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**On War:**

**Essays about the Russo-Ukrainian Conflict  
from a Global Perspective**

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**On War:  
Essays about the Russo-Ukrainian Conflict  
from a Global Perspective**

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## Foreword

This is the twelfth book published under the auspices of the Center for Asian Studies (*Laboratório de Estudos da Ásia* - LEA) of the University of São Paulo, the eighth one in English for an international audience.

The book contains essays by LEA researchers on the military conflict in Ukraine from an international perspective. At different points in time, Angelo Segrillo, Daniel Aarão Reis and Vicente G. Ferraro Jr. have done research *in loco* in that Eurasian part of the world. Here they analyze the theme from different points of view according to their experiences. These essays were originally published in Portuguese in Bruno Gomide & Neide Jallageas (eds.) *Ensaio Sobre a Guerra*. São Paulo: Kinoruss, 2022. We thank the Kinoruss editor Neide Jallageas for the kind permission to publish these translations into English.

**Angelo Segrillo** introduces some important basic elements for understanding the situation in the region, especially the fact that Ukraine and Russia are multinational states, which generates complex peculiarities specific to that context. He also investigates specificities of Vladimir Putin's thinking about Ukraine and Russia in their relationship between West and East.

**Daniel Aarão Reis** analyzes evidence and controversy about the different phases of the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian war within a larger global geopolitical context as well as the possible implications of this conflict for the world.

**Vicente G. Ferraro Jr.** examines Putin's rhetoric about the conflicts between Russia and Ukraine, in particular the contradictions concerning the relationship between Russia and NATO.

We hope you enjoy the reading.

## About the authors

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*The War in Ukraine:  
Some Explanatory Elements*<sup>1</sup>

Angelo Segrillo<sup>2</sup>

Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 took quite a few specialists aback because of its scale (initially widespread rather than concentrated in the Russian-speaking breakaway republics) and because of some strange elements in the arguments used to justify it ("denazification" of the Ukrainian government, banning of the word "war" to describe what was happening, etc.).

The purpose of this essay is to provide background information that helps to understand the phenomenon in its complexity. Some of these elements involve aspects of Russian and Ukrainian realities that are specific to those countries and little known outside them; hence the difficulty in their proper understanding.

Let us begin with the issue of the multinational states.

*Russia and Ukraine as multinational states: "jus soli" versus "jus sanguinis"*

Russia and Ukraine are multinational states. This fact imposes on them conditions which are very different from those of the nation-states (national states) of the West. In the latter, a person's nationality is determined by the legal principle of *jus soli* ("right of soil"), *i.e.*, by the place of birth. For example, a Japanese couple migrates to Brazil. If their child is born in Brazil, he/she is immediately considered a first-generation Brazilian.

In Russia, Ukraine (and Slavic countries in general) the nationality

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<sup>1</sup> This is an adapted translation into English of Angelo Segrillo's essay "A Guerra na Ucrânia: alguns elementos explicativos (ensaio impressionístico)" originally published in Bruno Gomide & Neide Jallageas (eds.) *Ensaaios Sobre a Guerra*. São Paulo: Kinoruss, 2022. We thank the Kinoruss editor Neide Jallageas for the kind permission to publish the translation in this book.

<sup>2</sup> Angelo Segrillo is an Associate Professor of History at the University of São Paulo and author of "The Decline of the Soviet Union: An Analysis of the Causes" and "Russia: Europe or Asia? The Question of Russia's Identity in the Discussions between Westernizers, Slavophiles and Eurasianists and an Analysis of the Consequences in Present-Day Russia", available online at

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(*natsional'nosti*) of a person has nothing to do with the place where he/she was born. There, nationality is determined by the legal principle of *jus sanguinis* (“right of blood”), that is, the nationality of a baby at birth is the nationality of the father or mother and has nothing to do with the place where the baby was born. That is, *jus sanguinis* perpetuates the differences that in Western countries we call ethnic, but which in Russia and Ukraine are called national differences, that is, between different nationalities. In Russia, for example, there are more than a hundred different nationalities (*natsional'nosti*).

This, on the one hand, creates great cultural diversity — wherever you go in these countries, you meet different cultures from different *nations* — but on the other hand, it also generates a potential for conflict. After all, multinational states are states in which many different *nations* coexist. I emphasize the word “nation” (*natsiya*), because it is the term used there instead of mere *ethnic* differences, as we usually describe in the West. And these different nations within the state have aspirations and/or demands for rights to protect their own way of life and culture, have schools and institutions in their own languages, have autonomy for their culture in certain areas, etc.

As an example of this complexity, we should note that in the Russian language there are two words for “Russian”: *russkii* and *rossiyanin*. *Russkii* is the “ethnic Russian” (son/daughter of a Russian father or mother). *Rossiyanin* is anyone born in Russia. For example, a Chechen is a *rossiyanin* (a citizen of Russia like any other, with the same rights and duties), but he is not *russkii* (ethnic Russian).

Likewise, in Ukraine, dozens of different nationalities coexist. There are Ukrainian citizens who hold Ukrainian nationality/ethnicity (being Ukrainian speakers, etc.). There are Ukrainian citizens who hold Russian nationality/ethnicity (being Russian speakers, etc.). President Volodymyr Zelensky, for example, does not belong to either of these two previous major groups. He is a Ukrainian citizen who holds Jewish nationality/ethnicity.

The fact that there is a *state* peopled by many *nations* creates unusual situations, such as *ethnic irredentism*. For example, Vladimir Putin feels obliged and entitled to protect the Russian nation wherever it may be, even outside of Russia (e.g., the ethnic Russians of Ukraine).<sup>3</sup> This was a

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<sup>3</sup> For example, on July 1, 2014 (in the heat of the conflict with Ukraine that year), in a speech to Russian ambassadors, Putin stated: “In Ukraine, as you may have seen, at threat were our compatriots, Russian people and people of other nationalities, their language, history, culture and legal rights [...] When I speak of Russians and Russian-speaking citizens I am referring to those people who consider themselves part of the broad Russian community [...] I would like to make it clear to all: our country will continue to actively defend the rights of

component of Putin's narrative to justify the 2022 invasion. He allegedly sent troops abroad to defend that part of the Russian nation that inhabits Ukraine (*i.e.*, the ethnic Russians from the breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk).

*Jus sanguinis* as the regulatory principle of nationality in multinational states also creates the problem of dual belonging and dual loyalty. An ethnic Russian born in Ukraine is a Ukrainian citizen but he is also part of the Russian nation at large which is spread across several countries besides Russia. In case of conflict between the two affiliations (citizenship and nationality/ethnicity) where will the person's loyalty lie? This was a major dilemma for ethnic-Russian Ukrainian citizens after 2014, when the regions where they were mostly concentrated (Crimea and the two provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk) did not accept the overthrow of President Viktor Yanukovich (an ethnic-Russian Ukrainian citizen) and declared themselves in state of rebellion.

Compared to the principle of *jus soli*, which tends to homogenize ethnicities into a single nationality, *jus sanguinis* perpetuates ethnic differences within a country and generates (or perpetuates) ethnic tensions that in nation-states tend to diminish or disappear with time.<sup>4</sup>

#### *Two valid points by Vladimir Putin*

In my opinion, there are two valid points in Vladimir Putin's argumentation that deserve attention: 1) The Maidan revolution of 2014 overthrew a constitutionally elected Ukrainian president (of Russian ethnic origin); 2) the question of NATO enlargement toward Russia.

As for the first point, we know that Viktor Yanukovich (a Ukrainian citizen of Russian nationality or ethnicity), democratically elected in 2010 in Ukraine, was overthrown by a popular rebellion (called the Maidan Revolution) in 2014. This split the country. The majority of ethnic Ukrainian citizens of Ukraine supported the overthrow of the unpopular president. But the majority of ethnic-Russian Ukrainian citizens did not accept such an overthrow. Moreover, in the eastern provinces where they were mostly concentrated (Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk), they did not accept the

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Russians, our compatriots abroad, using the entire range of available means." ("Conference of Russian ambassadors and permanent representatives" available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46131>)

<sup>4</sup> For more technical details on the problem of nationalities in the multinational states of the former Soviet countries, see the chapter "The Soviet Nationalities Problem" in Segrillo, Angelo. *The Decline of the Soviet Union: An Analysis of the Causes*. São Paulo: FFLCH/USP, 2020, pp. 119-140. Available at <http://lea.vitis.uspnet.usp.br/arquivos/angelsegrillobookthedeclineofthesovietunion.pdf>

legitimacy of the new government and declared themselves in state of rebellion. A civil war began. After a local referendum, Russia annexed Crimea (where its warm-water fleet was concentrated) and began to provide logistical support to the republics of Donetsk and Luhansk in their struggle against the central government.

The legitimacy of a revolution is always a controversial issue, since a revolution is a (usually violent) breach of the rules of the previous regime. Whether the later regime will be legitimate or not is a debate that usually lasts for a long time (as the example of major revolutions such as the French and Russian demonstrates). This is the case of the so-called Maidan Revolution in which the country split along ethnic lines over its assessment.

The second point of Vladimir Putin's concerns that I believe should be taken into account, since it expresses legitimate concerns, is that of NATO's enlargement toward Russia. NATO is a Cold War military alliance set against the Soviet Union. Since there is no more Cold War or Soviet Union, it would be logical to expect that such military alliances would tend to diminish in importance or disappear. But the opposite occurred. Not only did NATO not shrink or disappear, but it expanded (and coincidentally toward Russia)! And this has nothing to do with Putin. NATO's eastward enlargement began in the 1990s under President Yeltsin who was very pro-West and sought the integration of Russia with the West. Thus, NATO's expansion toward Russia dismayed Russians under Yeltsin, even before Putin came to power.

Great powers do not accept military alliances coming to their borders or surrounding them. The USA, for example, during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, brought the world to the brink of a nuclear war in order not to have a nuclear-armed ally of the USSR in its neighborhood.

And the argument that NATO is a "defensive" military alliance is not valid. All military alliances claim to be defensive. For example, the military alliances that led to World War I were all defensive military alliances. And that didn't stop them from contributing to the outbreak of WW1.

It is necessary to find another form of security structure for post-Cold War Eurasia that is not based on military alliances lingering on from the Cold War era.

### *Two Points about which Putin is wrong*

I believe Putin is especially wrong on two of his arguments: 1) the issue of Nazism in Ukraine; 2) The problem of Ukraine as an independent country and its autonomy in relation to Russia.

In the early days of the 2022 war, Putin announced that one of his goals in the conflict was to "denazify" Ukraine. According to him, neo-Nazi

groups controlled the government apparatus and influenced Ukraine's policy, especially toward ethnic Russians there.

This statement is an exaggeration to the point of absurdity of a factual truth. Like most countries in Europe, Ukraine harbors far-right and even neo-Nazi groups. The most famous case is that of the Azov Battalion, which has its origins in neo-fascist far-right groups and which was incorporated, after the 2014 conflict, into the country's National Guard. Hence the accusations that neo-Nazi groups have infiltrated the state apparatus. This is partly true in its origins, but the incorporation of the Azov Battalion into state structures was also a means of "taming" it and keeping it more closely under control. Far-right groups were very visible during the Maidan Revolution of 2013-2014, since they were among the most vocal and combative (in the literal sense of the word). However, their electoral power is very small. For example, in the last parliamentary election before the 2022 invasion, these radical right groups (Svoboda, National Corps, Right Sector and Governmental Initiative of Yarosh) came together in an electoral coalition and won only 2.15% of the vote, not even reaching the minimum electoral coefficient of 5% to elect a deputy in parliament.<sup>5</sup> Thus, to say that neo-Nazis dominate the Ukrainian government today is completely unrealistic.

There is a controversial historical element that is greatly exploited by the Russian government to disqualify the Ukrainian government as having Nazi sympathies. In 2010 the President of Ukraine, Viktor Yushchenko, posthumously conferred on Stepan Bandera the title of "Hero of Ukraine." This title would later be withdrawn by the subsequent president, (ethnic Russian) Viktor Yanukovich, but it left a sour taste in the relations with Russia, since Bandera is a highly controversial historical figure. In his fight for Ukraine's independence from USSR communism during World War II, Stepan Bandera (leader of the underground right-wing *Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists*) allied with the Nazis against the Soviets. Bandera is a national hero for Ukraine's right-wing anti-communist groups, but as we saw in the 2010 episode with President Yushchenko, his influence goes beyond these limits. It is on this type of fact that Putin relies to try to convey the idea that neo-Nazism is widespread in Ukraine.

An exaggeration with a grain of truth! The fact that Ukraine, like many countries, is home to racist and far-right groups, rather than representing a one-sided condemnation of Ukraine, should open our eyes to how much neo-fascism and the far-right are widespread all over the world.

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<sup>5</sup> OSCE/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. *Ukraine Early Parliamentary Elections 21 July 2019 ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report*. Warsaw, 20 November 2019, p. 35. Available at [https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/6/9/439634\\_0.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/6/9/439634_0.pdf)

The second point about which I think Putin is wrong (and not just exaggerating) is Ukraine's character as an independent country with its own statehood. In his televised address to the nation on February 21, 2022, on the eve of the invasion of Ukraine, Putin stated that

It should be noted that Ukraine actually never had stable traditions of real statehood. And, therefore, in 1991 it opted for mindlessly emulating foreign models, which have no relation to history or Ukrainian realities.<sup>6</sup>

Putin refers to the fact that Ukrainians had their first (minimally stable) independent state in December 1991 with the breakup of the USSR.

Some history recap is in order here.

The historical origin of the Russian civilization is not in present-day Russia, but in present-day Ukraine. It was the so-called Kievan State (or *Rus'*) that existed from the 9th to the 13th centuries. It was a loose confederation of city-states that owed allegiance to the Grand Prince of Kiev. At that time there was still no differentiation between Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians. This differentiation slowly emerged during the next stage, which was the 13th-15th-century Mongol rule over *Rus'*. After the expulsion of the Mongols in the 15th century, the fate of Ukrainians and Russians was very different. Russians managed to form a state of their own (Muscovy and the tsarist empire), but Ukrainians were scattered across several empires and countries such as the Russian, Ottoman and Austrian empires and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Ukrainians would only have a stable independent state in 1991 with the end of the USSR. In the confusion of the Civil War that followed the Russian Revolution of 1917, there was an ephemeral Ukrainian National Republic in the period 1918-1920, but it was forcibly reincorporated into Soviet Russia by the Bolsheviks.

So, as Putin put it, yes, Ukrainians only came to have their own minimally stable independent state in 1991. But here it is important to return to that discussion about the concept of *nation* under the principle of *jus sanguinis*. The country "Ukraine" is relatively young, however the Ukrainian nation is much older. Like the Jewish nation, it existed for a long time without having its own independent territory. In any case, the fact that a country acquired independence relatively recently does not (or should not) lower its status as a sovereign country.

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<sup>6</sup> The full text of Putin's televised address on Feb. 21, 2022 is available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>

On this subject, see also Putin's famous article "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians," dated 12 July 2021, available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>

### *Understanding Putin's mind*

The way the invasion of Ukraine in late February 2022 was carried out perplexed observers. It was expected that Putin, as he had stated many times before, would focus on the two breakaway (ethnically Russian) provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk to ensure their security. However, the Russian president went for an all-out invasion of Ukraine, including trying to take over the capital Kiev. This confused analysts, who began to revise their theories about Putin's worldview. Since Putin adorned the invasion with a stream of invectives against the West as a civilization with unhealthy and decaying values, I was criticized for having erred in classifying Putin (in my book *Russia: Europe or Asia?*) as a "moderate Westernizer" (within the classical debate between Westernizers, Slavophiles and Eurasianists).<sup>7</sup>

I will use this essay to clarify my position on this issue in light of the new realities brought about by this war. For a proper understanding of the problem by the reader, I will review how these discussions arose with the publication of my aforementioned book.

In the book *Russia: Europe or Asia?*, I analyzed the classical debates between Westernizers, Slavophiles and Eurasianists about the Russian identity between Europe and Asia and between West and East. After all, are Russians European, Asian, neither, or a mixture of both?<sup>8</sup> There is no consensus on this amongst Russians themselves.

Historically, three main schools of thought on this issue have emerged in Russia: Westernism, Slavophilism and Eurasianism. Westernizers are those who (following in the footsteps of Peter the Great, the main archetypal figure of the Westernizer school) consider Russia to be basically a European country and one that must, therefore, follow the path of Western development. The Slavophiles — who have opposed the Westernizers since the mid-19th century — are those who believe that Russia is neither Europe nor Asia but a unique civilization that must go its own way. Eurasianism — a school of thought that originated among Russian *émigrés* abroad from the 1920s onward — claims that Russia's strength rests on being a mixture of the

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<sup>7</sup> Segrillo, Angelo. *Russia: Europe or Asia? The Question of Russia's Identity in the Discussions between Westernizers, Slavophiles and Eurasianists and an Analysis of the Consequences in Present-Day Russia*. São Paulo: FFLCH/USP, 2020, p. 325. Available at <http://lea.vitis.uspnet.usp.br/arquivos/angelosegrillobookrussiaeuropeorasia.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Note that the issue becomes even more complex if we remember that by "Russian" we can mean two different things in the Russian language (as explained in the introduction about multinational states): *russkii* (an ethnic Russian) or *rossiyanin* (anyone who is born in Russia).

