

**THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR (2014-2022):  
BASIC PRECONDITIONS AND CAUSES**

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**Abstract**

On February 24, 2022, the Russian Federation started a large-scale military aggression against Ukraine, moving from covert hybrid to overt war. Ukraine found itself in the epicenter of one of the largest and most extreme socio-cultural rifts of the global world. The aim of the research is to study, analyze and summarize the causal chain and conceptualize the understanding of the nature of the Russian-Ukrainian war in the chronological range of 2014-2022. We consider it necessary to condition the possible change of a certain upper chronological limit (2022). The study is based on dialectical, comparative, international legal and systemic approaches. The basic methods are: analysis and synthesis, synchronic and diachronic, comparative-historical, historical-legal, and structural-functional.

It is proved that the preconditions for the Russian-Ukrainian war emerged from the collapse of the USSR and the first years of modern independent Ukraine. The collapse of the Soviet empire and the communist bloc at the end of the twentieth century was regarded by official Moscow as the greatest tragedy of the twentieth century. Russian President Vladimir Putin and those close to him did not abandon the idea of restoring the imperial structure and lost geopolitical positions, in particular by returning Ukraine under Kremlin's. At the beginning of the XXI century, Ukrainian-Russian relations became especially acute due to the different attitudes of Kyiv and Moscow towards European, Eurasian and Euro-Atlantic integration, as well as tensions in the security field of bilateral relations. The main reasons for Russia's war against Ukraine are: geopolitical, imperial, civilization, existential, personal and psychological. In general, from the Russian side, they boil down to a principled denial of Ukrainian

statehood. In 2014, Russia actually used the Revolution of Dignity as an excuse for the annexation of Crimea and a hybrid war against Ukraine. The reason for the conventional Russian-Ukrainian war of February 24, 2022 can be seen as the Kremlin's desire in the year of the centenary of the formation of the USSR to revive Russian influence in the post-Soviet space, which implied mandatory full control over Ukraine or its absorption.

**Keywords:** *Russia, Ukraine, Russian-Ukrainian war of 2014-2022, preconditions of war, causes of war, nature of war.*

### **Introduction**

***Statement of the problem terms and its relation to important scientific or practical tasks.*** The global world order of the 21st century is increasingly under the serious influence of regional and global multifaceted challenges. Climate, food, nuclear threats have been supplemented by the Covid-19 pandemic and asymmetric or hybrid threats and wars in different regions of the world. It is obvious that the international institutions and powerful global actors called to maintain stability and peace proved unable to effectively cope with such a duty. Only during the last decade, North Africa, Syria, Afghanistan, East Asia, as well as Eastern Europe, where the Russian Federation launched a hybrid war against Ukraine in February 2014, became the arena of tension, revolutions, and wars.

On February 24, 2022, the Russian Federation launched a large-scale military aggression against Ukraine, moving from a covert hybrid to an open conventional total war. Ukraine “found itself at the epicenter of one, and perhaps the largest and most extreme, socio-cultural rift of the modern global world” (Smoliy, 2022) (Kyrydon, Translation). More than eight years of heroic standoff by the Ukrainian people to the occupying state, the second military force of the modern world, are behind us. The scientific analysis of current events in relation to the component of the period of the hybrid Russian-Ukrainian war (since February 2014) allows us to infer important theoretical and methodological conclusions about its origins and nature.

***Analysis of recent studies and publications that have begun to address this problem and on which the authors rely.*** Scientific research, analytical and expert – Western (A. Acharya, B. Badie, B. Buzan, J. Elsea, Y. Felshtinsky, N. Ferguson, R. Glenn, F. Hoffman, M. van Herpen, T. Kuzio, J. Mearsheimer, etc.) and Ukrainian (P. Guy-Nyzhnyk, V. Gorbulin, M. Doroshko, M. Lazarovych, Y. Magda, R. Ofitsynsky, B. Parahonsky, G. Perepelycia, M. Stanchev, etc.) – conclusions in the context of the problems raised have recently appeared. Based on different approaches (historical, geopolitical, war theory, window of opportunity, clash of civilizations, deferred war) researchers have attempted to substantiate different aspects of Russia’s war against Ukraine (both hybrid war and the modern phase of total conventional war).

***Highlighting the previously unresolved parts of the general problem***

*to which the article is devoted.* The authors are aware that the proposed theoretical-conceptual historical scientific exploration, which is actually pioneering in terms of the study of the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2014–2022, its preconditions, causes, nature, etc. only outlines the raised problem, and requires further in-depth study and understanding.

**Formulation of the goals of the article (problem statement).** The purpose of the research is to study, analyze and summarize the causal chain and conceptualize the understanding of the nature of the Russian-Ukrainian war in the chronological range of 2014–2022. At the same time, we consider it necessary to condition the possible change of the determined upper limit of the chronology (2022), being aware of the incompleteness of the process.

