest conversation on Internet regulation is necessary to establish universally applicable standards of content moderation vs censorship, determine the legitimate use of surveillance, and address issues of privacy and national security. If Western states and democratic nations coalesce around a shared understanding of the challenges at hand, they can work towards preserving the interconnectedness of the Internet.[33]

- The recent Russian policies target the distribution of information about the war and Russia's standing in the world, to control the narrative and maintain regime stability. While it has become harder for Russians to access information about the war, this is not yet impossible. Solutions such as virtual private networks (VPNs) can help circumvent Russia's blocking measures. Companies can support these efforts by not geoblocking users behind VPNs. Most effective, however, would be the provision of information via technologies still allowed in Russia. To be

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33 S. Feldstein, *Russia's War in Ukraine Is a Watershed Moment for Internet Platforms*, "Carnegie Endowment for International Peace", 3 March 2022, [https://carnegieendowment.org/publications/86569].

specific, Telegram and WhatsApp remain available to Russian users, and news outlets are recommended to use these channels for sharing information on the war and other topics of relevance.[34]

> « *Cyberspace has long been a domain of Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine, with campaigns over the years crippling the power supply, and affecting government agencies, sensitive information on social benefits, and transportation infrastructure*

- Currently, Russia is not able to sustain its own technology needs. A shortage of chips and the effect of sanctions will keep Russia from being self-reliant in the foreseeable future, thus increasing Russia's dependency on China. While the long-term goals of both countries differ widely, the current setup might allow Russia to evade sanctions.[35] Hence, Western countries should develop a clear position on how to address the partnership between China and Russia in cyberspace. Further, they should evaluate the sanctions regime and its effectiveness regularly. Lastly, Western states should develop a common policy towards technology transfers with Russia and address the issue of technology supply shortages proactively.

Conclusion

The war in Ukraine has attracted much discussion about Russia isolating itself in geopolitical, financial, and economic terms, and the same can be said about its online sphere. While the exit of Western firms has certainly accelerated the process, Russia's efforts at establishing an independently functioning Internet predate the conflict. Since 2012, various laws have introduced surveillance and censorship methods under the guise of protecting children and national security.

Cyberspace has long been a domain of Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine, with campaigns over the years crippling the power supply, and affecting government agencies, sensitive information on social benefits, and transportation infrastructure such as the postal services or Ukraine's railways. Thus, cyberattacks accompanying the current aggression come as no surprise. However, Ukrainian investments in cyber defence and capacity building with the help of their international partners has prevented widespread destruction by cyber means.[36] While it is too early to judge the effectiveness of Russia's cyberattacks, the conflict in cyberspace has simultaneously resulted in stricter control of information online and the decoupling of Russia from the Internet.

Russia's war has most certainly increased the risk of cyberbalkanisation. While this effort to isolate Russia was unsuccessful, Russia's

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34 Y. Serhan, *How Western News Is Getting Around Putin's Digital Iron Curtain*, "The Atlantic", 22 March 2022, [https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2022/03/international-news-russia-kremlin-media-censorship/627120].

35 R. Standish, *Interview: Will the Russian Internet Resemble China's 'Great Firewall'?*, Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), 22 March 2022, [https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-internet-china-great-firewall-censorship-meta-facebook-instagram/31765408.html].

36 J. Ling, *Ukraine's Digital Battle with Russia Isn't Going as Expected*, "Wired", 29 April 2022, [https://www.wired.com/story/ukraine-russia-digital-battle].

bans on Western social media platforms and the exit of Western firms from the Russian market increase cyberbalkanisation.[37] With the exit of key Internet infrastructure providers, Russia's Internet has suffered setbacks in its reliability and speed. Sanctions targeting high technology imports decrease Russia's ability to become technologically self-reliant. Censorship regulations have already created an own Russian online space distinct from the global information domain.

While Russia is moving towards its own decoupled Internet, Western states lack a cohesive strategy to counter cyberbalkanisation. Differing policies concerning privacy, data localisation, preferences for local high technology solutions, and content management of hate speech and disinformation have resulted in a fragmented Western response to cyberbalkanisation developments. However, if Western states – and democracies worldwide – want to guarantee and protect international connectedness and civil liberties online, they need to find common ground on Internet governance. In the meantime, concrete actions such as providing information to the Russian public and addressing the issue of Russian technology imports can counter the trend of Russia's isolation online and global cyberbalkanisation.

Verena M. Wingerter is a Threat Intelligence Researcher for the Deutsche Cyber-Sicherheitsorganisation (DCSO), where she covers cyber policy and strategy as well as Russian threat activities. She holds an MA in International Affairs from the Hertie School and a BA in Governance from the Albert-Ludwigs-University. She has also studied at the George Washington University, United States, and at MGIMO, Russia.

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37 B. Fung, *Ukraine's request to cut off Russia from the global internet has been rejected*, "CNN", 3 March 2022, [https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/03/tech/ukraine-russia-internet-icann/index.html].