European Slavic principle with the (Asian) Turco-Mongol principle (as aforementioned, the Mongols dominated Kievan *Rus'* for two centuries and then were incorporated into the tsarist empire).

And where does Putin fit into these debates? Putin is a pragmatic politician. Thus, he generally maintains a low profile on this issue, avoiding taking a clear position in this debate. He knows that Russians are divided on this issue and avoids taking sides publicly so as not to alienate supporters of the other two schools. But most observers consider Putin either a Eurasianist (for his efforts toward the Eurasian integration of former Soviet countries located between Europe and Asia, such as, for example, the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union) or a Slavophile (for having confronted the western countries, especially the USA, in recent times).

I share a minority point of view that considers Putin originally a moderate Westernizer. The qualifier “moderate” is important, since Putin came to power after Yeltsin, who was a more committed Westernizer and actively sought integration with the West.

Why did I classify Putin as a moderate Westernizer in my book *Russia: Europe or Asia?* Since Putin is a pragmatic politician and does not take a definitive and clear overt position in this debate, I had to assemble pieces of evidence from different areas. Putin hails from St. Petersburg (then Leningrad), the city created by Peter the Great to be Russia’s window to the West. He keeps a bust and portrait of Peter the Great in his office. Peter is the great idol of Westernizers and we can hardly picture a Slavophile (or even most Eurasianists) having Peter the Great as one’s main idol. There is an “autobiographical” book by Putin which constitutes one of the rare occasions in which he openly took a stand on this issue.

Of course, Russia is a very diverse country, but we are part of Western European culture. No matter where our people live, in the Far East or in the south, we are Europeans.<sup>9</sup>

This is a typical Westernizer’s view about the identity of Russians. I consolidated my view of Putin as a Westernizer shortly afterwards, when I had the opportunity to meet Putin’s special advisor Igor Shuvalov — who was later to become Deputy Prime Minister of Russia between 2008 and 2018 — at an academic/diplomatic seminar in 2004. When asked by me about Putin’s position in this debate, Shuvalov said that, in the meetings of

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<sup>9</sup> Gevorkyan, N., Kolesnikov, A., Timakova, N. *First Person: an Astonishingly Frank Self-Portrait by Russia’s President Vladimir Putin*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2000, pp. 155-56.



his inner circle, Putin assumed that Russians are basically European and part of European culture.<sup>10</sup>

One (maybe surprising from today's point of view) practical example of these original leanings of Putin toward the West is that, when Putin came to power, Russia's relationship with NATO *improved*. At the end of Yeltsin's tenure as president, NATO-Russia relations were at its lowest in the decade because of the first wave of NATO enlargement in 1999 and the bombing of Russia's ally Yugoslavia by NATO in the same year due to the Kosovo war. Between 2000 and 2003 (and encouraged by the immediate post-9/11 cooperation between the U.S.A. and Russia), a "honeymoon" atmosphere pervaded the relationship between Putin's government and NATO — before things slowly started souring after 2004. This initial honeymoon atmosphere was vividly described by the Secretary General of NATO, Lord Robertson, in a 13 December 2002 speech and reached its apex when Putin even inquired about the possibility of Russia joining NATO.<sup>11</sup>

But how can this classification of Putin as a (moderate) Westernizer be reconciled not only with the fact that Putin has lately been confronting the West but also with his increasingly hostile statements toward Western culture in recent times?

We need to investigate the different layers of this discussion.

Firstly, Putin, like all human beings, is multidimensional. In addition to being a (moderate) Westernizer, he is also a pragmatic politician (as we have stated before) and a *gosudarstvennik*. The word *gosudarstvo*, in Russian, means "state." *Gosudarstvennik* is the person who upholds a strong state for Russia (unlike "liberals" who desire an expansion of the sphere of influence of the individual and a reduction in the role of the state). This has to do with the historical experience of Russia. The Kievan State (*Rus'*) flourished culturally but was militarily weak because it was decentralized and disunited and, therefore, it was conquered by the Mongols. On the other hand, the Muscovite State (which succeeded the Kievan state after the

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<sup>10</sup> Igor Shuvalov, in personal communication to the current author (at the seminar "Brazil-Russia: strengthening a partnership" held by the Alexandre de Gusmão Foundation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil) on Nov. 16, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> "A New Russian Revolution: Partnership with NATO" by NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson. 13 December 2022. Available at <https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2002/s021213a.htm> ; Rankin, Jennifer. *Ex-Nato head says Putin wanted to join alliance early on in his rule*. 4 Nov. 2021. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/04/ex-nato-head-says-putin-wanted-to-join-alliance-early-on-in-his-rule> ; See also Hoffman, David. *Putin Says "Why not?" to Russia Joining NATO*. 6 March 2000. Available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2000/03/06/putin-says-why-not-to-russia-joining-nato/c1973032-c10f-4bff-9174-8cae673790cd/>

Mongol Yoke of the 13th-15th centuries) was a centralized, united and strong state that not only drove out the (Mongol) invaders but also created a great empire. This differs profoundly from the historical experience of the West. England solved her problem of incessant religious wars with liberalism *à la* John Locke in the 17th century by reducing the sphere of influence of the state (which could no longer impose its religion on its citizens) and by increasing the sphere of the individual (religion would be a private right of each person). Due to their historical experience with the Kievan and Muscovite States, Russians developed the notion of *gosudarstvennost'*, that is, that it is with a centralized and strong state that Russian society blooms more fully.

Thus, Putin, in addition to being a moderate Westernizer, is a *gosudarstvennik* who fiercely defends the interests of the Russian state against threats (coming from the West or the East). That is, Putin is not *a priori* anti-Western (as are many of the Slavophiles and some of the Eurasianists). He happens to be fighting the West (especially the US) not because he is *a priori* anti-Western but because he is a *gosudarstvennik* who will defend Russia's interests (as he sees them) from both Western and Eastern threats. It is a case similar to that of General Charles de Gaulle in France. Charles de Gaulle clashed with the USA several times in his career. But this is not to say that Charles de Gaulle was *a priori* anti-Western: he was only defending the interests of his state as he saw them. When we see the moments when Putin clashes with the West (the US), we notice that they are usually reactive: for example, the issue of NATO expansion, the Color Revolutions (which oust pro-Russian presidents from power and generally lead to the installation of anti-Russian governments in ex-Soviet countries), etc.

But lately Putin has been making statements against Western *values*. How can this be reconciled with the fact that he is a Westernizer (albeit a moderate one)?

First of all, it should be noted that most of his critiques of Western values refer to Western *liberalism*, which he considers a philosophy that opens up flanks to far-fetched doctrines and "unhealthy" habits (to which he prefers "healthy" conservative habits). As he put it in an interview:

There is also the so-called liberal idea, which has outlived its purpose. Our Western partners have admitted that some elements of the liberal idea, such as multiculturalism, are no longer tenable. When the migration problem came to a head, many people admitted that the policy of multiculturalism is not effective and that the interests of the core population

should be considered [...] the liberal idea presupposes that nothing needs to be done. The migrants can kill, plunder and rape with impunity because their rights as migrants must be protected. What rights are these? Every crime must have its punishment. So, the liberal idea has become obsolete. It has come into conflict with the interests of the overwhelming majority of the population. Or take the traditional values. I am not trying to insult anyone, because we have been condemned for our alleged homophobia as it is. But we have no problems with LGBT persons. God forbid, let them live as they wish. But some things do appear excessive to us. They claim now that children can play five or six gender roles. I cannot even say exactly what genders these are, I have no notion. Let everyone be happy, we have no problem with that. But this must not be allowed to overshadow the culture, traditions and traditional family values of millions of people making up the core population [...] there must be some fundamental human rules and moral values. In this sense, traditional values are more stable and more important for millions of people than this liberal idea, which, in my opinion, is really ceasing to exist [...] For this reason, I am not a fan of quickly shutting, tying, closing, disbanding everything, arresting everybody or dispersing everybody. Of course, not. The liberal idea cannot be destroyed either; it has the right to exist and it should even be supported in some things. But you should not think that it has the right to be the absolute dominating factor. That is the point.<sup>12</sup>

Putin is definitely not a liberal (someone favoring expanding the sphere of the individual and shrinking that of the state). On the contrary, he is a *gosudarstvennik* (defender of a strong state), as we mentioned earlier. But that doesn't make him anti-Western a priori. On the contrary, even in the West (as we have been witnessing more and more often in recent years) there are traditionalist conservatives defending family values, etc. against the diversity proposed by liberals and progressives. Conservatism is a fully-fledged component of Western culture!

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<sup>12</sup> Putin, Vladimir. "Interview with the Financial Times, 27 Jun. 2017." Available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60836>

But what about Putin's televised address exactly on the day of the invasion of Ukraine on 02/24/2022 when he seemed to attack western values in themselves, *qua* western ones?

Properly speaking, the attempts [by the so-called collective West] to use us in their own interests never ceased until quite recently: they sought to destroy our traditional values and force on us their false values that would erode us, our people from within, the attitudes they have been aggressively imposing on their countries, attitudes that are directly leading to degradation and degeneration, because they are contrary to human nature.<sup>13</sup>

The war in Ukraine in 2022 really seems to mark a turning point in Putin's trajectory. After a long time trying to work out some sort of arrangement with the West that would spare Russia from submitting to NATO's continual expansion, Putin seems to have abandoned these pretensions and set out for direct confrontation with the Western NATO countries and their *values*. Does this mean that he never was or ceased to be a moderate Westernizer?

I do not think so. I believe that he started off from a position as a moderate Westerner and was forced to alienate himself from the West because of these geopolitical and military issues to which his *gosudarstvennik* dimension did not allow him to submit. He himself had warned about something like this happening. He said he was trying to get close to the West, but that if the West was not receptive, he would look elsewhere for alternative paths and partners. In the continuation of the same previously quoted passage from his "autobiographical" book in which he clearly stated that Russians were (Western) Europeans, Putin drew attention to this point.

Russia is a very diverse country, but we are part of Western European culture. No matter where our people live, in the Far East or in the south, we are Europeans. All that remains is for Europe to think that, too. We will fight to keep our geographical and spiritual position. And if they push us away, then we'll be forced to find

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<sup>13</sup> Putin, Vladimir. "Address by the President of the Russian Federation, 22 February 2022." Available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>

allies and reinforce ourselves. What else can we do?<sup>14</sup>

In my view, Putin is originally (and basically still is) a moderate Westernizer. He did not have an *a priori* anti-Western view and sought to approach the West. However, several initiatives from the West (NATO enlargement, Color Revolutions, etc.) ended up leading Putin to “give up on the West” and look for new allies, as he announced in his 2000 “autobiographical” book. The West missed the opportunity to attract a person who, in principle, was a moderate Westernizer (albeit a *gosudarstvennik* one *à la* de Gaulle). Always a pragmatic politician, Putin made sure his entourage was composed by members of the three schools of thought (Westernizers, Slavophiles and Eurasianists). The constant clashes with Western powers have lately alienated Putin from his Westernizer circles (for example, his former Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov and Anatoly Chubais) and pushed him toward his more Slavophile and Eurasianist circles.

It is important to note that Putin has not alienated himself from all Western political figures. On the contrary, he has bonded with some of the most conservative among them, like Donald Trump himself. In short, even with his personal characteristics of being *gosudarstvennik* and anti-liberal, Putin could perfectly be an actor among Western politicians and thinkers, in the West itself, without seeming like a “fish out of water.” After all, in the West itself there are many authors lamenting the decay of “Western values”...

### *The dark side of Putin*

Nothing written above is to justify Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. If Putin’s worries (shared by many Russians, including Westernizers) about NATO’s enlargement toward Russia is legitimate, it does not justify invasion and breach of sovereignty of a country, especially the way it was done (with previous assurances that the border military exercises were peaceful, surrealistically forbidding Russians themselves from using the word “war” to describe what was happening, and possibly committing war crimes). Furthermore, Putin committed one of the worst crimes that a ruler can commit vis-à-vis his people: crushing his country’s democracy. Putin has destroyed the last vestiges of democracy in Russia by practically introducing “martial law” in the country, banning demonstrations against the war and even preventing certain words from being expressed. Russian democracy will hardly recover from this blow under Putin. For many (for example, Freedom

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<sup>14</sup> Gevorkyan, N., Kolesnikov, A., Timakova, N. *First Person: an Astonishingly Frank Self-Portrait by Russia’s President Vladimir Putin*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2000, pp. 155-56.

House), Russia since 2004 is already a “non-free” regime. I have previously classified early 2000s Russia as a “managed democracy”, an expression current in Russian academic circles (*upravlyamaya demokratiya*).<sup>15</sup> That is, it has many of the formal characteristics of traditional democracy (elections with opposition parties, movements, media, etc.), but, via informal mechanisms (not available in more consolidated democracies), Putin manages to control the functioning of the system from a much more advantageous position than any opponent. In other words, it was still an immature, deficient democracy with serious problems. These shortcomings could lead to a qualitative leap toward sheer dictatorship. Well, this leap seems to have been taken with the political processes that accompanied the 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Putin has never been a fully-fledged democrat. On the contrary, being a former spy used to the underground “dirty” games of the spy world, he brought this *modus operandi* into his politics. Very emblematic was the way he liberated Yeltsin from investigations by prosecutor Yury Skuratov when he was still director of the Federal Security Agency: using fake footage that showed someone who looked like Skuratov having an orgy with two girls. Throughout his presidency, a series of strange occurrences, including bombings and mysterious deaths (some via old KGB methods, such as poisoning) occurred with some of his opponents: Anna Politkovskaya, Boris Nemtsov, Alexey Navalny, etc.. All this was already undermining Russian democracy from the inside. With the war in Ukraine, these types of extra-democratic methods seem to have been naturalized and are openly used, such as the surreal ban on using the word “war” in the media to refer to the 2022 events.

### *Putin as derzhavnik*

*Derzhava* in Russian means “power” as in the expression “Great Power” to describe a country. *Derzhavnik* is the person who defends his country’s status as a great power. Putin is a *derzhavnik* in relation to Russia. For him, his country’s weakened status in the economic crisis of the 1990s was an exception in Russia’s long history. Russia has traditionally been either a great power (in the case of Tsarist Russia) or one of the only two superpowers in history (in the case of the USSR). Now economically recovered, Russia must remain a world-class great power in Putin’s view.

<sup>15</sup> Segrillo, Angelo. A Questão da Democracia na Rússia Pós-soviética. In: Alves, André Augusto de Miranda Pineli (org.) *O Renascimento de uma Potência?: A Rússia no Século XXI*. Brasília: IPEA, 2012, p. 121. Available at [https://www.ipea.gov.br/portal/images/stories/PDFs/livros/livros/livro\\_russia\\_no\\_seculoxxi.pdf](https://www.ipea.gov.br/portal/images/stories/PDFs/livros/livros/livro_russia_no_seculoxxi.pdf)

This complicates the issue of coexistence with the West. If we consider that NATO enlargement is a legitimate problem for Russia, the mere resolution of the problem of NATO expansion to the east may not be enough to prevent another source of tensions: the fact that Putin considers the region of the former Soviet republics (with the exception of the Baltic countries, which are already part of NATO) as Russia's zone of influence. Especially after the "color revolutions," Putin tries to keep the countries of the former Soviet Union under his influence. This can lead to problems with Western (and non-Western) countries regardless of whether the specific problem of present NATO expansion is resolved.

*By way of conclusion*

It seems to me that the current *imbroglio* shows that the world is facing new situations equipped with outdated and anachronistic instruments.

After the Second World War, many institutions were created to solve the new problems of the bipolar world of the Cold War: the UN with its Security Council, the Bretton Woods system (IMF, World Bank, etc.) and the NATO and Warsaw Pact military alliances, which kept their blocs "under control" and sought to avoid a new world war. In a way, these instruments worked well during the Cold War: it never became "hot" nor was there a Third World War in the period. However, today we live in a new reality. The Cold War is over, the Soviet Union and the bipolar world no longer exist. Nonetheless, we continue to deal with the problems of our post-Cold War world with exactly the same instruments from the Cold War period mentioned above. For example, we are still haunted by Cold War-era military alliances. These instruments were created for another reality. We need to find new instruments and more adequate paradigms to deal with the new reality of our post-Cold War world.