**The research methodology** involves a departure from the so-called “tunnel thinking” / “tunnel vision” (when there is a certain pattern, typical ways of solving the problem, embedded in the mind, activated according to the situation) in favor of generalizing and fitting the content-events facet of the Russian-Ukrainian war into the national (Ukrainian), regional (European) and global (world) historical context. The conducted research is based on dialectical, comparative, international-legal and systemic approaches. The basic methods include analysis and synthesis, synchronic and diachronic, comparative-historical, historical-legal, structural-functional.

### **Preconditions of Russia’s war against Ukraine**

Preconditions of Russian aggression against independent Ukraine, resulting first in a hybrid and then full-scale conventional war, have been put forward since the collapse of the USSR and the first years of modern independent Ukraine. The fall of the Soviet empire and the communist bloc was a test for many peoples in the conditions of the post-bipolarity, the completion of the decolonization process, the expansion of the circle of international actors and an unprecedented level of global interdependence (Acharya, Buzan, 2019, p. 261).

There are notable analogies between the reactions of Russian society to the outcome of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR and German society a century ago to defeat in World War I. Researchers have noted the presence of the so-called “Versailles syndrome” (the term appeared to refer to the painful reaction of Germans to the trauma of the military fiasco and the harsh conditions of the Versailles Peace Treaty of 1919 (Kornijevsky, Fylypenko, 2021) (Kyrydon, Translation) among a significant part of Russians. Common and typical for both cases are “the trauma of the Great War” (Trojan, Kyrydon, 2021, p. 110), the “loser complex” (“we were defeated, but we are still the best”), an exaggeration of the “catastrophic nature” of defeat and the desire to restore great power status (“to rise from the knees”) and recover lost territories.

After the change of power in the Russian Federation in 1999–2000 these ideas actually became part of the official ideology and political rhetoric: V. Putin’s statements about the collapse of the USSR as “the greatest geopolitical disaster of the 20th century”(April 2005) and “unjust” inclusion of “originally Russian territories” into Soviet Ukraine (December 2019);

statement of a State Duma deputy from the pro-government party “United Russia” Y. Fedorov (November 2015) on the need to restore the Russian state to the borders of the USSR of 1945. It is quite typical that in post-Soviet Russia, as in its time and in post-Soviet Germany, the mythologies of “conspiracy” and “stab in the back” became widespread as attempts to explain the defeat not so much by objective reasons, as by subversive activities of “hostile elements” inside the country, “in the rear”. Whereas in the German case the culprits were predominantly Jews and socialists, in the Russian case it was the traitors in the state apparatus and the cosmopolitan intellectuals.

Consequently, in order to restore historical justice, it was proposed to give proper assessment of the activities of the destroyers of the USSR. At the same time, there are calls to “deal resolutely with modern “enemies” in order to avoid the mistakes of the past”. Most often, these are people who are potentially disloyal to the current government and the neo-imperialist ideology (Kornijevsky, Fylypenko, 2021) (Kyrydon, Translation). Such views are actively promoted by a number of pro-governmental intellectuals, primarily representatives of the so-called “Izborsk Club” (A. Dugin, L. Ivashov, A. Platonov, O. Prokhanov, A. Fursov).

Furthermore, from his statement during the annual address to the Federal Assembly (2005) about the collapse of the Soviet Union as “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century”, Russian President Vladimir Putin did not abandon the idea of restoring the imperial structure, in particular by returning Ukraine to Kremlin control. Let us consider a fairly clear characterization of the analysis of the Kremlin’s policy in the former Soviet Union, which in the book “The Dawn of Peace in Europe” (1996) was given by M. Mandelbaum (former adviser to U.S. President B. Clinton): “Today the most dangerous place on the continent is the border between Russia and Ukraine... Russia’s efforts to absorb all or part of Ukraine, or to disintegrate that country, which would result from a deliberate policy of restoring a great Russian state, whether by any combination of the two factors... will have serious consequences for all of Europe. They could substantially damage, and probably even completely destroy, the jointly produced sense of security at the end of the Cold War. After the successful takeover of Ukraine Russia could once again become an international power that pursues a policy of expansion into the West and poses a serious threat to all of Europe” (Mandelbaum, 1996, p. 112). The origins of Russia's current policy toward Kyiv were based on just such a strategy, as evidenced by the realities of Ukrainian-Russian relations between 1991 and 2013 (Zadorozniy, 2014) (Kyrydon, Translation).

The first stumbling block was the attitude of Ukraine and Russia to the newly created association, whose founding states they were (along with Belarus) – the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). However, Ukraine did not sign the Decision on the CIS Charter and ratified the Agreement on the Commonwealth of Independent States with comments. Ukraine's comments concerned the excessive influence of central coordinating bodies on the policies of independent states, ambiguous interpretation of some provisions of the Agreement and its general direction by official circles of the signatory parties.