NATO, as part of the two great military alliances at the time of the Cold War, fit well with the bipolar world in the sense that the two alliances maintained a balance between themselves. With the end of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, the continued existence of NATO became a requirement of the apparent unipolar power of the USA in the post-Cold War period: it had more to do with the need for the USA to justify the presence of its troops in Europe as the "ultimate arbiter" than a real military need in the post-Cold War world. In unipolar worlds (or moments), the main hegemon has the ability to impose its preferred hegemonic structure, which is often accepted (or tolerated). However, the post-Cold War period was not an orthodox unipolar moment. It involved a great power (the US) that could clearly claim to be unipolar in military terms, but which was declining in other dimensions or areas (e.g., the economic field). The height of US

economic power was in the immediate aftermath of World War II when, in the face of destruction in the rest of the world, the country alone accounted for almost 50% of world GDP. Since then, this proportion has been persistently declining, reaching 24% in nominal terms (or 16% in Purchasing Power Parity) in 2021. Meanwhile, other countries, such as China and India, have been increasing their proportion of world GDP. China's GDP, for example, increased from 1.3% of world GDP (in nominal terms) in 1980 to 17.8% in 2021 (or 18.7% in PPP).<sup>16</sup>

In short, we live in a period of hegemonic transition that, after the brief (military) unipolar moment of the US, is being slowly reconfigured into a more multipolar world in which countries like China, India (and even Russia, at least in the military field) will carry greater weight together with the US. Thus, the continued existence of NATO in its traditional version (a military alliance from the bipolar Cold War era that maintained its post-Cold War existence thanks to the US military unipolar moment) will have to undergo revisions to accommodate the new more multipolar world system.

We have the historical experience of the 19th-century Concert of Europe that brought about a long period of relative “peace” in Europe (*i.e.*, without generalized or “world” wars for nearly a hundred years from 1815 to 1914). It was an arrangement that, for good or ill, accommodated the needs of the major powers. Likewise, as the world approaches a more multipolar configuration, arrangements are needed to accommodate the needs of these new powers to avoid wars (at least generalized wars). And let's hope that these new arrangements (unlike the rather “aristocratic” arrangements of 19th-century Concert of Europe), taking advantage of the lessons learned from the processes of decolonization and globalization, involve mechanisms of global democracy that also allow voice to other regions of the world.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://statisticstimes.com/economy/projected-world-gdp-ranking.php>



## *The invasion of Ukraine: Evidence and Controversies*<sup>17</sup>

Daniel Aarão Reis<sup>18</sup>

### *Introduction*

It is a challenge to discuss, from the perspective of history, a war in progress, subject to fluctuations and changing dynamics. Besides, it is necessary to deal with passionate polarizations, not to mention the effects of propaganda that lies or omits, confirming the Aeschylean dictum that truth is the first casualty of war.

The war sparked by the invasion of Russian armies in Ukraine since February 24, 2022, is no exception to this pattern. The states involved reiterate it, abusing the immense power that the media, enhanced by the internet, have acquired. In the context of contradictory interests, it is up to the historian to identify the best sources, analyze the controversies, create explanations and interpretations of the conflict in its genesis, its movement, and the eventual conditions for the reestablishment of peace. In this difficult endeavor, an impossible neutrality is not to be expected, as long as one does not lose the essential commitment of our craft: to understand.

It is with these commitments that we have organized the article as follows: 1) The political-military evolution, from the beginning of the war to the present day (December 2022); 2) The immediate consequences and impact of war on international relations; 3) The historical background of the war; 4) The resurgence of Russian protagonism and cultural nationalism: the Eurasian option; 5) Toward the war option; 6) The challenges of peace; 7) Chronology; 8) Bibliographical references.

### *1. The political-military evolution of the war (February-December 2022)*

Before considering the invasion and its immediate results, it is necessary to highlight two aspects that we will return to at the end of the article.

The first concerns the fact that the war was preceded since 2014 by

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<sup>17</sup> The present article is an updated development of conferences I have presented since February 2022 on the invasion of Ukraine by Russian armies. In a first version, the article was published in the book by Bruno Gomide & Neide Jallageas (eds.) *Ensaio Sobre a Guerra*. São Paulo: Kinoruss, 2022, pp 51-84. I would like to acknowledge the support of CNPq and the Hoover Institute/Stanford University (Visiting Scholar - July-September 2022)

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another type of conflict, a low-intensity civil war, which caused deaths and material destruction. It arose from the self-proclamation of the Lugansk and Donetsk Republics in eastern Ukraine, which announced secession on the occasion of the Russian occupation of the Crimean peninsula<sup>19</sup>. The Russian government supported the separatists politically and militarily, but avoided diplomatic recognition of the two republics<sup>20</sup>. Since the Ukrainian government did not accept the secession, a conflict began that would extend until the invasion in February 2022. In this low-intensity civil war, resentment and hatred have built up, and military disposition and experiences have been forged not only among the direct combatants but also in the civilian population.

The second aspect is that, over these eight years, Russia has concentrated military units on the eastern border with Ukraine. By the end of 2021, there were about 100,000 men and the corresponding military equipment, a process denounced as preparation for aggression. However, the Russian government denied any such intentions, generating in the Ukrainian, Russian and European populations an atmosphere of doubt and/or disbelief in the hypothesis of an invasion<sup>21</sup>.

Let us now examine the war, how it unfolded, and its developments over the months between February and December 2022.

The Russian invasion initially took three directions: Kyiv, the country's capital, to the west; Kharkiv<sup>22</sup>, the second most important city, to the east, attached to the Russian border; and a third front in the south/southeast, involving the two aforementioned self-proclaimed republics

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<sup>19</sup> The Crimea was transferred in 1954 from Russia to Ukraine in the context of the Soviet Union. When the latter broke up, an agreement was reached in 2010 between Russia and Ukraine under which Russian military bases could remain until 2042 in exchange for advantages in the supply of Russian oil to Ukraine. However, the local Russian majority (58% of the population, according to the 2001 census), encouraged by Moscow, came out in favor of secession and incorporation into Russia. The outcome came between February 23 and March 28, 2014, involving popular pressure and military action, resulting in a plebiscite that approved by a large majority the integration of the peninsula into the Russian Federation. The annexation was not recognized internationally, generating tensions and economic sanctions from the US and European states.

<sup>20</sup> Diplomatic recognition by Russia would be made official on the eve of the February 2022 invasion.

<sup>21</sup> After Joe Biden assumed the presidency of the US republic — in January 2021 — the US intelligence services began to publicize preparations from Russia for an imminent invasion. However, the information has not changed the trends of public opinion. The majorities, seemingly anesthetized, continued not to believe that war would break out.

<sup>22</sup> In Russian, the names of the cities are Киев/Kiev and Харьков/Kharkov.

(Lugansk and Donetsk) and further westward, targeting the cities of Kherson and Mariupol.

In the early days it looked as if the country would be taken over in a kind of *blitzkrieg*, that is, a war with a quick outcome, as had happened in Crimea in 2014. Russians, Europeans, Americans, and not a few Ukrainians imagined the worst was inevitable. Crowds began to flee the combat zones and, if possible, the country<sup>23</sup>. The US government even offered transportation into exile to Ukrainian President V. Zelensky.

However, and once again, the improbable happened<sup>24</sup>.

Quite unexpectedly, strong Ukrainian national resistance surged. Thousands upon thousands of civilians rushed to recruiting stations and integrated themselves into irregular defense units, in the organization of all kinds of auxiliary services, including activities performed by ordinary citizens who, using cell phone applications, informed on where the invaders were, locating them on the ground and enabling their destruction. In a recent study, Shi Zhan showed how the Ukrainians were able, with technological support from the U.S., to use a new kind of war: dispersed, digital, networked, intelligent<sup>25</sup>. Nor did the ukrainian armed forces disintegrate as some expected. And there was the presence, underestimated by observers, of Ukrainian President V. Zelensky, a former comedian who was elevated to the presidency of the republic as an expression of the discontent of the majority of Ukrainians with the corruption and inefficiency of the system, and who proved up to the challenge. Mastering the language of the media, he was able to express the will of the national resistance, assuming the leadership of his people at a crucial hour.

The Russian government's optimistic expectations were not borne out. Its troops looked like World War II armies in their offensive maneuvers. They became easy targets for the enemy. The Russian intelligence services (FSB<sup>26</sup> and other agencies) failed in a caricatural way. The accomplices they counted on in various cities did not show up. Even most of Russian-speaking populations, numerous in the east (Kharkiv) and south of

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<sup>23</sup> As of early June, the UN Refugee Agency/UNHCR registered about 7.3 million border crossings (about 2.5 million have already returned), not counting an equivalent number of internally displaced persons. Cf. <https://www.acnur.org/portugues/2022/acnur>

<sup>24</sup> The reflection is from Edgard Morin. He maintains that the improbable often happens in history.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Shi Zhan, 2021 and 2022 and his reflections on the metaverse, a universe that mixes virtual and real environments

<sup>26</sup> FSB/ФСБ РФ - Федеральная Служба Безопасности Российской Федерации/Federal'naya Sluzhba Bezpanocti Rossiiskoi Federatsii/ Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation.

the country (Kherson and Mariupol), preferred to resist — or flee.

Realizing the difficulties in overcoming the resistance on three simultaneous fronts, the Russian government considered the immediate fall of the Ukrainian government and its president, V. Zelensky, unfeasible and redefined the axes of the initial offensive. It gave up maintaining the attacks on the two main cities — Kiiv and Kharkiv — and concentrated forces on the south-southeastern front, aiming to expand the territories of the Lugansk and Donetsk Republics and conquer a continuous strip from around Kharkiv in the northeast to near Odessa in the south, occupying the Black Sea coastline facing the Crimean peninsula. The city of Kherson, taken on the seventh day of the invasion, was followed by the laborious conquest of Mariupol in mid-May, securing part of these objectives. Later on, in the second half of September, the Russians annexed the regions under their control after hastily organized and held plebiscites that were obviously not recognized by the international community.

However, starting in September, the Ukrainian troops unleashed an unexpected counteroffensive, forcing, on several fronts, the precipitous withdrawal of Russian troops. They even retook Kherson in the beginning of November. Faced with these developments, the Russian government was forced, from 20 September, to call up extra contingents of soldiers (about 300,000), a “partial military mobilization,” causing protests in Russia and the precipitous flight of tens of thousands of Russians to neighboring countries. In retaliation, the Russians have unleashed heavy bombing raids by aircraft and artillery on Ukrainian energy infrastructures since October.

At the present time (December, 2022), the Russians seem more interested in securing the territories already conquered (20% of Ukrainian territory). Mr. Putin even proposed to start peace talks. But the fighting continues. On one side, Russian troops, with powerful artillery, maintain absolute control of the air, but the Ukrainians, supported by the US government and by European states, continue to hope for new advances and victories in their counter-offensive.

It is difficult to predict how things will unfold from now on. The diplomatic peace talks in Belarus and Turkey have been fruitless. Recently there was an agreement that allowed a "corridor" to flow agricultural production from Ukraine and Russia across the Black Sea. This agreement has been respected, but has not led to further progress toward a more comprehensive peace agreement.

On both sides of the war, radical tendencies make their voices heard. On the Russian side, hopes of conquering Ukraine have been abandoned, but the use of atomic weapons continues to be proposed and openly discussed. On the Ukrainian side, in the US and in some European capitals, it is argued that the war should continue until the retaking of all invaded Ukrainian

territory including Crimea and also with the fall and trial of V. Putin.

These are apparently unfeasible proposals that lead the war to a stalemate, with unimaginable catastrophic potential.

In terms of international relations, the mobilization of European states was surprising. Under the leadership of the U.S. government, they condemned the Russian invasion and defined a policy of sanctions that gained a level of effectiveness not yet reached in previous conflicts. In successive "rounds," in addition to freezing the assets of members of the Russian political establishment, they prohibited exports considered sensitive, the operation of European and American companies in Russia, and various activities linked to the financial sector. It is likely that the Russian government's assessments were wrong, imagining that the Western reaction would not reach such a scale. However, IMF estimates, while confirming the decline of the Russian economy (-6%), underscored the unsuspected resilience to sanctions.

Russia counterattacked, cutting off exchanges and activities of mutual interest, and began to take retaliatory measures with regard to a crucial point: the supply of Russian oil and gas to Europeans. From demands for payment in rubles to partial interruptions due to "technical problems," Russia has activated its economic weapons. The conflict caused the price of a barrel of oil to skyrocket, which comforted the Russian position<sup>27</sup>. On the other hand, flows toward Europe have been redirected to India and China to avoid a major crisis. The European states are racing against time to face the coming winter, with drastic measures expected that could go as far as rationing.

A provisional assessment of the sanctions war shows that the "disengagement" between Russia and Europe will cause after-effects on both sides. Expectations of a Russian economic catastrophe, as noted, have not been confirmed. European states, on the other hand, while sacrificing their high levels of welfare, would also be able to cope with the consequences of Russian sanctions. It remains to be seen how their populations, among the wealthiest on the planet, will react to a "sober" way of life of relative scarcity.

Here we come to a key point: how is it possible to predict the reaction of the populations - Russian and European - to the war and its implications?

In Europe, there was a torrent of outrage against Russia. After 75 years, a full-scale war, a war of aggression, was beginning on European land. Demonstrations and petitions of intellectuals followed in dozens of cities, supporting Ukraine. A certain anti-Russian hysteria took hold. Russian artists,

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<sup>27</sup> The barrel was once priced at \$129, falling to \$105, well above the average of \$90 before the conflict.

working in Europe or the United States, lost their positions because they were unwilling to condemn their own country<sup>28</sup>. In the name of freedom, pro-Russian media were closed down and someone even went so far as to say that Russian culture was responsible for the war and that it was therefore necessary to ban it<sup>29</sup>. In addition, the solidarity movements for Ukrainian refugees have acquired great popular participation in society.

Among Russian intellectuals and artists abroad, manifestos and positions against the invasion were published. In Russia, before the end of March, about 20,000 Russians were in jail for demonstrating against the war. The protests tended to diminish with the passage of a law that criminalized opposition to the war, providing for sentences of up to 15 years. It was even forbidden to mention the word "war," called a "special military operation" by the government. The anti-war protest movement regained momentum after the partial military mobilization in last September. In contrast, there were several public demonstrations and petitions from intellectuals in support of the government and the decision to wage war<sup>30</sup>. The Levada Center for public opinion research, considered independent, in monthly polls recorded favorable results for the "policy undertaken by V. Putin": approval in January reached 69%. In April it reached 83%, remaining at this level until the end of June, but declining slightly in the following months<sup>31</sup>. In Russian conditions, such polls must be admitted with caution, but the numbers are significant. However it is undeniable that after the "partial military mobilization", since

<sup>28</sup> Russia has been banned from the World Cup in Qatar. In Marseille, the Tursky Theater cancelled the scheduled 26th Russian festival in March. The curator of the Russian pavilion at the Venice Biennale, scheduled for April, has resigned. Russia has been banned from the popular contest organized by the European Union of Radio and Television/UER. Conductors Tugan Sokhiev (Toulouse) and Valery Gergiev (Munich) have been dismissed. Symmetrically, European artists who were performing in Russia, broke their contracts and left the country. Other Russian artists, either out of conviction or under pressure, took a stand against the invasion. It should be noted that the "witch hunt" merited protests in the press and in the European cultural circles themselves.

<sup>29</sup> The idea, supported in certain circles, would be rejected by Sergei Loznitsa, a Ukrainian director at the Cannes Film Festival. Cf. *How can one confuse the Russian regime with the works of Russian authors?* <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/le-cineaste-serguei-loznitsa-comment-peut-on-confondre-le-regime-russe-avec-les-oeuvres-des-auteurs-russes-9489067>

<sup>30</sup> Cf. "Литературной газеты" (litgazeta@lgz.ru) с пометкой "Письмо поддержки"/ Literary Gazette, notifying "Letter of Support." Cf. also Association Française des Russisants/AFR/French Association of Russisants, 2022. One should note the ostensible support of the Orthodox Church, which has given the government its full backing in its war policy.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. <https://www.levada.ru/en/ratings/>

September, pro-war opinions have declined.

In the context of a war that many consider will be protracted, the question is to assess the degree of resilience of European and Russian societies. In European and American opinion, signs of disinterest and fatigue appear, as measured by recent polls<sup>32</sup>. As for Russian opinion, as already said, it is more difficult to formulate conjectures, although the signs of "fatigue" are also perceptible, especially after September. This is a dimension that should be carefully considered by the governments involved in the conflict because it could prove decisive in the coming months, should the fighting continue or even intensify.

## 2. *The immediate consequences and impact of war on international relations.*

It seems important to us to highlight the following aspects.