The question was directly about the purpose of the Agreement as a basis for the creation of a new union state (Agreements establishing the Commonwealth of Independent States, 1991). Ukraine remained only a founder of the CIS, participated in realization of mutually beneficial projects, but nevertheless did not become a member of this union. Of course, such a position by Ukraine could not please Russia.

Subsequently, serious collisions in Ukrainian-Russian relations arose in connection with the preparation and signing of the interstate treaty of friendship and cooperation. For example, such an equal treaty was signed by Ukraine with Hungary on December 19, 1991, and with Poland on May 18, 1992. With Russia, as early as May 31, 1997 (Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, 1997) (it was this high level interstate document, in which both sides recognized each other's independence and borders, that the Russian Federation brutally trampled in February 2014 and continued to do so, which prompted Ukraine to officially terminate the treaty in fall 2018). Problems concerned many important issues: the recognition of borders (borders were recognized, but Russia refused to implement their full delimitation and demarcation, particularly in the Sea of Azov); the future status of Crimea, Sevastopol (the Russian State Duma even adopted anti-Ukrainian decisions on the status of Sevastopol); the division and basing of the Black Sea Fleet (under frantic pressure from official Moscow it was eventually divided in a ratio of about 80:20 in favor of Russia, with the Russian Navy base in Sevastopol retained until 2017).

The Agreement on the Ukrainian-Russian State Border was concluded in 2003 between Ukraine and the Russian Federation. The line of the state border, which the Russian side undertook to respect, was finally determined and legalized on the maps. However, in the following years, Russia hampered the process of demarcation of the state border with Ukraine in every possible way (in particular in the Sea of Azov and in the Kerch Strait).

At the beginning of the 21st century, Ukrainian-Russian relations have become particularly acute due to the different attitudes of Kyiv and Moscow towards European, Eurasian and Euro-Atlantic integration, as well as tensions in the security field of bilateral relations. For example, the Russian Federation attempted to directly alienate the island of Tuzla in the Kerch Strait from Ukraine, which caused military and political tension and a threat of war in October 2003. At the same time, Kyiv's Foreign policy did not develop in the direction desired by Moscow. Thus, despite signing the agreement on the formation of the common economic space by Ukraine on September 19, 2003 (the law on ratification of the agreement by Ukraine contained a reservation: "Ukraine shall take part in the establishment and operation of the Single Economic Space within the limits that accord with the Ukrainian Constitution"(Agreement on the Establishment of the Common Economic Zone, 2003), Ukraine did not join the Eurasian integration in the format of participation in the economic or customs union.

The turning point in Russian-Ukrainian relations was the Orange

Revolution at the end of 2004. The President of the Russian Federation V. Putin perceived it as his personal defeat. It was then that the scenarios used against Ukraine 10 years later were worked out. In particular, in 2004, Russia played the card of "Eastern Ukrainian" separatism for the first time. On November 26, 2004, the Luhansk Regional Council voted for the creation of the South-Eastern Republic. On November 28, 2004, a congress of deputies of all levels from 17 regions of Ukraine (mainly eastern and southern) was held in the city of Severodonetsk, Luhansk region. A representative delegation from the Russian Federation headed by Y. Luzhkov (the Mayor of Moscow) took part in it. At the congress, the creation of a South-Eastern federal state with the capital in Kharkiv was discussed, but then this idea was not implemented.

The Ukrainian society and state leadership were increasingly convinced of the need for close cooperation with NATO (Partnership for Peace program in 1994 and the Charter on Special Partnership in 2007) and accession to the European Union (Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and aspiration for a new agreement with the prospect of EU membership for Ukraine). Russia put political and diplomatic pressure on the North-Atlantic Alliance which at Bucharest Summit (April 2008) rejected Ukraine's NATO Membership Action Plan, although it confirmed that Ukraine would definitely become part of the Euro-Atlantic community (Bucharest Summit Declaration, 2008) in the future.

Ukraine also reacted sharply negatively to Russia's war against Georgia on August 8–13, 2008 and showed solidarity with the state leadership and people of Georgia (Kyrydon, Troyan, 2009) (Kyrydon, Translation). It was then when the questions "Today Georgia – tomorrow Ukraine?", "Will Ukraine become the next target of Putin's doctrine?", "Is Kyiv next on the Kremlin's list?" and the like (Kuzio, 2008, p. 5) (Kyrydon, Translation) become topical.

Azarov's government's statement about postponing the signing of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU in November 2013 (which was exactly what Russia sought to prevent Ukraine's integration into the European economic and political space) catalyzed the processes of the Revolution of Dignity and changes of the political regime in Ukraine after the escape of the then president V. Yanukovich. It was these circumstances, which created a powerful turbulent field in Ukrainian-Russian relations, that Russia actually used as an occasion for aggression against Ukraine. Russia's aggression since February 2014 has found expression in a hybrid war, accompanied by Russia's occupation and direct annexation of parts of Ukrainian territory.

The direct reason for the total conventional war, which Russia began against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, can be seen in the Kremlin's desire to revive Russian influence in the post-Soviet space by proclaiming a modern Russian neo-imperium through an interstate association under the aegis of Moscow in the year of the centenary of the formation (December 30, 1922) of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). According to Putin, Ukraine should become its mandatory component, without control over which Russia does not see its future as a full-fledged empire state. It is indicative that the same ideas were actually duplicated in the text of one of the pro-Kremlin

ideologists, P. Akopov, “The Attack of Russia and the New World” published (although this document disappeared from the website very quickly) on the website of the Russian state agency RIA Novosti on February 26, 2022. The blitzkrieg was planned to be completed on that date, almost immediately after the beginning of military operations. The text frankly outlined the goals of the Russian leadership, declaring in particular that “Russia is restoring its historical completeness by gathering the Russian world, the Russian people together – in its totality of Great Russians, Belarusians and Little Russians”, Russia launched a special operation to “finally resolve the Ukrainian question”, “there will be no more Ukraine as anti-Russia” (Akopov, 2022) (Kyrydon, Translation).

### **Causes of the Russian-Ukrainian war**

The form of Russia’s war against Ukraine – first in the form of a hybrid, and then total – is not formally determined by the complex of reasons that created the basis for such a war. In modern conditions, in very many cases, states fight without prior declaration of war, using various methods (including covert and open) to achieve success. So, in particular, the USA last declared war on Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania on June 5, 1942, that is, during the Second World War (Elsea, 2014). In February 2014, Russia generally denied its participation in the annexation of the territory of Ukraine for some time, and on February 24, 2022, it announced the beginning of a “Special Military Operation” (Russian Federation Announces “Special Military Operation” in Ukraine, 2022). However, regardless of these circumstances, every war – the modern Russian-Ukrainian one only confirms this rule – has deep roots that find expression in the fundamental causes of war.

Among the main reasons for the Russian-Ukrainian war we will distinguish the following.

*Civilizational.* The war of the Russian Eurasian civilization against the local Ukrainian civilization in order to implement its own civilization-imperial plans (Dugin, 1997; Mchiedlov, 2001; Myhalchenko, 2013; Troyan, 2016; Zalizniak, 2017; Kononov, 2018).

It is about values and inter-civilizational differences of societies of different mentality, ethnic being, cultural orientation, collective memory, traditions. Thus, they form essential semantic rifts in the understanding of the state and prospects of development. Throughout its history, Ukraine has been an organic part of European civilization. Its ties with Eurasian Russia are not natural, long-standing and objectively conditioned by Ukraine’s geopolitical position on the map of Europe. Its forced reorientation from the European West to the Eurasian East has occurred over the past centuries during the era of Moscow imperialism’s greatest expansion (Zalizniak, 2017, p. 10) (Kyrydon, Translation).

The Russian side views Ukrainianism as a threat to the position of the Russian Federation as a global actor and to the position of the “Russian world” as the ideological pillar of contemporary Russian society and Russian statehood. The situation in Russian-Ukrainian relations has greatly worsened after the activation of Ukraine’s European integration plans and the agreement

on the terms and deadline for signing the Association Agreement with the European Union. Ukraine's unwillingness to fit into the Russian civilizational paradigm of development, orientation on pan-European and Euro-Atlantic democratic values became the determining motive of the modern Russian "crusade" against Ukraine both in political, social, cultural, informational and ideological, hybrid, and, ultimately, armed conflict. From the side of Ukraine, this is "a war for a chance for a new civilization of mankind" (Daciuk, 2022) (Kyrydon, Translation).

*Neo-imperial*; for global dominance. The imperial idea in the historical dimension has always been and continues to be a propaganda construct and justification for the expansionist Russian policy in order to expand its own sphere of influence and to weaken the positions of its opponents as much as possible (Gunczak, 2010; Korovin, 2016). Hence, the Russian-Ukrainian war is motivated, from the point of view of official Moscow, by the need to fight on Ukrainian territory against the United States and its NATO allies (against the Anglo-Saxons).

In order to implement the imperial plans, Russian propaganda tried to actively use appeals to the historical unity between Russia and, first of all, the eastern, southeastern and southern regions of Ukraine. For this, the idea of reviving Novorossiia in these territories and its inclusion in the Russian Federation was carried out (Turchenko, F., Turchenko, G., 2015) (Kyrydon, Translation). After 2004, Russian special services formed an extensive network of anti-Ukrainian organizations in the southeastern regions and Crimea. It was controlled or even led by Russian agents. This anti-Ukrainian network included the structures of the Party of Regions, the Communist Party of Ukraine, the Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine, the "Rodyna" and "Russian Unity" parties, various Orthodox groups focused on the idea of a "Russian world", separatist political groups ("Donetsk Republic"), criminalized paramilitary formations (Cossack formations, fighting clubs, the "Oplot" organization, security structures that were actively used during the Revolution of Dignity, the so-called "titushki"). The vast majority of these groups did not have broad public support, while at the same time they actively interacted with law enforcement agencies during the regime of V. Yanukovich.