Russia's vaunted military superiority — tactical and strategic — was not confirmed. The *blitzkrieg* war did not happen. Moscow certainly has complete mastery of the air and its heavy artillery has unquestionable superiority, resulting in the intense and merciless demolition of Ukrainian cities. The political cost, however, is very high; combined with the strength of the Ukrainian resistance, it makes the conquest of the country, which was the major objective of the Russian government, unfeasible.

Also surprising was Europe's unity, solid especially at the beginning of hostilities. And the sanctions policy, gradually radicalizing, offered a sharp contrast to the recent past marked by much rhetoric and symbolic sanctions. It was estimated that Europe's energy dependence, built up over the past decades — especially Germany's — vis-à-vis Russia would inhibit a decisive policy against Moscow<sup>33</sup>.

The European states, led by Germany, found consensus, not without

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<sup>32</sup> Research by the European Council on Foreign Relations in mid-June 2022, covering 8,000 interviews, conducted in 10 countries concentrating 54% of the continent's population, showed that 35% were in favor of peace even if Ukraine has to accept concessions (the "peace camp"); 22% consider that Russia and Putin should be condemned (the "justice camp"); 20% hesitate between these two camps. And 23% have no opinion or interest in the matter. The survey results were analyzed by Ivan Krastev of the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna. He diagnosed "fatigue" of European opinion regarding the war. Cf. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2022/06/pesquisa-mostra-cansaco-de-europeus-com-a-guerra-da-ucrania.shtml>

<sup>33</sup> Among European and American intellectuals, severe condemnation of Russia has long prevailed. Cf., among many others, T. Snyder, 2022; I. Wallerstein and G. Derluguian, 2014; V. Pastoukhov, 2022; V. Kravchenko, 2022 and S. Zizek 2022. Among the rare dissident voices, cf. B. de S. Santos, 2022 and 2022a

difficulty, to approve the aforementioned sanctions and also assistance of all kinds, including military, to Ukraine.

The leadership of the United States over the European continent has grown. The U.S. is the major supplier of arms and technology to the Ukrainian resistance. In the wake of this process, the moribund North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, diagnosed some time ago by French President E. Macron as “brain dead,” has reappeared alive and kicking. The military alliance has gained strength and even new members (Finland and Sweden), which have broken with a long tradition of neutrality. Thus, the hegemony of the United States has been consolidated, also because the continent’s energy supply will, in the near future, pass in no small measure through the “good offices” of Big Brother.

These first three aspects were unfavorable to the interests of the Russian government and it is very possible that they were not foreseen, at least to the degree that they were realized. Nevertheless, the propagated Russian “isolation” did not take place. A large majority vote in the UN, condemning the invasion, aroused the enthusiasm of the anti-Russian front<sup>34</sup>. However, a less cursory reading of the significance of the vote can see that the governments representing the majority of the world’s population did not condemn the Russian government, preferring to abstain. And they were not even remotely willing to adopt sanctions against Russia, preferring to advise dialogue between the belligerents. In the subsequent months Russia found firm support from the Chinese government within the framework of a “limitless friendship”, announced in early February of this year and maintained flawlessly to date<sup>35</sup>. In addition, India and Turkey, although formally having ties with the US, have retained and intensified diplomatic and trade relations with Russia<sup>36</sup>. Trips by V. Putin to Iran — when he met with national leaders and the president of Turkey — and by Russian Foreign Minister S. Lavrov to Africa, touring several countries, have shown that Russia maintains ample room for maneuver in the framework of international relations. It is also worth mentioning the International Army Games — known as the “War Olympics,” — a Russian initiative that has been going since 2015, bringing together diverse countries from various continents, and

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<sup>34</sup> The UN General Assembly, on March 2, 2022, condemned the invasion by 141 votes, including Brazil, with 35 abstentions, 12 absences, and only 5 votes against, *i.e.*, in favor of Russia, which was supported only by Eritrea, North Korea, Syria, and Belarus.

<sup>35</sup> The Chinese government has even decreased oil imports from Iran for the benefit of Russia to mitigate the damage from sanctions already in place or announced by the Europeans.

<sup>36</sup> Turkey is a formal member of NATO.



which will once again take place with the participation of 37 countries, including U.S. allies. At the same time, traditional U.S. allies, such as Saudi Arabia, are showing signs of rapprochement with Russia and of distancing themselves from Washington. And even Israel plays a double game, conciliating the warring contenders, a game criticized internally and also by the Ukrainian government, but which is expressive of the current volatile state of international relations.

In the so-called “Global South,” the Russian invasion has not aroused sharper emotions — or outrage. Among intellectuals and so-called “public opinion makers” there is a clear division: commentators identified with the right wing praise the US and European states, condemning the Russian invasion. However, on the left and center-left, a position of equidistance or neutrality tends to prevail. The phenomenon has caused consternation in Europe and the United States, with difficulties in evaluating the resentment, accumulated over decades, regarding wars that took place — and are still taking place — in the “South” and that never aroused European or American sensibility or solidarity. Rather, it is often the U.S. and European states that have appeared — or have been appearing — as agents of extermination, ruin, and destruction. Thus, it is not uncommon to find in the area of the “global South,” attitudes that can be summed up like this: “If anyone is against the US, whoever they are, we will be for them”<sup>37</sup>.

Another aspect that has received a lot of media coverage has been war crimes. In the first instance, massacres committed by Russian soldiers in the vicinity of Kiev, which were discovered when they were hastily withdrawn, caused scandal. The Ukrainian Prosecutor’s Office, with French support, is making inquiries in order to bring charges in international courts<sup>38</sup>. Recently, a video was circulated showing a Chechen soldier cold-bloodedly castrating a Ukrainian prisoner. The photo of the bloodthirsty executioner appeared the next day in Russian media. Russia hit back by releasing videos in which Russian prisoners were shot at with bullets, in cold blood, by Ukrainian officers. In the battle that propaganda apparatuses wage, supporters of each side tend to value “their” victims, as is tradition in these circumstances. But it would be unreasonable to say that “both sides” bear equal responsibility for the cruelties. It is hard to imagine, in the context of this war, anything comparable with the atrocities committed by Russian and Chechen soldiers<sup>39</sup>.

<sup>37</sup> See, in Brazil, among many others, J.L. Fiori, 2022

<sup>38</sup> In July, the Ukrainian government, supported by 40 other states, initiated a case against the Russian Federation at the International Court of Justice. In addition, several NGOs have denounced forced population transfers from Ukraine to Russia

<sup>39</sup> See Amnesty International report, May 2022.  
<https://www.amnesty.fr/actualites/ukraine-les-forces-russes-crimes-de-guerre->

Finally, the emerging alliance between Russia and China deserves mention. Announced shortly before the beginning of the war, as being “limitless,” the partnership has asserted itself. It is a relevant factor in the international scenario, and we will return to its analysis at the end of the article.

### *3. The historical background of the war.*

Leaving aside the reasons and counter-reason propagated by the belligerents, we must reflect on the historical background of the war. Like every major conflict, it is the expression of an accumulation of tensions that became radicalized, left unchecked or uncontrolled. They culminated in the Russian invasion.

There is no evidence to support the idea that, under any circumstances, the outcome would be the same. This reasoning is an expression of the historical necessity mentality, that is, what happened had to happen. This is a questionable way of thinking and is not helpful in explaining and interpreting historical events.

To understand the current process one must, at the very least, go back to the 1990s, when the breakup of the Soviet Union occurred. During that decade, under the leadership of B. Yeltsin, Russia showed great openness to establish constructive relations with the US and European states. In May 1997, the “Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation” was signed<sup>40</sup>.

Positive expectations were not limited to government policies. The Russian population aspired to quickly achieve, with international help, a standard of development and welfare comparable to the “Western” nations (Europe and the USA). However, thanks to the ultra-liberal policies of converting the state economy into a so-called market economy, Russia was plunged into chaos: economic rise of an oligarchy greedy for profits and power; weakening of the state’s capacities for intervention; mass unemployment; bankruptcy of companies; runaway inflation; demolition of the health and education systems; irregular payment of pensions and salaries for civilian and military civil servants. A process of cultural destructuring occurred<sup>41</sup>. At the international level, attempts at dialogue and openness were

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commis-dans-la-region-de-kiev

<sup>40</sup> Cf. [https://www.nato.int/cps/fr/natohq/official\\_texts\\_25468.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/fr/natohq/official_texts_25468.htm)

<sup>41</sup> Among many indices, there is the decrease in life expectancy. With no natural disasters or wars, the index fell from 76 to 66 years! The Russians thought they lacked “civilized” economic and institutional structures, which they urgently needed to find in the US and Europe, adapting them to the characteristics of their

met with contempt. In 1999, in defiance of UN resolutions, bombing raids on Serbia, Russia's traditional ally, secured Kosovo's independence.

In the same year, in defiance of agreements drawn up by M. Gorbachev and G. Bush, NATO executed a first expansionist movement in Eastern Europe, integrating the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland into its ranks<sup>42</sup>. The Russian protests were ignored. It was argued that the governments of these countries had freely expressed their will to integrate into the military organization. It was forgotten, however, to remember that in its neighborhood the U.S. would never admit similar movements of foreign powers<sup>43</sup>. A historic opportunity to integrate Russia into a sphere of collective prosperity and security has been lost, as indeed H. Kissinger, among many others, warned<sup>44</sup>. An attitude analogous to the one adopted by the victorious powers of World War I toward defeated Germany prevailed: exclusion and marginalization. The Russian population, crushed and frustrated in the economic and social chaos, accumulated bitterness and resentment.

It was in this context that V. Putin took over the Russian government<sup>45</sup>. His first initiatives showed harmony with the political orientation of President B. Yelstin. On several occasions, Putin declared himself in favor of Russia's integration into NATO and other partnerships with the U.S. and Europe<sup>46</sup>. Furthermore, the Russian president was one of the first to show solidarity with the USA, on September 11, 2001, at the time of the attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Center. He did not do it out of benevolence. There was mutual interest in fighting the terrorism of Islamic fundamentalists that also threatened Russia (autonomous Islamic nations within the Russian Federation, such as Chechnya), as well as questioning the Central Asian states, former Soviet republics and allies of

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country.

<sup>42</sup> It is true that no formal treaties were signed between U.S./European states and Russia. But promises of "no expansion" by NATO in Central Europe and among the former Soviet republics have become public.

<sup>43</sup> One need only recall the 1962 Cuban rocket crisis. More recently, the U.S. has manifested itself in a belligerent and threatening manner in the face of mere rapprochement between the governments of Venezuela and Russia.

<sup>44</sup> For H. Kissinger cf. <https://www.businessinsider.com/kissinger-ukraine-give-up-land-russia-not-humiliate-putin-2022-5> In the same vein, since 1997, Jack Matlock the last US ambassador to the USSR has spoken in hearings in the US Senate, cf. <https://www.nybooks.com/contributors/jack-f-matlock/>

<sup>45</sup> For the specific role of V. Putin, cf. D. Aarão Reis, 2022 and C. Taibo, 2016.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. among many other texts, the BBC interview on the Chechen war and NATO available at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/audio\\_video/programmes/breakfast\\_with\\_frost/transcripts/putin5.mar.txt](http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/audio_video/programmes/breakfast_with_frost/transcripts/putin5.mar.txt)

Russia (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan). Russia opened its airspace and offered support for the invasion of Afghanistan by U.S. troops. The cooperation, which could have led to a rapprochement, did not result in anything substantive.

The position of the US governments — of marginalizing Russia — remained unchanged. This can be seen in a second expansionist movement by NATO, which took place in 2004, reaching Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia, as well as including for the first time former Soviet republics: Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. Moreover, the U.S. government spared no efforts to encourage and give media and diplomatic coverage to the “Color Revolutions” — in Georgia (Pink Revolution in 2003) and Ukraine (Orange Revolution in 2004) — even though they were political processes hostile to Russia and its hegemonic pretensions.

The reaction came through the speech given by V. Putin at the 43rd Munich Security Conference on February 10, 2007<sup>47</sup>. In a self-controlled, sometimes ironic, but very forceful tone, V. Putin warned that Russia would no longer accept that pattern of conduct on the part of the “Western” powers, emphasizing that security should take on a collective character and not only serve the interests of a few powers at the expense of the interests of others. However, he did not advocate a breakup. On the contrary, he cited the US as a “friend” and talked about common interests and the need to create mechanisms and policies aimed at easing tensions and creating an atmosphere of cooperation and understanding.

The speech produced great media repercussion. In this context, and since the beginning of the century, thanks to the exponential rise in oil and gas prices, Russia’s main export products, Russia had resumed economic and social development on new bases, overcoming the chaotic situation of the 1990s, centralizing political power in the state, reestablishing the functioning of public services, guaranteeing the payment of salaries and pensions, neutralizing centrifugal tendencies (oligarchies, local and regional governments, separatist tendencies, etc.). The leadership of V. Putin was respected and even admired by many analysts, who praised his “pragmatism.” It was, therefore, from a position of relative strength that he now spoke.

However, there was no change in the policy of marginalizing Russia in the context of the alliances undertaken by the US and the European states. B. Obama’s election in 2008 indicated the possibility of a change of course. H. Clinton, the new secretary of state, even said that there would be a *reset* in

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<sup>47</sup> See the full text of V. Putin’s speech, in Russian with English translation at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQ58Yv6kP44>

the US-Russian relations. But this did not happen.

#### 4. *The resurgence of Russian protagonism and cultural nationalism: the Eurasian option.*

The 20<sup>th</sup> NATO Summit in Bucharest in 2008 — which V. Putin attended a year after the Munich speech — signaled the possibility of Ukraine and Georgia joining NATO in the future<sup>48</sup>. Its consequences materialized shortly thereafter in the conflict with Georgia in 2008, when there was the annexation, in practice, by Russia of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, two provinces of the small Caucasian country. From 2012 on, the large-scale intervention in the Syrian civil war, together with the combination of forces and interests with Iran and its allies in the country, showed that the Russian protagonism in international relations had become a new fact to be considered in the context of international relations. It should be noted that the relative moderation of the Obama administrations in the US interventionist tradition (particularly in the case of the Syrian civil war) — deepened by President Trump's isolationist policy from 2016 onward — would open wide margins for Russia, which would be exploited without further hesitation.

Strictly speaking, since the middle of the first decade of the current century, Russia has chosen a different — and novel — path. In the military field, investments in information technology and in the improvement of new weapons, widely publicized, indicated that the country was once again assuming the aspiration — or the condition — of a great power. Russian activism — never formally acknowledged — organizing interference and cyber-attacks on electoral processes in England, France and the USA, became a major issue.

Two other internal trends help to understand the phenomenon.

The first one concerns the political struggle within Russia itself. After two successful presidential terms between 2000 and 2008, V. Putin has shown authoritarian ambitions in two complementary aspects: to perpetuate himself in power and radicalize the process of political centralization with authoritarian strains, the so-called *vertical of power*<sup>49</sup>. His party managed to approve the extension of the presidential term to 6 years, now allowing indefinite reelection. In this framework, the Russian leader returned to the presidency in 2012, getting reelected in 2018<sup>50</sup>. Such maneuvers aroused

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<sup>48</sup> See [https://www.nato.int/cps/fr/natolive/official\\_texts\\_8443.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/fr/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm)

<sup>49</sup> Cf. the interesting reflection by A. Lutsenko, 2022, inspired by N. Elias.

<sup>50</sup> Between 2008 and 2012, an ally of V. Putin, D. Medvedev, was elected president but de facto power remained in the hands of V. Putin, who was appointed prime

opposition, including expressive street demonstrations. People protested against the authoritarian tendencies of the Russian leader and manifested in favor of policies aimed at social welfare, resuming the constructive advances of the first decade of the century and the combat, in practice, against social inequalities and the corruption that was rife in the upper echelons of power<sup>51</sup>.

The government has violently repressed the protests and covered up a process of intimidation and selective assassinations of whistleblowers, journalists and opposition leaders.

The second trend materializes in another movement, the elaboration of a new doctrine — philosophical and political — based on two axes: cultural conservative nationalism and the Eurasian option, making them a true program for the mobilization of consciences and national cohesion, presented as a condition and consequence of a *strong* government. In this sense, the majority in Parliament approved a set of laws and provisions aimed at tightening controls over the opposition and constituting a *united front* to support the government in its new foreign policy<sup>52</sup>.

In the formulation of cultural nationalism, the meetings of the Valdai Discussion Club have played an important role. Meeting annually since 2004 in different cities, hundreds of social scientists, journalists, politicians, Russians, and international guests have gathered to discuss the country's challenges in today's world<sup>53</sup>.

In defense of cultural nationalism, conservative ideologues, such as, among others, Sergei Karaganov, began to pontificate. In interviews to the international press and Russian media, the ideologue defends “personal liberties, a prosperous society, with security and national dignity,” but within a framework of restrictions — considered “inevitable” — on political liberties<sup>54</sup>. He attacks people and movements that “reject history, homeland,

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minister by the elected president.