Thus, the Russian state leadership explains the coercion of Ukraine to peace as a necessary step to protect its regional and global interests. It is a question of satisfying expansionist imperial ambitions for regional and global domination. The war against Ukraine is only one of the tools to achieve it, to realize its goals (along with energy, the arms race, the information war, etc.) In fact, the imperial facet was outlined in V. Putin's speech at the Munich Security Forum on February 10, 2007 (Putin, 2007), which became the starting point of the new "cold war" between the East (the Russian Federation and its allies) and the West (NATO member states, above all, the United States) and the EU.) As the Ukrainian historian J. Grytsak noted, it is quite an objective understanding that the fate of the whole world is being decided in modern Ukraine (Grycak, 2022) (Kyrydon, Translation).

*Geopolitical*: for space, expansion as the quintessence of imperialism.



Russia as a telurocratic state, i.e. a “land” state, builds its power on the basis of control over a vast continental Eurasian space (Dnisriansky, 2021; Dugin, 1997). In this sense, it relies on three subspaces, which are the “whales” of Russian imperialism: Eastern European, Caucasian and Central Asian. Russia as an empire has always considered Ukraine to be the key zone of East European space. Accordingly, the subordination of the Ukrainian space – territorially the largest state formation in Europe, the axial state of the Middle-Eastern European macro-region, a large market in terms of labor force, services, capitals, economic potential – filled the notion of Russian imperialism with full content. It allowed the control of the Black Sea, the determining influence on the Balkans and Central Europe.

The Russian leadership led by V. Putin already in the second half of the “zero” years of the 21st century, as noted by Academician V. Gorbulin, moved to the direct implementation of its revanchist strategy in combination with geopolitical plans (Gorbulin, 2016) (Kyrydon, Translation). First of all, the task was determined to find out the reaction of the USA and its allies. For this purpose, Russia resorted to the use of force against Ukraine (October 2003 – the crisis around Kosa Tuzla Island, January 2006 and January 2009 – “gas wars”) and Georgia (August 8–13, 2008 war). After these events, the Kremlin formed a persistent idea that the elites of Western countries, primarily European ones, have the “Munich syndrome” – readiness to make concessions to the aggressor at the expense of the states of the Baltic–Black Sea–Caspian region. The passive reaction of Western states to Russian provocations significantly contributed to the formation of the Russian leadership's belief in impunity, actually encouraged the Kremlin to take aggressive actions against the states of the former USSR and the “socialist camp”.

*Existential*: aimed at the destruction of Ukraine as a state and Ukrainianism / Ukrainian people / Ukrainian nation as a bearer of a worldview and collective memory different from the Russian and “Russian world”. The adjective “existential” (i.e., “vital”) was recognized by the online Dictionary as the word of the year 2019 in the world (at least, the meaning of this very term was searched most frequently by Internet users during the year) (“Existential” is Dictionary.com’s Word of the Year, 2019). For Ukraine and Ukrainians this concept has taken on special significance since 2014, when it became clear that for the sake of historical perspective, we have nothing else but to fight for our existential meanings, for our existence, for the right to be Ukrainians and to have our own independent state. At the core of this struggle is the assertion of freedom as a human right of free choice (Sartre, 1945–1949). At the same time, Putin views everything Ukrainian from a position of great-power chauvinism as an existential threat to Russia. We are talking about the absolute rejection by the Russians of Ukraine as something original and separate from Russia.

So, as S. Plokhyy, a professor of Ukrainian history at Harvard University, who at one time comprehensively researched the past and present of Russian nationalism (Plokhyy, 2017), reasonably noted, as a result of the Russian-Ukrainian war, Ukrainian statehood is being reformatted on the basis of a political nation, and Ukraine is fighting a war not only for its right to

independent existence, but also for the whole of Europe (Plokyh, 2022) (Kyrydon, Translation). At the same time, for example, the well-known representative of neorealism J. Mearsheimer believes that one should not underestimate the threats from modern authoritarian-nationalist regimes (he includes the Russian one) and considers the chances of nationalism to win in the historical perspective quite significant (Mearsheimer, 2018, p. 82).

*Personal and psychological* as a meaningful projection of the worldview anti-Ukrainian complexes-constructions of the Russian President V. Putin (Muhin, 2015; Zaypel, 2016; Kuzio, 2017). They endorsed his indignation at Ukraine's unwillingness to join the pro-Russian common economic space, and then the cultural trauma of the Ukrainian revolutions, which were based on the main Ukrainian values – independence, freedom, will, dignity, and Europeanness – that were unacceptable for the authoritarian Russian president. Accordingly, the Russian president declares his attitude towards Ukraine not as a modern independent state, but as a rebellious province seeking to get rid of Russian tutelage. Speaking to U. S. President Bush at the NATO summit in Bucharest (2008), he said that there was no such state as Ukraine because “part of its territory is Eastern Europe, and part, and a significant one, given by us (Russia – auth.)” (Volovytych, 2014, p. 20) (Kyrydon, Translation). This connection of semantic judgments and motivations determines the behavioral characteristics of V. Putin's being: he does not allow the existence of Ukrainian in any manifestations, and above all, he fundamentally denies Ukrainian statehood (not only at the level of being, but also at the level of idea). These worldview matrixes directed the actions of the Russian leader in relation to the unleashed Russian-Ukrainian war.