<sup>51</sup> The economic-financial oligarchies, losing their political power, continued enjoying the process of income concentration, constituting a “new dominant class”, the “new Russians”/новые русские, squandering wealth at home and abroad.

<sup>52</sup> For current Russian nationalism, cf. F. Georgesco, 2022. For nationalist traditions, N. Mitrokhin, 2003. For an original critical approach to the same phenomenon, cf. C. Taibo, 2014 and also I. Kuril, 2022.

<sup>53</sup> Valdai Discussion Club/ Международный Дискуссионный Клуб "Валдай". Valdai is a lake near the city of Veliky Novgorod, where the first conference of the club was held in 2004. The most recent conference of the Valdai Club took place in October 2022. Closing the proceedings, on the 27th of that month, V. Putin gave a speech on the theme “A Post-Hegemonic World – Justice and Security for Everyone.”

<sup>54</sup> Cf. New Statesman, April 8, 2022 and New York Times, July 8, 2022

gender [...] like the aggressive LGTB and ultrafeminist movements.” For Karaganov, this is *posthumanism*, which must be suppressed. And he proposes an action of “the majority of mankind” around conservative values. Such values would be rooted in history, corresponding to a kind of “human nature.” It would be urgent to defend them at all costs, a matter of survival<sup>55</sup>.

The emphasis on Russia’s “survival” is also formulated by V. Putin in a 2021 speech. In his turn toward cultural nationalism, and break with the Western world, the Russian president has come to identify a tendency toward the “exhaustion” and “decay” of the US and Europe, compared, in a geological metaphor, to “dying volcanoes.” In contrast, new, dynamic centers of power emerge, Russia itself, China, India and other middle powers (including Brazil, Turkey, Iran), compared to “erupting volcanoes”<sup>56</sup>.

The question of history assumes particular importance in this speech. V. Putin is proud to affirm that Russia has “a thousand years” of Christian choice and other thousands of history, although he is economical in discussing the evidence that would support his assessment, especially with regard to the continuity between this dense past and the present Russia<sup>57</sup>. But it is precisely on this inconsistent basis that the Russian president claims that Russia — a vector of modernization and civilization — would have the right to recover and unify the territories of the former Soviet Union, whose states (including, of course, the Ukrainian one) would be nothing more than “artificial historical formations,” the result of mistakes made by the communists in power rather than of a process of development based on history and culture. S. Karaganov backs him up: “it is necessary to gather the lands,” he says, because this is decisive not only for “saving” Russia, but also for the country to help build with more and better musculature the Eurasian alliances and with the Global South<sup>58</sup>.

The concern with history gained additional strength in March of this year, when a governmental decree constituted a control committee to combat the “falsifications of history,” criminalized by law. Representatives from various ministries — including Education and Culture, of course —, but it is symptomatic that representatives of the armed forces and the security apparatus/FSB also participate.

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<sup>55</sup> For an analysis of Russian messianic cultural nationalism, cf. C. Ingerflom, 2022 and 2022a

<sup>56</sup> Cf. V. Putin’s speech at the Valdai Club meeting in October 2021. V. Putin, 2021.

<sup>57</sup> In one of the oldest documents in Russian history, the “Tale of Bygone Years,” there is a record of the Christian option formulated in the 10th century by the then Prince Vladimir of Kyiv.

<sup>58</sup> For discussion of the imperialist character of Russian nationalist expansionism, Cf. B. Kagarlitsky, 2015 and C. Katz, 2022

Russia's Eurasian option is situated in this context<sup>59</sup>. It unfolds an assumed protagonism in international relations. And it has as its axis the "limitless friendship" with China, complementing itself with the approximation to the "Global South," including therein traditional "backyards" of Europe (incursions in Africa) and even in Latin America (Venezuela). It is to be expected, in this same sense, a particular emphasis on the so-called BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), a conglomerate that cannot yet be called an "alliance", and whose potential is still subject to speculation.

### 5. *Toward the war option*

We tried to show the background of the current war, how it was gestated through time, but this does not mean that it was irreversible or inevitable. If the historical context matters to better understand major trends, it is in the political conjuncture — in the short time — that, after all, decisions are made and it is there that a war, even if unannounced, is decided and begins to be fought.

Several closer factors contributed to the decision for the Russian invasion.

First, the demonstrations held in Maidan Square between November 21, 2013 and February 22, 2014 that toppled and put to flight the elected President Viktor Yanukovich, sympathetic to Russia, who had decided to withdraw a partnership agreement with the European Union. Called the "Maidan Revolution" or "Ukrainian spring" by the European and US media, encouraged by US diplomats and public figures, the process, by signifying a move away from partnerships or alliances with Russia, led to the incorporation of Crimea by Russia and the proclamation of independence of two eastern Ukrainian provinces (Lugansk and Donetsk), besides signaling the beginning of a low-intensity civil war in the east of the country.

The failure of the Russian-Ukrainian negotiations to end this civil war (non-implementation of the agreements drawn up in Minsk in 2015) aborted attempts to reactivate such agreements. The weakness of the so-called "Normandy format" talks (including countries not participating in the conflict) evidenced the unwillingness of the adversaries to find acceptable terms of pacification, *i.e.*, that would respect the different interests involved<sup>60</sup>.

<sup>59</sup> One of the first systematic articles published by V. Putin in this regard is dated October 4, 2011. Cf. <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/novyy-integratsionnyy-proekt-dlya-evrazii-budushee-kotoroe-rozhdaetsya-segodnya>

<sup>60</sup> The so-called "Normandy format" diplomatic initiative brought Ukraine, Russia, France, and Germany together in an attempt to reinvigorate the Minsk agreements, but never resulted in anything effective.



The non-participating powers also did not make greater efforts in this regard. It was as if the conviction that there was *nothing to be done* was established, underestimating the explosive potential of the conflict, which accentuated and consolidated mutual resentments and hatreds.

A further aspect concerns the US position. After the four years of isolationism under D. Trump, the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 affected the credibility in the US potential for action and intervention, despite the declarations of the new President Joe Biden, elected at the end of 2020, to the contrary. The idea that the US government would not react decisively to a Russian invasion of Ukraine has been strengthened.

At the same time, there was, on the Russian side, the estimation that also the European states, considering their energy dependence on Russia, would not go beyond the traditional symbolic sanctions and speeches without practical effects. There was no clear warning from these states — which, as already mentioned, did not believe in the invasion — that the invasion would be unacceptable and that it would generate drastic reactions at the time. It can be said, in this sense, that an effective deterrent policy was not formulated and implemented.

It remains to be said that the demands put forward by Mr. Putin shortly before the conflict, namely, no extension of NATO to Ukraine; no extension of NATO to the other “peripheries” of Russia; withdrawal of NATO troops from the countries of Eastern Europe, were not even considered. Except for the third one, which is unfeasible — probably advanced as a bargaining chip — the first two would, in theory, be susceptible to understanding which, if realized, could perhaps have the effect of suspending — or postponing — the invasion.

In the context of strong, historical trends, the interweaving, in the short duration, of such events, evaluations, and decisions precipitated the outbreak of the war.

## *6. The challenges of peace.*

At the moment I finish off this article, the war is ten months old.

After it, nothing will ever be the same again.

On the international level, the expectation of US hegemony in a unipolar world has disappeared from the radar screen. A multipolar world is emerging, and it is most likely to be a world of great instability and new local or regional wars.

Regarding specifically the war in Ukraine, as mentioned, it was not a short and victorious war, as Russians and even Europeans and Americans estimated. Redefined, the Russian invasion has maintained its advances only in the southeast of the country, occupying about 20 percent of Ukraine's

territory. However, since last September, a Ukrainian counter-offensive has begun that has changed the war's scenario in no small measure. The Ukrainian military has retaken small but significant portions of territory previously occupied by the Russians, including the city of Kherson. The Ukrainians already carry out small drone bombardments on Russian territory, not always officially admitted and were probably the perpetrators of an explosion on the bridge connecting the Crimean peninsula to Russian territory. And there are already political leaders advocating the possibility of liberating all Ukrainian territory and even recovering the Crimean peninsula, annexed to Russia since 2014.

In Russia the “partial military mobilization” (call-up of 300,000 new troops) and the defeats on the ground have raised clear tensions although their depth has yet to be properly assessed<sup>61</sup>.

Making a strategic retreat to the eastern bank of the Dniepr, the Russians do not seem interested or strong enough to unleash new offensives<sup>62</sup>. While V. Putin formulates, for the first time, peace proposals, Russian artillery and military aviation intensively bombard the Ukrainian energy infrastructures and cities, razing the country. On the other hand, unconfirmed news reports register pressure from Russian military leaders on Putin to escalate even further (use of tactical atomic weapons?) to break Ukrainian resistance<sup>63</sup>.

In the camp of the Ukrainian allies contradictory signals appear. The US government and most European governments continue, at least officially, to unconditionally support the Ukrainian resistance. The French government, while also not denying its support for Ukraine, is the only one to maintain a “direct line” with the Russian government. Within public opinion, polls register tensions and dissatisfaction due to increases in the prices of gas and oil and the forecasts of possible power cuts in the winter that is about to begin.

War, which has been announced for years, having been greatly underestimated, is settling in Europe and there seems to be no medium-term

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<sup>61</sup> For the first time, anti-war protests were taken place in local institutions, such as the Lomonosovsky (Moscow) district council, which called for V. Putin's resignation. District deputies from the cities of Moscow, St. Petersburg and Kolpino spoke out in the same vein last September. The trial of Ilya Yashin, in December, sentenced to eight years and six months in prison for criticizing the war, also had repercussions in the country.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Dugoin-Clément, Christine, 2022

<sup>63</sup> Dmitri Medvedev, vice-chairman of the security council of the Russian Federation, V. Putin's staunch ally, sometimes considered an unofficial government spokesman, has, repeatedly in recent months, threatened the use of nuclear weapons.

prospects for peace<sup>64</sup>.

The worrying thing is that even in Europe and perhaps in Russia itself, not to mention the rest of the world, apathy and indifference to the conflict are growing<sup>65</sup>. As if the ongoing war did not contain an even greater potential for destruction and human misery. As if an eventual recourse to atomic weapons — advocated, as mentioned, by Russian military and political leaders — did not contain a horizon of unimaginable catastrophes<sup>66</sup>.

Will the Russian and Ukrainian societies, supported by movements on a wider scale, have the strength to move and press for realistic and reasonable *war aims* to be defined in the most urgent way, opening possibilities for diplomatic talks, aiming at a peace that minimally meets the interests of both contenders?

Unfortunately, nothing seems to indicate that this hypothesis is likely.

If this is the case, we live in gloomy times.

And gloomier still they may become.

## 7. *Chronology*

**May 27, 1997:** Signing of the “Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation”.

**March 6, 2000:** V. Putin hints at Russia joining NATO.

**2004:** Founding and first meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club.

**February 10, 2007:** V. Putin’s speech at the 43rd Munich Security Conference.

**April 2-4, 2008:** 20<sup>th</sup> NATO Summit at Bucharest signals the possibility of Ukraine and Georgia joining NATO in the future.

**October 4, 2011:** V. Putin’s article on the Eurasian project.

**November 21, 2013:** Start of pro-European demonstrations in Maidan Square in Kiev.

**February 22, 2014:** Having succeeded in overthrowing the pro-Russian Ukrainian president, the demonstrations in Maidan Square are suspended.

**March 16, 2014:** Crimean referendum approves integration to Russia, after

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<sup>64</sup> So far, the only steps taken towards a limited appeasement have been, under strong international pressure: the agreement between Russia and Ukraine, mediated by Turkey, to allow Ukrainian and Russian grain exports to flow through the Black Sea.

<sup>65</sup> From an anthropological point of view, A. Zhelnina, 2020 and J. Kormina, 2022 analyze populations’ reactions to war between “aphasia” and “apathy.”

<sup>66</sup> Since the beginning of the conflict, Russian journalists and ideologues, in large audience TV programs, have openly advocated the use of atomic weapons to break the resistance of Ukraine and its allies.

peninsula was occupied by Russian troops.

**April 7, 2014:** Proclamation of the Donetsk People's Republic.

**April 27, 2014:** Proclamation of the Lugansk Republic. Start of low-intensity civil war among Ukrainians

**September 5, 2014:** First of Minsk Agreements as an attempt to end civil war.

**February 12, 2015:** Minsk Agreements II.

**July 12, 2021:** V. Putin's article "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians."

**February 4, 2022:** China-Russia Joint declaration stating that "the friendship between the two states has no limits".

**February 24, 2022:** V. Putin announces the beginning of a "special military operation" in Ukraine.

**February 24, 2022:** Joe Biden denounces "unwarranted and unprovoked" Russian invasion.

**February 26, 2022:** Ukraine files an application instituting proceedings against the Russian Federation at the International Court of Justice.

**March 1, 2022:** Ukrainian President Zelensky speaks to the European Parliament.

**March 2, 2022:** UN Assembly adopts resolution condemning Russian aggression in Ukraine.

**March 16, 2022:** V. Zelensky's speech to the US Congress.

**April 5, 2022:** President V. Zelensky addresses UN in wake of Bucha massacre exposure.

**May 6, 2022:** Amnesty International attests to war crimes committed by Russian troops.

**May 27, 2022:** Moscow-led branch of Ukrainian Orthodox Church breaks ties with Russia.

**June 4, 2022:** E. Macron, President of France, says that "We must not humiliate Russia."

**June 14, 2022:** Pope Francis warns that the "Third World War has been declared."

**June 17, 2022:** At the 25<sup>th</sup> St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, V. Putin stresses that "the era of a unipolar world order has come to an end."

**June 29, 2022:** The Duma adopts a law tightening restrictions against individuals and organizations classified as "foreign agents."

**July 4-5, 2022:** Ukraine Recovery Conference in Lugano, Switzerland.

**July 13, 2022:** More than 40 states issue a joint statement backing Ukraine in its proceedings against Russia at the International Court of Justice.

**July 28, 2022:** President V. Zelensky on the Day of Ukrainian Statehood: "we existed, exist and will exist!"

**August 3, 2022:** Marine Le Pen calls for an end to sanctions against Russia.

**August 11, 2022:** Latvian parliament recognizes Russia as “a state sponsor of terrorism.”

**August 24, 2022:** V. Zelensky on the Independence Day of Ukraine: “We will certainly drive the invaders out of our land.”

**September 1, 2022:** Human Rights Watch NGO report on the crime of forcible transfer of Ukrainian civilians to Russia.

**September 8, 2022:** Municipal deputies in the Moscow district of Lomonosovsky appeal to Russian President V. Putin to resign.

**September 13, 2022:** Deputies from 18 municipal districts in Moscow, St. Petersburg and Kolpino call for V. Putin’s resignation.

**September 21, 2022:** V. Putin announces a “partial military mobilization” to continue the war in Ukraine.

**September 25, 2022:** Patriarch Kirill (Russian Orthodox Church) supports the mobilization decreed by V. Putin: “Sacrifice is the greatest manifestation of the best of human qualities.”

**September 27, 2022:** D. Medvedev, vice-chairman of the Russian Security Council: “Russia has the right to defend itself with nuclear weapons if necessary.”

**September 30, 2022:** Russia annexes Donetsk, Lugansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson.

**October 2, 2022:** Pope Francis calls for an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine.

**October 8, 2022:** Explosion partially destroys bridge connecting Crimea to Russia. V. Putin accuses Ukraine of having committed a “terrorist act.”

**October 12, 2022:** UN, by large majority, passes resolution on “territorial integrity of Ukraine.”

**October 27, 2022:** V. Putin’s speech at the 19th meeting of the Valdai Club about the theme “A Post-Hegemonic World: Justice and Security for Everyone.”

**November 11, 2022:** Ukrainian army retook the city of Kherson.

**November 24, 2022:** European Parliament declares Russia to be a state sponsor of terrorism.

**December 7, 2022:** Putin admits that the war “can be a long process.”

**December 9, 2022:** A Moscow court sentences Ilya Yashin to eight years and six months imprisonment on charges of “spreading false information” about the armed forces.

**December 11, 2022:** D. Medvedev says that Russia is “increasing production of the most powerful means of destruction, including those based on new principles.”

*Source:* Elizabeth Kozlowski. La guerre de la Russie contre l'Ukraine. Repères chronologiques et documents historiques (1991-2022)

Cf. <https://chrono.cercec.fr/>

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# The Contradictions in Vladimir Putin's “Just War” against Ukraine<sup>67</sup>

Vicente Ferraro<sup>68</sup>

## Introduction

Since the 2014 Ukrainian political crisis, Russia has been engaged in efforts to dismember Ukraine according to Vladimir Putin's expansionist ambitions. Moscow annexed Crimea and began to promote armed groups which aimed at having the eastern region of Donbas to secede from the country. On February 24, 2022, Putin launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which became the tensest geopolitical conflict since World War II. Significant parts of Ukraine's territory are currently under Russian occupation.

In this article I discuss the inconsistencies in Vladimir Putin's main justifications for initiating the full-scale war against Ukraine, drawing on official statements, public opinion polls, and reports from civil society organizations and the United Nations. Given the temporal proximity to the events, I also address media content from Western, Russian and Ukrainian sources.

Three main arguments (the *casus belli*) were mobilized by the Kremlin to justify the war, in particular the expansion of the North Atlantic

<sup>67</sup> This paper is an updated and translated (from Portuguese) version of the chapter *As contradições nos argumentos de Putin para invadir a Ucrânia: Os mitos da OTAN, da proteção de minorias e da desnazificação* [“The contradictions in Putin's arguments for invading Ukraine: The myths of NATO, minority protection, and denazification”], published in the book: GOMIDE, Bruno and JALLAGEAS, Neide (eds). *Ensaio sobre a Guerra Rússia-Ucrânia* [Essays on the Russo-Ukrainian War]. São Paulo, Brazil: Kinoruss, 2022. This updated and translated publication was authorized by the publisher.

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Treaty Organization (NATO) in Eastern Europe, the protection of the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine's east and the fight against Nazism. Although Russian elites' arguments against NATO enlargement is legitimate, there is significant evidence that contradicts it as a motive for Putin's aggression. Instead of tipping the European balance of power in favor of Russia, the invasion, as expected, has strengthened NATO. Contrary to the Kremlin's allegedly humanitarian intentions to protect ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking minorities, ten months of invasion led to a number of civilian deaths higher than eight years of war in Donbas<sup>69</sup> — the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine's east and south was exactly the major victim until now, and has presented significant resistance to the “liberation” onslaughts promoted by Russia. With regard to the denazification argument, although there are ultranationalist groups in Ukraine, there is no evidence that such groups count on significant social support or political influence. Furthermore, radical and violent right-wing groups are also present in Russia. The Nazism argument constituted a strategy of “demonization” of the opponent, mobilized to contest Ukraine's right to exist as a sovereign nation and state as well as to boost nationalism in Russian society by reviving the WWII collective trauma.

In the final sections, I briefly discuss other *casus belli* mobilized by the Kremlin and Putin's real motivations for launching the invasion.

## I. The “just war” against NATO expansion

The NATO threat was among the most discussed arguments in academic debates, propagated by scholars of the Realist school of International Relations and the Russian state propaganda. Although very mobilized in Russia, it was not at the top of popular mentions at first glance. In a public opinion poll by a state institute, conducted a few days after the beginning of the invasion, 20% of respondents answered that the main objective of the “special military operation” (the official mandatory euphemism for the invasion) was to prevent NATO from installing military bases on Ukrainian territory<sup>70</sup> — the response lagged behind the humanitarian motivation to protect the Russian-speaking population of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and Lugansk People's

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<sup>69</sup> *Donbass* in Russian and *Donbas* in Ukrainian; *Lugansk* (Russian) and *Luhansk* (Ukrainian).

<sup>70</sup> The second most mentioned option (25%) was avoiding an attack/threat against Russia; protect its borders so that Ukraine does not attack it.

Republic (LNR), breakaway regions of Donbas, with 26%.<sup>71</sup> However, when concerns about NATO are grouped with other security considerations, one sees a significant preponderance of its mentions over the months, ranging between 38% and 46%, as shown in chart 1 in the Appendix of Charts.

NATO enlargement was one of the main bones of contention between Russia and Western powers in the post-Cold War period. As early as in the 1990s, Russian diplomacy and President Boris Yeltsin had questioned the expansionist policy of the alliance. Two waves of expansion were particularly contentious: the 1999 enlargement, which incorporated states of the former socialist bloc in Eastern Europe (Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic), and the 2004 enlargement, which, in addition to incorporating more countries of that bloc, included three former republics of the Soviet Union (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania). Although there was no treaty between NATO members and Russia to restrict its eastward enlargement, Russian elites have claimed that such assurances were orally given to Mikhail Gorbachev during the 1990 discussions for the Two Plus Four Agreement on the reunification of Germany.<sup>72</sup> Some documents indeed seem to confirm this assumption,<sup>73</sup> whereas some transcripts of negotiations in the different countries involved indicate that the discussions revolved around the military status of Germany and its eastern portion and the accession of Eastern European states was not even imagined as a possibility at that time.<sup>74</sup> Other reports, documents and statements by participants in these and other

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<sup>71</sup> WCIOM. Spetsial'naya voyennaya operatsiya v Ukraine: otnosheniye i tseli [Special military operation in Ukraine: attitude and objectives]. 28.02.2022. Available at: <<https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/specialnaja-voennaja-operaciya-v-ukraine-otnoshenie-i-celi>>. Accessed on: 15.07.2022.

<sup>72</sup> Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany.

<sup>73</sup> ZAKHAROVA rasskazala, gde bylo zakrepleno obeshchaniye NATO ne rasshiryat'sya [Zakharova told where NATO's promise not to expand was recorded]. RIA Novosti, 15.06.2021. Available at: <<https://ria.ru/20210615/obman-1737101938.html>>. Accessed on: 04.06.2022.

AKHTYRKO, Aleksandr. Oni dali SSSR obeshchaniye ne rasshiryat' NATO [They promised the USSR not to expand NATO]. Gazeta.ru, 19.02.2022. Available at: <<https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2022/02/19/14554111.shtml>>. Accessed on: 04.06.2022.

<sup>74</sup> KRAMER, M. The Myth of a No-NATO-Enlargement Pledge to Russia. The Washington Quarterly, v. 32, n. 2, p. 39–61, abr. 2009.

negotiations disprove<sup>75</sup> or confirm this thesis.<sup>76</sup>

In the academic mainstream, there is an acute debate around whether NATO enlargement was a geostrategic mistake or not. Some analysts consider that the enlargement violated the post-Cold War balance of power and further contributed to deteriorate the relations between Russia and the West, while others claim that the measure was necessary to guarantee security to Eastern Europe against possible Russian nationalist revisionism (like the current invasion of Ukraine) and that Putin's arguments are just a pretext for his expansionist ambitions.<sup>77</sup>

Since the demise of the USSR, Russia's relations with NATO have faced significant oscillations. There were moments of rapprochement and establishment of channels of dialogue, such as the "honeymoon" period in the early 1990s and the "war against terrorism" phase, in which the fight against Chechen separatists and the attacks of 9/11 brought Vladimir Putin and George Bush together.<sup>78</sup> Nonetheless, the policy of enlargement and the hegemonic-oriented stance of the alliance contributed, in part, to cooling these relations. The initiative to carry out military interventions without the approval of the UN Security Council or the OSCE, the intervention in Kosovo in 1999 and in Iraq in 2003, the ballistic missile defense/shield projects in Eastern Europe (supposedly to deter Iran) and the negotiations to incorporate other former Soviet republics, such as Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine caused new frictions. It should be noted that in his first years in power, Putin was not very confrontational toward NATO enlargement in the

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<sup>75</sup> WIEGREFFE, Klaus. NATO's Eastward Expansion: Is Vladimir Putin Right? Spiegel, 15.02.2022. Available at: <<https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/nato-s-eastward-expansion-is-vladimir-putin-right-a-bf318d2c-7aeb-4b59-8d5f-1d8c94e1964d>>. Accessed on: 04.06.2022.

<sup>76</sup> ARIS, Ben. Gorbachev and the verbal promises of no Nato eastern expansion. BNE Intellinews, 13.01.2022. Available at: <<https://www.intellinews.com/gorbachev-and-the-verbal-promises-of-no-nato-eastern-expansion-231651/>>. Accessed on: 05.06.2022.

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<sup>77</sup> WAS NATO Enlargement a Mistake? Foreign Affairs Asks the Experts. Foreign Affairs, 19.04.2022. Available at: <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ask-the-experts/2022-04-19/was-nato-enlargement-mistake>>. Accessed on: 08.06.2022.

<sup>78</sup> FORSBERG, T.; HERD, G. Russia and NATO: From Windows of Opportunities to Closed Doors. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, v. 23, n. 1, p. 41–57, 2 jan. 2015.

Post-Soviet Space: in 2002, he mentioned that the decision to join NATO should be made independently by Ukraine and that this would not harm its bilateral relations with Russia;<sup>79</sup> in 2005, he stated that, although he did not consent to, if other former Soviet republics wanted to join NATO, he would respect that choice as it constituted their “*sovereign right to decide their own defense policy*”.<sup>80</sup>

The deterioration in the bilateral relations accelerated with the occurrence of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004. At that time, Putin accused the West of encouraging instability and rebellion against Russia's allies. In 2007, during his famous contentious speech at the Munich Security Conference, Putin harshly criticized NATO's defense policy, questioning why the organization, established to contain the USSR during the Cold War, continued to exist despite the breakup of the USSR and the extinction of the Warsaw Pact.<sup>81</sup> The 2008 Russo-Georgian war and the Russian aggression against Ukraine during its 2014 political crisis (with the annexation of Crimea and the military intervention in Donbas) further brought the relations to critical levels. The channels for dialogue were significantly exhausted.

Before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russian diplomats accused the alliance of violating the principle of “indivisible security,” according to which a state cannot maximize its own security by increasing the insecurity of others.<sup>82</sup> The prerogative was contemplated in the Helsinki

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<sup>79</sup> KREMLIN official website. After the Russia-NATO Summit President Vladimir Putin took part in a joint press conference with NATO Secretary General George Robertson and Italian Prime Ministers Silvio Berlusconi. 28.05.2002. Available at: <<http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/43122>>. Accessed on: 12.06.2022.

<sup>80</sup> KREMLIN official website. Interview with French Television Company France 3. 07.05.2005. Available at: <<http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22952>>. Accessed on: 12.06.2022.

<sup>81</sup> KREMLIN official website. Vystupleniye i diskussiya na Myunkhenskoy konferentsii po voprosam politiki bezopasnosti [Speech and discussion at the Munich Security Conference.]. 10.02.2007. Available at: <<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>>. Accessed on: 12.06.2022.

<sup>82</sup> MINISTRY of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. Tekst poslaniya Ministra inostrannykh del Rossiyskoy Federatsii S.V. Lavrova po tematike nedelimosti bezopasnosti, napravlennogo 28 yanvarya s.g. glavam vneshnepolitycheskikh vedomstv SShA, Kanady i ryada yevropeyskikh stran [Text from the message of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation S.V. Lavrov on the topic of the indivisibility of security, sent on January 28 of this year to the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the United States, Canada and several European countries]. 01.02.2022. Available at: <[https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/1796679/](https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1796679/)>. Accessed on: 06.08.2022.

Accords in 1975, the Charter for European Security,<sup>83</sup> established at the OSCE Summit in Istanbul in 1999, and in the Declaration of the OSCE of Astana in 2010.<sup>84</sup> Meanwhile, Russian diplomats also admitted that this principle had not been codified in a treaty with legally binding effects (due to Western powers' resistance).<sup>85</sup> Another document often mentioned by the Kremlin is the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997,<sup>86</sup> which advocated the need for mutual consultation in military decision-making.

As the aforementioned facts show, prior to 2014 Russia had legitimate arguments to question NATO enlargement and its security policy. However, as I argue below, there are five indications that combatting NATO expansion was not among Putin's main motives and interests for starting the full-scale war against Ukraine.

### **(a) The invasion only strengthens NATO**

Russian political elites expected that the gains on the military and geopolitical fronts would offset other losses in the economic, diplomatic and reputational (soft power) fronts. Nonetheless, even on the geopolitical front Russia has been facing acute losses. Several analysts did not believe in the possibility of a Russian invasion exactly because there was a highly feasible expectation that an invasion would have the opposite effect to that claimed by the Kremlin. It would further strengthen NATO and bring the alliance even closer to Russian borders. This expectation has in fact come true.

Unlike the fragmentation and underfunding of NATO observed during Donald Trump's leadership, the Russian aggression has boosted strong cohesion in the alliance and rapid collective action among its members. Its presence in Eastern Europe, close to Russian borders, is being

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<sup>83</sup> OSCE. Istanbul Document. 19.11.1999. Available at: <https://www.osce.org/mc/39569>. Accessed on: 08.06.2022.

<sup>84</sup> OSCE. Astana Commemorative Declaration: Towards a Security Community. 01.12.2010. Available at: <https://www.osce.org/mc/74985>. Accessed on: 08.06.2022.

<sup>85</sup> Sergey Lavrov: postavlena tsel' lyuboy tsenoy vyvesti Rossiyu iz ravnovesiya [Sergey Lavrov: the definite aim was to throw Russia out of balance at any cost]. TASS, 10.09.2014. Available at: <https://tass.ru/top-officials/1432200>. Accessed on: 08.06.2022.

<sup>86</sup> NATO. Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation signed in Paris, France. 27.05.1997. Available at: [https://www.nato.int/cps/su/natohq/official\\_texts\\_25468.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/su/natohq/official_texts_25468.htm). Accessed on: 08.06.2022.

substantially reinforced<sup>87</sup> with troops, equipment, weapons, military training, and defense systems (a trend that had already been reinforced with the annexation of Crimea in 2014).<sup>88</sup> The alliance announced in June 2022 that it will increase rapid reaction forces from 40,000 to over 300,000 troops.<sup>89</sup> NATO multinational battalion-size battlegroups in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland have been reinforced and four more were established in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia.<sup>90</sup> There are signs of an arms race in Europe, with countries such as Germany,<sup>91</sup> Estonia,<sup>92</sup> Latvia,<sup>93</sup> Lithuania,<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> MASON, Rowena. NATO to deploy extra troops to alliance nations in eastern Europe. *The Guardian*, 25.02.2022. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/25/nato-deploy-extra-troops-eastern-europe-ukraine-russia-war>>. Accessed on: 20.06.2022.

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<sup>88</sup> NATO. NATO's military presence in the east of the Alliance. 08.07.2022. Available at: <[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_136388.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm)>. Accessed on: 10.07.2022.

<sup>89</sup> CHISLENNOST' sil bystrogo reagirovaniya NATO prevysit 300 000 chelovek [NATO's rapid reaction force to exceed 300,000]. *Golos Ameriki*, 27.06.2022. Available at: <<https://www.golosameriki.com/a/nato-high-readiness-forces-strategy/6634745.html>>. Accessed on: 10.07.2022.

<sup>90</sup> NATO. NATO's military presence in the east of the Alliance. 21.12.2022. Available at: <[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_136388.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm)>. Accessed on: 03.01.2023.

<sup>91</sup> SHEAHAN, M., MARSH, S. Germany to increase defence spending in response to 'Putin's war' - Scholz. *Reuter*, 27.02.2022. Available at: <<https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/germany-hike-defense-spending-scholz-says-further-policy-shift-2022-02-27/>>. Accessed on: 10.07.2022. GERMANY commits €100 billion to defense spending. *Deutsche Welle*, 27.02.2022. Available at: <<https://www.dw.com/en/germany-commits-100-billion-to-defense-spending/a-60933724>>. Accessed on: 10.07.2022.

<sup>92</sup> NEW €3.8-billion defense spending plan for 2023-2026 unveiled. *ERR*, 20.05.2022. Available at: <<https://news.err.ee/1608604033/new-3-8-billion-defense-spending-plan-for-2023-2026-unveiled>>. Accessed on: 10.07.2022.

<sup>93</sup> MOTIVANS, Ivars. Government approves proposal to raise Latvia's defense spending to 2.5% of GDP. *Leta*, 22.03.2022. Available at: <<https://www.leta.lv/eng/home/important/04ACB9A4-5BA7-4576-A50D-AC1A9220B61C/>>. Accessed on: 10.07.2022.

<sup>94</sup> LITHUANIA raises defence spending to 2.52 percent of GDP. *LRT*, 17.03.2022. Available at: <<https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1647017/lithuania-raises->

and Poland<sup>95</sup> raising their military budgets. Several NATO members have been providing Ukraine with a range of economic resources, weapons and military equipment. It is difficult to imagine that Russian elites had not expected such reactions beforehand.