As noted by the domestic philosopher S. Daciuk: “The cause of the war between Russia and Belarus against Ukraine is formed by the results of the defeat of the USSR in World War III (Cold War) paranoid sentimental psychosis of Putin, induced by the masses of Russian subjects due to infodemic Russian media up to the level of creating a paranoia that is completely detached from reality and accompanied by anti-western sentimentality and aggression towards the world” (Daciuk, 2022) (Kyrydon, Translation).

But even well-known American international political scientist J. Mearsheimer believes that it was Vladimir Putin who started the war and is responsible for how it is being waged. The prevailing view in the West is that he is an irrational, outright aggressor who wants to create a great Russia in the image of the former Soviet Union. “Thus, J. Mearsheimer concludes, he alone bears full responsibility for the Ukrainian crisis” (Mearsheimer, 2022).

In general such a complex of reasons against the background of “the consolidation of neo-Soviet authoritarianism” (Kuźniar, 2022, p. 239) (Kyrydon, Translation) in Russia prompted its leadership to take active actions in the space of the former USSR. This was reflected in the aggression against Ukraine, in particular, in the form of a hybrid war (since the beginning of 2014), which after eight years turned into a total war. One of the most important military-political factors of the modern Russian-Ukrainian war is the impact on the situation of relations between limited war, nuclear deterrence, information

operations and conventional capabilities. Therefore, the presence of nuclear weapons in Russia is the main critical component of modern warfare, which creates serious problems for Ukraine, Europe and the whole world.

### **The nature of the Russian-Ukrainian war**

In our view, the outlined cause-and-effect series allows us to understand the anatomy of the emergence of the Russian-Ukrainian war, as well as its nature. Since February 2014, Russia began an imperialist, invasive war for the destruction of Ukraine or an existential war against Ukraine and everything Ukrainian. We agree with Ukrainian historian Y. Oficynsky that at this stage the concept of “hybrid warfare” (“unconventional”, “irregular”, “mixed” war) and the model of “farewell to the empire” are very productive for different levels of verbal connotations and creation of narratives (Oficynsky, 2018, pp. 77, 86) (Kyrydon, Translation). The paradigm of this war as an aggression of neo-imperial Russia against its main post-Soviet rival, Ukraine, as an outpost of Western civilization has actually been established (Resolution 2132, 2016).

In the temporal dimension, the Revolution of Dignity, the annexation of Crimea, the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) are successive stages of Russia's covert armed struggle against Ukraine. At the same time, in the system of international legal norms and values, the main actors are antipodes – the aggressor of Russia and the victim of Ukraine. Here it is important to emphasize that some Western and Central European scientists even consider Russian foreign policy at the beginning of the 21st century, and then the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the war with Ukraine, as a manifestation of the firm Realpolitik of modern Russia, which seeks to take leading positions in the future “post-American world” (Zakaria, 2008; Sherr, 2013, p. 61–64; Bieleń, 2021, p. 239). The anti-Western orientation of the Russian foreign policy line, which has strong support in society, is noted. Popular mistrust of “the West” has become a defining feature of political life in Putin's Russia, where it is encouraged and amplified via state television and numerous other media platforms (Szostek, 2017, p. 195).

At the first stage (February 26, 2014 – February 23, 2022), the Russian-Ukrainian war was of a hybrid nature – hybrid technologies were used by the Kremlin to occupy Ukrainian territories. The methods and direction of such a war generally fit well into the conceptual field of Western (Hoffman, 2007; Glenn, 2009; Kuzio, 2017) and Ukrainian approaches (Gorbulin, 2017; Magda, 2015; Doroshko, Baliuk, 2018) to its understanding. In particular, F. Hoffman, notes that hybrid wars incorporate a range of different modes of warfare, including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts, etc. They are operationally and tactically synchronized and coordinated within an area of operation to achieve “synergistic effects” (Hoffman, 2007, p. 14). A similar vision of a hybrid war, which combines conventional, unconventional, information and cyber operations into a particularly effective set of actions, is held by American military analysts: “The idea of hybrid warfare germinated in the Russo-Georgian War of 2008, but came into its own

during the Russo-Ukrainian War, of which the annexation of Crimea and the seizure of the Donbas are the two most visible campaigns. Hybrid warfare, as demonstrated by Russia in Ukraine, is a powerful tool for an era of limited war, and is arguably the modern Russian way of warfare” (Fox, 2017, p. 14).

One of the main ideologues of the Russian hybrid aggression against Ukraine, the chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, Valery Gerasimov, actively uses a hybrid approach to conduct modern warfare. He believes that in modern conflicts, the emphasis is increasingly shifting towards the integrated use of political, economic, informational and other non-military measures implemented with the reliance on military force. The combination of traditional and hybrid methods is already a characteristic feature of any armed conflict. At the same time, if hybrids can be used without the open use of military force, then classic combat operations without hybrids are no longer possible (Gerasimov, 2016, pp. 33–34). This is the nature of the war that Russia has been waging against Ukraine from the very beginning.

The force component of the war, which brought death and material destruction, since 2014 operated in spatially limited, local dimensions. At the same time, the limited scale of military activity was accompanied by an unrestricted dissemination of the discourse of war. There was a struggle for the dominance of certain ideas about the world and events in the social and individual environment and the simultaneous destruction of opposing, “hostile” approaches and points of view, for cognitive and communicative control, power over people’s minds, their emotions, thinking, behavior, and attempts to destroy their identities (Mink, Neumayer, 2007; Yakubova, 2018). In this sense, the hybrid Russian-Ukrainian war is informational and semantic in nature. In the information war, unreliable facts or opposite realities are used, while in the semantic war, interpretations are used, for example, the actions of the army can be presented as “anti-terrorist” or “punitive” actions. According to the Ukrainian scholar and expert on information policy and communication technologies G. Pochepcov, we are talking in general about the First war of Meanings in the world (Pochepcov, 2016) (Kyrydon, Translation), when “brother nations” (according to Soviet ideology) turned into “enemy nations” in the post-Soviet space.

Since February 24, 2022, there has been a stage of conventional war on the part of Russia. At the same time, Russia’s vision of the war is fundamentally different from Ukraine’s. If for official Moscow it is a war for the complete destruction of all Ukrainian state and society, for Ukraine the main content of modern war is really existential: it is a struggle in the form of the National Liberation War for the Ukrainian State, for the Ukrainian People, for Freedom, for Dignity. It is these meanings of life that Russia wants to destroy, and we strive to defend, protect and affirm them with all our might.

Without exaggeration, the whole Ukrainian nation rose up for the war against Russia, without regard to ethnic, linguistic, religious, etc. differences of its individual representatives or groups. Ukrainians became at the same time the biggest victim of the treacherous and destructive war unleashed by the Russian Federation: thousands of children and women killed, tens of thousands

of civilians killed, millions of people who left their places of residence, including those who went abroad. All of them are innocent citizens of Ukraine, absolutely groundless in terms of morality and law, subjected to terrible ordeals, including rape, torture, and abuse by Russian occupants. The tragedy of Bucha became the embodiment and symbol of Russia's modern policy of genocide of the Ukrainian people. American historian O. Motyl, in particular known for the book “Imperial Ends: The Decline, Collapse, and Revival of Empires” (Motyl, 2001) called such actions “an exceptional act of savagery” (Motyl, 2022) (Kyrydon, Translation).

On April 14, the Verkhovna Rada Ukraine recognized the genocide of the Ukrainian people by the armed forces of the Russian federation, as well as Russia’s political and military leadership of Russia under the veil of a full-scale war against Ukraine. The Rada also called on the UN, the European Parliament, PACE, the OSCE, NATO, and the world Parliaments of foreign to recognize the genocide committed by Russia against the Ukrainian people, as well as the crimes against humanity and war crimes on the territory of Ukraine (Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2022) (Kyrydon, Translation). At the same time, during the war there was a rapid and powerful crystallization of the Ukrainian people into a political nation. The above factors in conjunction with the goals and aspirations of the Ukrainian people in the war define its character as national liberation, anti-Russian, anti-imperialist, existential, and civilizational.

However, as noted by Taras Kuzio (Research Fellow at the Henry Jackson Society, London, and Professor of Political Science at the National University of Kyiv Mohyla Academy), it is very important to bring this understanding to the Western public consciousness. In particular, he analyzes five aspects in Russian studies following the 2014 European crisis and Russian-Ukrainian war that prevent Western historians and political scientists from looking at these events impartially (Kuzio, 2020). The first is how Western historians continue to include Ukrainians within an imperial history of “Russia” which denies Ukrainians a separate history. The second perspective is to counter the common narrative of Crimea as “always” having been “Russian” which denies that Tatars are the indigenous people of Crimea – not Russians. The third perspective focuses on academic orientalist approaches to writing about Ukraine and the Russian-Ukrainian war. The fourth perspective downplays Russian nationalism (imperialism) in Vladimir Putin’s Russia and completely ignores the revival of Tsarist and White émigré Russian nationalism that denies the existence of Ukraine and Ukrainians. Meanwhile, academic orientalism exaggerates the influence of Ukrainian nationalism in post-Euromaidan Ukraine. The fifth perspective counters the claim of Putinverstehers (Putin-Understanders) scholars of a “civil war” taking place in Ukraine through extensive evidence of Russian military aggression and imperialism. Finally, these five factors taken together show Russian studies will be unable to escape its crisis if it cannot come to understand how the source of the Russian-Ukrainian war lies in Russian national identity and its attitudes towards Ukraine and Ukrainians and why therefore the chances for peace are slim.