The invasion also offered a *raison d'être* for NATO, a legitimization for its post-Cold War existence: if before 2014 the “Russian threat” was an anachronism from the Cold War era and NATO lacked a real “enemy” that could provide significant cohesiveness among its members, recent bellicose policies by Moscow have been filling this vacuum. For European states (especially Eastern ones), there is no doubt that the alliance is a fundamental instrument for protecting their independence and sovereignty against potential expansionist ambitions by Putin. As evidence of this trend, Chart 2 (in the Appendix of Charts) shows a sharp decrease in favorable views of Russia among NATO members, breaking negative records: in Poland, these views plummeted to 2% in 2022. Conversely, favorable views of NATO increased significantly in major member states, such as in Germany (from 59% in 2021 to 70% in 2022) and the UK (from 66% to 74%) as one can see in Chart 3. Positive attitudes toward economic and military support to Ukraine, as well as the adoption of sanctions against Russia (despite its economic costs), remain high in several European countries.<sup>96</sup>

Just as the US interventionist policy in the Cold War left resentment and suspicion in Latin America, the Soviet/Russian interventionist policy fostered animosity in Eastern Europe, which explains at least in part the decision of many states to seek NATO membership. Sporadic statements by Russian nationalists and the “Russian World” doctrine (the idea that Russia must protect ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking minorities abroad) have heightened suspicions in countries with significant shares of ethnic Russians, such as Estonia and Latvia. Other states that historically maintained a position of military neutrality, like Finland and Sweden, are now applying for

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[defence-spending-to-2-52-percent-of-gdp](#)>. Accessed on: 10.07.2022.

<sup>95</sup> POLAND to ramp up defence spending, army as Ukraine war rages. Reuters, 03.03.2022. Available at: <<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/poland-ramp-up-defence-spending-army-ukraine-war-rages-2022-03-03/>>. Accessed on: 10.07.2022.

<sup>96</sup> EUROPEAN Parliament. Eurobarometer. Public opinion on the war in Ukraine (December 8, 2022). Available at: <<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2022/public-opinion-on-the-war-in-ukraine/en-public-opinion-on-the-war-in-ukraine-20221208.pdf>>. Accessed on: 04.01.2023.

Kumar, Nikhil and Labbate, Mariana. The war in Ukraine brought the West together. For the rest of the world, it's complicated. Grid, 14.11.2022. Available at: <<https://www.grid.news/story/global/2022/11/14/the-war-in-ukraine-brought-the-west-together-for-the-rest-of-the-world-its-complicated/>>. Accessed on: 05.01.2023.



NATO membership<sup>97</sup> – the former has an extensive border strip with Russia (near Saint Petersburg, the second largest Russian city), a large and modern army and was a victim of Russian expansionism at different historical periods. Since the onset of the invasion, public opinion in these countries, which until then had been in favor of neutrality, leaned mostly toward joining the alliance.<sup>98</sup> The feeling of mistrust and insecurity on the continent may last for decades.

If economic sanctions deepen in the long run, the West continues to seek independence from Russian oil and gas, and China (along with other countries) fails to make up for these losses, Russia's state and military capabilities may be undermined. Recent data show that European gas imports from Norway and the US have surpassed those from Russia<sup>99</sup> – its share of trade in value fell from 39,3% in 2021 to 15,0% in the third quarter of 2022. In the same vein, the share of oil imports from Russia decreased from 24,8% to 14,4%. These losses were partly compensated by the increase in the price of these commodities in the world market.<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, Moscow is losing an important bargaining tool in its relations with Europe.

In summary, there is significant evidence of a strengthening of NATO and an even greater presence near Russian borders, as a (expected) response to the invasion, which partly refutes the Kremlin's argument — propagated by many scholars from the Realist school of International Relations — that Russian action was aimed at protecting Russian borders against the alliance and keeping the European balance of power. Gains on the geopolitical front are not tangible so far.

<sup>97</sup> NATO. Finland and Sweden submit applications to join NATO. 18.05.2022. Available at: <[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_195468.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_195468.htm)>. Accessed on: 10.07.2022.

<sup>98</sup> GROWING majority of Swedes back joining NATO, opinion poll shows. Reuters, 20.04.2022. Available at: <<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/growing-majority-swedes-back-joining-nato-opinion-poll-shows-2022-04-20/>>. Accessed on: 10.07.2022.

YLE. Yle poll: Support for Nato membership soars to 76%. 09.05.2022. Available at: <<https://yle.fi/news/3-12437506>>. Accessed on: 10.07.2022.

<sup>99</sup> SHIRYAEVSKAYA, Anna. For the First Time, US Is Sending More Gas to Europe Than Russia. Bloomberg, 01.07.2022. Available at: <<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-07-01/us-lng-supplies-to-europe-overtake-russian-gas-ica-says>>. Accessed on: 10.07.2022.

<sup>100</sup> EUROSTAT. EU imports of energy products - recent developments. 12.2022. Available at: <[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=EU\\_imports\\_of\\_energy\\_products\\_-\\_recent\\_developments#Main\\_suppliers\\_of\\_natural\\_gas\\_and\\_petroleum\\_oils\\_to\\_the\\_EU](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=EU_imports_of_energy_products_-_recent_developments#Main_suppliers_of_natural_gas_and_petroleum_oils_to_the_EU)>. Accessed on: 06.01.2023.

## (b) The absence of an ultimatum to Ukraine

Russia's position in the face of NATO enlargement and Ukraine is sometimes compared to the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, when the US issued an ultimatum to the USSR: withdraw its medium and intermediate-range ballistic missiles from Cuba or face direct confrontation. Unlike this episode, Russia's representatives never issued an ultimatum to Ukraine, such as refraining from its plans for joining NATO or from its military cooperation with the alliance. On the contrary, on several occasions they reiterated that the expectation of invasion was "hysteria" by the West<sup>101</sup>, and that its military buildup near the Ukrainian border had exclusively defensive motivation. At the end of January, a representative of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared: "*For our part, we have repeatedly stated that our country will not attack anyone. We find even the thought of a war between our peoples unacceptable.*"<sup>102</sup> Volodymyr Zelensky himself raised doubts about the possibility of a full-scale invasion and claimed that the feeling of "panic" was hurting the Ukrainian economy.<sup>103</sup> Russia had carried out several maneuvers close to the Ukrainian border in recent years, so there was doubt whether there would in fact be an attack or whether the buildup was just another form of intimidation. If the real objective was to obtain official commitment from Ukraine to abstain from its plans to join NATO, the Kremlin could have issued an ultimatum with a specific date for the Ukrainian government to revise its position. At different times after the invasion, Zelensky expressed his willingness to negotiate Ukraine's military neutrality and reaffirm its non-nuclear status if effective security guarantees were given,<sup>104</sup> but Russian demands went far beyond the NATO issue, involving the recognition of the Crimean Peninsula as a Russian territory, the

<sup>101</sup> ISTERIYA na Zapade o "vtorzhenii" Rossii vyzyvayet udvleniye, zayavil Lavrov [The hysteria in the West over the "invasion" by Russia is surprising, declared Lavrov]. RIA Novosti, 16.02.2022. Available at: <<https://ria.ru/20220216/lavrov-1773105900.html>>. Accessed on: 08.06.2022.

<sup>102</sup> CHERNYSHOVA, Elena. Moskva zayavila o nedopustimosti «dazhe mysli» o voyne s Ukrainoy [Moscow declared the inadmissibility of "even the thought" of a war with Ukraine]. RBC, 27.01.2022. Available at: <<https://www.rbc.ru/politics/27/01/2022/61f296ec9a794785fb8175af>>. Accessed on: 07.06.2022.

<sup>103</sup> DETTMER, Jamie. Kiyev i NATO razoshlis' vo mneniyakh po povodu neizbezhnosti rossiyskogo napadeniya [Kyiv and NATO disagreed over the inevitability of a Russian attack]. Golos Ameriki, 30.01.2022. Available at: <<https://www.golosameriki.com/a/ukraine-nato-differ-on-imminence-of-russian-attack/6418277.html>>. Accessed on: 07.06.2022.

independence of Donbas, the imprecise objective of Ukraine's "denazification" and the annexation of new territories.

### (c) The scope of Russia's demands

Shortly before the invasion, the Kremlin had presented a list of demands to the United States in order to ensure compliance with the principle of "indivisible security."<sup>105</sup> In addition to not enlarging the alliance and not installing military systems close to Russian borders, there was one item that would certainly not be accepted by NATO member states — the return of the military infrastructure of the alliance to the status of 1997, when the NATO-Russia Founding Act was signed.<sup>106</sup> Judging by later events, Ukraine's fate was at the mercy of requirements far beyond Kyiv's reach and the Kremlin knew in advance that its demands would never be accepted by NATO members.

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<sup>104</sup> FURSEEV, Ilya. Zelenskiy zayavil o gotovnosti govorit' s Rossiyei o neytral'nom statute [Zelensky announced his readiness to talk with Russia about neutral status]. RBC, 25.02.2022. Available at: <<https://www.rbc.ru/politics/25/02/2022/62180a5b9a79475fd50ff949>>. Accessed on: 09.06.2022.

V OFISE Zelenskogo zayavili, chto Ukraina obsudit neytralitet pri garantiyakh bezopasnosti [Zelensky's cabinet declared that Ukraine will discuss neutrality with security guarantees]. TASS, 09.03.2022. Available at: <<https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/14015105>>. Accessed on: 09.06.2022.

KROPMAN, Vitaliy. Prezident Ukrainy dal bol'shoye interv'yu rossiyskim zhurnalistam [The President of Ukraine gave a long interview to Russian journalists]. Deutsche Welle, 27.03.2022. Available at: <<https://www.dw.com/ru/prezident-ukrainy-dal-bolshoe-intervju-rossijskim-zhurnalistam/a-61275001>>. Accessed on: 09.06.2022.

DUBENKO, Vadim. My gotovy poyti na neytralitet i bez'yadernyy status — Zelenskiy [We are ready to pursue neutrality and the nuclear-free status – Zelensky]. Zerkalo Nedeli, 27.03.2022. Available at: <<https://zn.ua/POLITICS/my-hotovy-pojtinga-nejtralitet-i-bezjadernyj-status-zelenskij.html>>. Accessed on: 09.06.2022.

<sup>105</sup> MINISTRY of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. Dogovor mezhdru Rossiyskoy Federatsiyey i Soyedinennymi Shtatami Ameriki o garantiyakh bezopasnosti [Treaty between the Russian Federation and the United States of America on Security Guarantees]. 17.12.2021. Available at: <[https://mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/rso/nato/1790818/](https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rso/nato/1790818/)>. Accessed on: 10.07.2022.

<sup>106</sup> PUTIN: Zapad proignoriroval printsipial'nyye trebovaniya RF v otvetakh po bezopasnosti [Putin: West ignored Russia's fundamental demands on security responses]. TASS, 01.02.2022. Available at: <<https://tass.ru/politika/13586841>>. Accessed on: 10.07.2022.

#### (d) The little prospect of Ukraine joining NATO

Although the objective of joining NATO was written into the Ukrainian constitution in 2019<sup>107</sup> and military cooperation with the alliance was boosted after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, there were no indications that Ukraine was close to realizing it, at least in the short and medium terms. As early as the beginning of the 2000s, part of the Ukrainian elites had expressed their intention to join the alliance. In 2008, during the pro-Western government of Viktor Yushchenko, NATO officials announced at the Bucharest Summit that Georgia and Ukraine would eventually become members.<sup>108</sup> Progress in this direction, however, has not been significant. In addition to carrying out political reforms, one of the admission criteria is to enhance the alliance security prospects.<sup>109</sup> It would be difficult for the thirty member countries to consent to the membership of a state involved in an indirect conflict with a nuclear power since 2014, what could further bring insecurity and instability to the organization. According to Article 5 of the 1949 NATO Treaty, *"if a NATO Ally is the victim of an armed attack, each and every other member of the Alliance will consider this act of violence as an armed attack against all members and will take the actions it deems necessary to assist the Ally attacked"*.<sup>110</sup>

In practice, by intervening in Crimea and Donbas, Russia pressured Ukraine toward NATO, but at the same time obtained a tacit veto to its entry (though formally the alliance does not recognize that an external player can constrain its "open door" policy). In 2021 the Ukrainian minister of Foreign Affairs, Dmytro Kuleba, sharply criticized the fact that little progress had

<sup>107</sup> PARLIAMENT of Ukraine (Rada). U «Vidomostyakh Verkhovnoyi Rady Ukrainy» opublikovanyy Zakon pro vnesennya zmin do Konstytutsiyi Ukrainy shchodo stratehichnoho kursu derzhavy na nabuttya povnopravnoho chlenstva Ukrainy v YeS ta NATO [The Law on Amendments to the Constitution of Ukraine on the strategic course of the State towards full membership of Ukraine in the EU and NATO was published in the "Journal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine]. 07.03.2022. Available at: <<https://www.rada.gov.ua/news/Novyny/168096.html>>. Accessed on: 10.07.2022.

<sup>108</sup> NATO. Bucharest Summit Declaration. 03.04.2008. Available at: <[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_8443.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm)>. Accessed on: 07.07.2022.

<sup>109</sup> CHADWICK, Lauren. How do you join NATO and how close is Ukraine to becoming a member? Euronews, 18.02.2022. Available at: <<https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/02/18/how-do-you-join-nato-and-how-close-is-ukraine-to-becoming-a-member>>. Accessed on: 07.07.2022.

<sup>110</sup> NATO. Collective defence and Article 5. 20.09.2022. Available at: <[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_110496.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_110496.htm)>. Accessed on: 06.01.2023.

been made since 2008.<sup>111</sup> The country obtained the Enhanced Opportunities Partner status in 2020, which allows access to military exercises and information sharing,<sup>112</sup> but the main entry mechanism, the Membership Action Plan (MAP), has not yet been offered. From MAP status to effective membership there is a long way to go, in which several political and military reform criteria must be met. Scholars such as Daniel Treisman consider that, despite NATO's declarations, Ukraine and Georgia were not on the path to membership.<sup>113</sup> Zelensky later admitted that there was no real prospect of joining it.<sup>114</sup> On the eve of the invasion, therefore, there was no indication that NATO enlargement toward Ukraine was a feasible possibility in the short and medium terms.

### **(e) Other negotiation alternatives**

If the real intention was to contain NATO, Putin could have resorted to a series of measures (even based on hard power) that would be less costly, less controversial and potentially more effective. As an example, he could have used Europe's dependence on Russian gas as a bargaining tool, threatened to increase the military presence in the Kaliningrad exclave or expand military cooperation projects with allies close to US borders, such as Cuba and Venezuela, or even with China and other countries antagonistic to the West. He could also have issued an ultimatum to Ukraine and threatened to annex the Donbas territories that in fact were already under his control.

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<sup>111</sup> KULEBA, Dmytro. Why is Ukraine still not in NATO? Atlantic Council, 16.02.2021. Available at: <<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/why-is-ukraine-still-not-in-nato/>>. Accessed on: 07.07.2022.

UKRAINE Unhappy With Lack Of Progress In Joining NATO As Kyiv Is Not Invited To Summit. RFERL, 26.05.2021. Available at: <<https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-nato--summit-kivy-not-invited-kuleba-lack-progress-membership/31275358.html>>. Accessed on: 07.07.2022.

<sup>112</sup> NATO. NATO recognises Ukraine as Enhanced Opportunities Partner. 12.06.2020. Available at: <[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_176327.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_176327.htm)>. Accessed on: 07.07.2022.

<sup>113</sup> WAS NATO Enlargement a Mistake? Foreign Affairs Asks the Experts. Foreign Affairs, 19.04.2022. Available at: <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ask-the-experts/2022-04-19/was-nato-enlargement-mistake>>. Accessed on: 08.06.2022.

<sup>114</sup> ZELENS'KYI: yakshcho zavtra nam zaproponuyut' vstupyty v NATO - budemo vstupyty. Ale ts'oho ne bude. [Zelensky: If tomorrow we are offered NATO membership, we will join. But that won't happen]. Evropeyska Pravda, 05.04.2022. Available at: <<https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/news/2022/04/5/7137248/>>. Accessed on: 07.07.2022.

The resolution of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis involved this kind of bargain: the Soviets withdrew medium and intermediate-range ballistic missiles from Cuba, while the US withdrew its ballistic missiles from Turkey. Whether these measures would be successful is uncertain, but they would certainly be less costly than the full-scale invasion. Furthermore, Putin has a close relationship with some “strong men” inside NATO, such as Viktor Orban in Hungary and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey. These ties could be eventually used to block Ukraine’s accession to NATO.

## II. The “just war” against the “genocide” in Donbas and the protection of the Russian-speaking population in eastern Ukraine

The protection of Ukraine’s Russian speaking population in the east and in the Donbas region was another paramount argument pointed out by Russian elites for launching the “special military operation.”<sup>115</sup> In Russia, there is a widespread view (promoted by the Kremlin ideologues) that the Donbas region has been suffering a genocide for eight years, neglected by the West, and that Ukraine is now paying the price for this violence. A well-known Russian journalist stated that formally the war in Donbas (2014-) is an internal Ukrainian problem, but in practice it is a Russian problem. In his words (as Russian values advocate), “we do not abandon our own.”<sup>116</sup> Before discussing the reasons for why this, in my opinion, was not Putin’s real main motivation, I present a brief history of the 2014 conflict.