An example of the vision of the modern Russian-Ukrainian war in the context of a rational explanation and even justification of aggression on the part of Russia by the previous actions of NATO is the point of view of the well-known neorealist J. Mearsheimer (Mearsheimer, 2022). The recently published article “The West bears the main responsibility for the Ukrainian crisis” reveals the researcher's view of modernity. He believes that the reckless expansion of NATO provoked Russia (Mearsheimer, 2022). At the same time, a real “war of letters” unfolded around the Russian aggression and Ukraine’s response to it. On June 29, 2022, German intellectuals published an open letter entitled “A Ceasefire now!”. In response, experts on the problems of Eastern Europe, on the initiative of Andreas Umland (National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academia), published their statement “Heavy weapons now!” on July 22, 2022. They stated that the signatories of the Zeit appeal entitled “A Ceasefire Now!” misjudge the nature of Putin’s internal regime and foreign policy doctrine, and propose the opposite of the measures needed to deter the Kremlin: namely, heavy weapons delivered to Ukraine now and maximum sanctions on Russia (Krytyka, 2022).

The newest period of Ukraine’s independence has become for it, on the one hand, a powerful challenge and test of strength and historical perspective, on the other hand, turned it into a subject of current European (regional) and world (global) history. The war of aggression unleashed by the Russian Federation against Ukraine has lasted more than eight years – since February 26, 2014. It has passed through two phases: I – hybrid war from February 26, 2014 to February 23, 2022; II – total large-scale conventional war, lasting from February 24, 2022. For the West (primarily NATO and EU member states) this war can be seen as a hybrid World War III, which has lasted for over eight years (Felshtinsky, Stanczew, 2022). It was preceded by Russia’s “cold war” of the 21st century against NATO and the EU (it was started by Vladimir Putin’s speech at the Munich Security Forum on February 10, 2007).

At the same time, for Ukraine in the context of its national, European and global historical development, the war initiated by Russia is the National Liberation War of the XXI century. In this war, Ukraine is defending not only its independence and the main existential values of democratic choice, but also pan-European principles, rights and freedoms, and the international legal foundations of the modern world order.

### **Conclusion**

Russian aggression against Ukraine – initially hybrid, and then large-scale – is the result of a whole complex of geopolitical, civilization, existential, imperial and even personal (behavioral) reasons. It is based on Russia's desire to spread its influence and dominance over the entire space of the former Soviet Union. Ukraine is considered as a central link of the Eastern European geopolitical space in the context of strengthening the international positions of the modern Russian state. Situationally, the official Kremlin sought to use the century since the formation of the USSR as an additional ideological tool and a reason to speed up the process of solving the “Ukrainian question” through

an open war of aggression. For Ukraine, this war objectively became a national liberation, anti-imperialist and civilization war.

Being in the zone of objective reaction, in the conditions of turbulent and momentous events for Ukraine, Europe and the world, it seems difficult to make conclusions (as applied to the essential processes, chronological framework). At the same time, the internal cause-and-effect meanings of events relevant to contemporaries, peculiarities of perception of the eventful plot and character of the war need their proper understanding for further generalizations and theoretical constructions. We are talking about the indispensable for the researcher “experience of direct observation” during the war: existing meanings, unlike material artifacts, are transient and variable. The sets of meanings associated with the war will further undergo modifications and turn into stable narratives. The latter ensure the heredity of collective memory and are aimed at maintaining community identities. Consequently, disagreements between the understanding of the meaning of events by those who write history and the perceptions of those who make it are inevitable. This has a direct bearing on the National Liberation War of the 21st century for Ukraine, which it wages against Russian neo-imperialism to preserve and defend both its sovereignty and international subjectivity, as well as universal rights and values, fulfilling a high civilization mission.

However, what is already obvious is that the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2014–2022 occupies a prominent place in the spectrum of powerful challenges and threats that Europe and the world faced during the last decade. They demonstrate the weakness and unwillingness of global and regional international actors to give them a quick and effective response. Moreover, multifaceted conventional and hybrid threats and wars tend to proliferate. An example could be the growing tension in the China-Taiwan-USA triangle, the aggravation of the situation in the Greater Caucasus, or, finally, the instigation of the conflict between Serbia and Kosovo in the Balkans. Hence, Europe and the world faced the obvious need for a broad international dialogue to reduce the degree of conventional and hybrid threats in the area of development and legitimization of a new security architecture based on clear compliance with international legal norms.

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