For purposes of simplification, Ukraine is divided into two macro-regions: west and east. The west, which had been part of different European states, has historically been inclined toward integration with Europe and presented a more negative view of Russia and the Soviet past, in addition to the predominant use of the Ukrainian language. The east, on the other hand, was part of the Russian Empire for an extended period and is characterized by a higher diffusion of the Russian language (even among ethnic Ukrainians), a greater concentration of ethnic Russians, a more positive view

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<sup>115</sup> LEVADA-CENTER. Konflikt s Ukrainoy [Conflict against Ukraine]. 31.03.2022. Available at: <<https://www.levada.ru/2022/03/31/konflikt-s-ukrainoj/>>. Accessed on: 03.06.2022.

<sup>116</sup> SADULAYEV, German. Svoikh ne brosayem: pro yevraziyskiye interesy i tsennosti. Za chto Rossiya vstupila v bor'bu, tsennosti geroyev Marvel i Marii Zakharovoy [We do not abandon our own: about Eurasian interests and values. Why Russia joined the fight, the values of the heroes of Marvel and Maria Zakharova]. VN News, 21.03.2022. Available at: <<https://vnnews.ru/svoikh-ne-brosaem-pro-evraziyskie-inte/>>. Accessed on: 01.09.2022.

toward the Soviet past and (before 2014) a greater inclination toward integration with Russia.<sup>117</sup> There is also an economic divide — the agricultural west and the industrial east. Some of the identity symbols and national heroes worshiped in the West were viewed with aversion in the East and vice versa. This historical polarization in the national identity between a Ukrainophile west and a Russophile east gained strength in the post-Soviet period, mainly in the 2000s, and ended up being reflected in the electoral-party system.<sup>118</sup> As a result, the country has experienced alternations of power between pro-Russian and pro-Western elites.

In late 2013 the polarization reached its peak when pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich refused to sign a trade deal that could facilitate Ukraine's entry into the European Union. Crowds gathered in protests in the capital Kyiv, a movement that became known as Euromaidan. The EU issue was the trigger for the mobilization, but the Yanukovich government was highly unpopular for a number of reasons.<sup>119</sup> After weeks, the protests acquired violent contours, with the murder of demonstrators and police officials, which culminated in the overthrow of the president and his escape to Russia. The participation of ultranationalist groups from the western regions (an issue addressed in the next section) in the radicalization of the movement caused fear in the east. Russia took advantage of these animosities to annex the Crimean Peninsula (a region with high concentration of ethnic Russians) in March 2014, and to promote an armed separatist movement in Donbas, specifically in parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Due to Russia's active role in the crisis, there is a debate about the nature of the conflict in Donbas. Some authors point to domestic sources, especially the reaction of part of the local population to the violent overthrow of a legitimately elected government,<sup>120</sup> nostalgia for the Soviet past and the regional elites' interest in economic relations with Russia.<sup>121</sup> Other observers (and the Ukrainian elites) emphasize the external elements and consider that

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<sup>117</sup> There were also intense family ties and commercial interchanges.

<sup>118</sup> WAY, L. *Pluralism by Default: Weak Autocrats and the Rise of Competitive Politics*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015.

<sup>119</sup> Among them, corruption, authoritarianism (imprisonment of opponents), co-optation of Constitutional Court judges and the revision of the 2004 agreement that had strengthened the parliament.

<sup>120</sup> KUDELIA, S. *Domestic Sources of the Donbas Insurgency*. PONARS Eurasia, 29 set. 2014.

<sup>121</sup> GIULIANO, E. *The Social Bases of Support for Self-determination in East Ukraine*. *Ethnopolitics*, v. 14, n. 5, p. 513–522, 20 out. 2015.

ZHUKOV, Y. M. *Trading hard hats for combat helmets: The economics of rebellion in eastern Ukraine*. *Journal of Comparative Economics*, v. 44, n. 1, p. 1–15, fev. 2016.

this is not a conventional separatist war, but rather an invasion,<sup>122</sup> since some of the main leaders of the movement were Russian citizens.<sup>123</sup> Russian nationalists directly participated in the combats, and there was direct economic and military support from the Kremlin, without which such armed groups would not have managed to control Donbas. Local activists were not influential from a military point of view, but were very useful as a political instrument<sup>124</sup> to legitimize Moscow's claim that it was a "separatist" or "civil" conflict. The Kremlin propaganda addresses the issue as an internal Ukrainian crisis, a conflict between "neo-Nazi Ukrainians" (encouraged by the West) against oppressed Russian-speaking minorities and ethnic Russians.

In order to regain control over Donbas, the new Ukrainian authorities launched the so-called "Anti-Terrorist Operation" (ATO), promoting frequent shelling that hit civilian urban areas<sup>125</sup> and led to the further alienation of the region. From 2014 to July 2021, the war left around 14,000 dead, including 3,901 civilians, 4,200 Ukrainian military servicemen and 5,800 members of Russian-backed armed groups.<sup>126</sup> Over 3 million citizens abandoned the region.<sup>127</sup> There were civilian casualties on both sides, but the separatist-held regions, more densely populated and closer to the front, saw significantly more deaths.<sup>128</sup> Russia accused the West of ignoring

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<sup>122</sup> Oleksiy Haran is among leading Ukrainian political scientists who advocate this perspective.

<sup>123</sup> UMLAND, A. In Defense of Conspirology: A Rejoinder to Serhiy Kudelia's Anti-Political Analysis of the Hybrid War in Eastern Ukraine. PONARS Eurasia, 30 set. 2014.

<sup>124</sup> WILSON, A. The Donbas in 2014: Explaining Civil Conflict Perhaps, but not Civil War. *Europe-Asia Studies*, v. 68, n. 4, p. 631–652, 20 abr. 2016.

<sup>125</sup> HEAVY shelling hits centre of rebel-held Donetsk. *France 24*, 14.08.2014. Available at: <<https://www.france24.com/en/20140814-ukraine-heavy-shelling-hits-donetsk-city-centre-first-time>>. Accessed on: 07.07.2022.

WALSH, N., SMITH-SPARK, L. Bodies in streets as shelling rocks Ukraine city of Donetsk. *CNN*, 30.01.2015. Available at: <<https://edition.cnn.com/2015/01/30/europe/ukraine-crisis/index.html>>. Accessed on: 07.07.2022.

<sup>126</sup> RADIO Svoboda. OON pidrakhuvava kil'kist' zhrtv boyovykh diy na Donbasi, pochynayuchy z 2014 roku [The UN has counted the number of victims of hostilities in Donbas since 2014]. 15.07.2021. Available in: <<https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-un-donbas-vtraty-gertvy/31359458.html>>. Accessed on: 07.01.2023.

<sup>127</sup> Detailed number and sources provided on next pages.

<sup>128</sup> CRISIS Group International. Visualising the Dynamics of Combat and Negotiations in Donbas. 03.08.2021 (atualizado em fevereiro de 2022). Available at:



the Ukrainian attacks and claimed that Kyiv was promoting genocide.<sup>129</sup> Meanwhile, the armed groups backed by Russia also attacked civilian areas on several occasions<sup>130</sup> and tried to conquer other parts of Donbas that were under Ukrainian control, such as Mariupol — an objective partially achieved with the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022. Local communities close to the front contact line have been facing a context of daily violence and crossfire since 2014.<sup>131</sup>

Despite the fact that the Ukrainian government's attempts to retake Donbas have caused civilian deaths and a high number of displaced people, reducing the prospects of reintegrating the region into Ukraine and causing grievances in the local population and in Russian society, in my opinion there are three reasons why the protection of minorities and humanitarian concerns were not among Putin's main motivations for the 2022 invasion.

Firstly, when one observes the variation in the dynamics of the conflict, it is remarkable that the most intense moment was the initial phase (2014-2015), with a higher concentration of casualties (chart 4). From 2018 to 2021, there was a significant reduction in the intensity of fighting.<sup>132</sup> In the months leading up to the invasion, the number of occurrences and casualties had been experiencing a notable drop, apparently seasonal (chart 5). Contrary to the Kremlin's arguments, there were no indications that Ukraine was planning a broad military retake of Donbas. The mass evacuation of Donbas citizens to Russia in the weeks before the February invasion, under the pretext of an imminent full attack by the Ukrainian army, was perceived as a

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<<https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/eastern-europe/ukraine/visualising-dynamics-combat-and-negotiations-donbas>>. Accessed on: 08.07.2022.

<sup>129</sup> WEST'S "blind eye" policy towards shelling in Donbass can provoke Kiev attack — diplomat. TASS, 20.02.2021. Available at: <<https://tass.com/politics/1406781>>. Accessed on: 08.07.2022.

<sup>130</sup> HARDING, L., WALKER, S., HARRISON, E. Shelling by Russian-backed separatists raises tensions in east Ukraine. The Guardian, 17.02.2022. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/17/shelling-by-russian-backed-separatists-hits-school-in-east-ukraine>>. Accessed on: 08.07.2022.

SHELLING Strikes Two Schools In Eastern Ukraine, Including Kindergarten. RFERL, 17.02.2022. Available at: <<https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-ukraine-donbass-rubivka-shelling/31708351.html>>. Accessed on: 08.07.2022.

<sup>131</sup> GONCHARUK, Tatiana. Donbas: "We're used to the shelling". Open democracy, 28.07.2017. Available at: <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/donbas-we-re-used-to-shelling/>>. Accessed on: 08.07.2022.

<sup>132</sup> CRISIS Group International. Conflict in Ukraine's Donbas: A Visual Explainer. 02.2022. Available at: <<https://www.crisisgroup.org/content/conflict-ukraines-donbas-visual-explainer>>. Accessed on: 08.07.2022.

blatant “false flag operation.”<sup>133</sup>

If the invasion were motivated by a humanitarian concern for the population of Donbas, it is doubtful why Moscow did not take this decision in the most intense period of the conflict, but only in a phase of significant reduction of its intensity. Moscow opted to mobilize its control over Donbas’ armed groups as a bargaining tool in its relations with Ukraine from 2014 to 2021.

Secondly, the “humanitarianism” of Putin’s foreign policy contradicts the results of his “special military operation” on Ukrainian territory so far. According to official data from the United Nations, in ten months of war almost 7,000 civilians were killed,<sup>134</sup> a toll higher than the number of civilian deaths (near 4,000) in eight years of war in Donbas, not counting the number of wounded and disabled people, or the tens of thousands of casualties among Ukrainian and Russian soldiers. Of this total, over 3,500 civilians were killed in areas of Donbas including those with a predominance of Russian-speaking population (chart 6). Therefore, Putin’s action to protect the “Russian World” has so far inflicted more damage exactly in the Russian-speaking regions. According to the Kremlin’s double-standard approach, the civilian casualties resulting from the attempts by the Ukrainian state to regain control of part of its territory correspond to a genocide, but the civilian casualties (in that same region) occasioned by its own actions are only collateral effects justified by “legitimate” ends.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, has expressed concerns that the Russian armed forces are not respecting international humanitarian law, by causing daily civilian casualties, extensive destruction of urban infrastructure, arbitrary detention, and mass displacement of civilians. She also mentioned infractions in the detentions by Ukraine.<sup>135</sup> Ukrainian authorities report casualty figures much higher<sup>136</sup> than

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<sup>133</sup> HERSZENHORN, David. Ukraine and West see false flags flying as pro-Russian separatists urge civilian evacuation. Politico, 18.02.2022. Available at: <<https://www.politico.eu/article/ukraine-west-false-flags-pro-russia-separatist-urge-civilian-evacuation/>>. Accessed on: 08.07.2022.

<sup>134</sup> UNHCR (ONU). Operational Data Portal: Ukraine Refugee Situation. 27.12.2022. Available at: <<https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-civilian-casualties-26-december-2022-enruuk>>. Accessed on: 02.01.2023.

<sup>135</sup> OHCHR (ONU). High Commissioner for Human Rights: High Numbers of Civilian Casualties in Ukraine Raise Concerns that Attacks by Russia are not Complying with International Humanitarian Law. 05.07.2022. Available at: <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/07/high-commissioner-human-rights-high-numbers-civilian-casualties-ukraine>>. Accessed on: 08.07.2022.

<sup>136</sup> KARMANAU, Y., SCHRECK, A., ANNA, C. Mariupol mayor says siege has

those of the UN and accuse Russia of having committed genocidal acts in Bucha, Irpen, Hostomel, Mariupol, Chernihiv and Kharkiv.<sup>137</sup> The humanitarian catastrophe can also be measured by the high number of civilians who had to leave their places of residence. By January 2023, around 7.9 millions refugees were recorded across Europe (since the onset of the war)<sup>138</sup> and 4.9 millions of internally displaced people were registered in Ukraine<sup>139</sup>, one of the biggest migration crises in history.

Thirdly, the Kremlin's double-standard approach is also evident when one examines how it has tackled separatism in Russia. The Ukrainian government undoubtedly bears responsibility for civilian deaths in Donbas in its attempt to regain control over the region. However, Moscow's wars to fight separatists and regain control of Chechnya left tens of thousands of civilians dead<sup>140</sup> and journalists who investigated cases of human rights violations in Chechnya were murdered.<sup>141</sup> The solution of the Chechen conflict, at high humanitarian costs, is cited by opinion polls as one of Putin's major political achievements.<sup>142</sup> Other former Soviet republics, such as

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killed more than 10K civilians. Associated Press, 11.04.2022. Available at: [https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-state-of-the-union-address-zelenskyy-biden-kyiv-7cc069b80178629a60f4f2d166348d45?fbclid=IwAR2ZV0fSOOuZJnG\\_UYw3PL4fYzd6LYQO346mdSlQBxwcz4Js13VoLfdVh0Q](https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-state-of-the-union-address-zelenskyy-biden-kyiv-7cc069b80178629a60f4f2d166348d45?fbclid=IwAR2ZV0fSOOuZJnG_UYw3PL4fYzd6LYQO346mdSlQBxwcz4Js13VoLfdVh0Q)>. Accessed on: 08.07.2022.

<sup>137</sup> UKRAINIAN forensic investigators start exhuming bodies from Bucha mass grave. Reuters, 08.04.2022. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukrainian-forensic-investigators-start-exhuming-bodies-bucha-mass-grave-2022-04-08/>>. Accessed on: 08.07.2022. BALACHUK, Irina. Na Kharkivshchyni spravzhnii henotsyd, hynut' desyatyky myrnykh – holova oblasti [There is a real genocide in the Kharkiv region, dozens of civilians are dying – governor of the region]. Ukrayinska Pravda. 28.02.2022. Available at: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2022/02/28/7326854/>>. Accessed on: 08.07.2022.

<sup>138</sup> UNHCR. Ukraine Refugee Situation. 03.01.2023. Available at: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>>. Accessed on: 07.01.2023.

<sup>139</sup> MINISTRY of Social Policy of Ukraine. Sotsial'nyy zakhyst-2022 u tsyfrakh i faktakh: Pidtrymka VPO [Social protection-2022 in figures and facts: Support for IDPs]. 04.01.2023. Available at: <https://www.msp.gov.ua/news/22495.html>>. Accessed on: 07.01.2023.

<sup>140</sup> CHECHEN official puts death toll for 2 wars at up to 160,000. The New York Times, 16.08.2005. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/16/world/europe/chechen-official-puts-death-toll-for-2-wars-at-up-to-160000.html>>. Accessed on: 11.07.2022.

<sup>141</sup> Anna Politkovskaia (2006) and Natalia Estemirova (2009).

<sup>142</sup> Levada-Center. Balans dostizhenij i neudach Putina [The balance of achievements

Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova also witnessed separatist conflicts with a high humanitarian impact and Russian direct or indirect interference.

It should be noted that the Kremlin's discourse about the protection of ethnic Russian/Russian-speaking minorities in Ukraine (the "Russian World" doctrine) is not limited to Donbas, but also addresses other regions in eastern/southern Ukraine that were historically considered "pro-Russian" and, according to Moscow, had been oppressed by nationalists and the Ukrainian state.<sup>143</sup> During the 2014 tensions, around 50 pro-Russian activists were slaughtered in the southern city of Odessa<sup>144</sup>. However, apart from this episode, there is no evidence of systematic violence against Russians and Russian-speaking communities: less than 10% claimed to have witnessed discrimination against Russians and, although phobia toward Russians has grown, it is marginal and much lower than phobia toward other ethnic minorities.<sup>145</sup> The Kremlin's argument about the oppression of Russian-speaking minorities revolves around the language issue. Despite state pressure aiming at promoting the diffusion of Ukrainian language and a regionally polarized discussion over controversial language policies,<sup>146</sup> Russian is still widely spoken. Zelensky's comedy series that propelled him politically was shown mostly in Russian. According to a survey conducted in August 2022, 13% speak Russian at home and 34% both Russian and

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and failures of Putin]. 08.04.2021. Available at:

<<https://www.levada.ru/2021/04/08/balansdostizhenij-i-neudach-putina/>>. Accessed on: 12.04.2021.

<sup>143</sup> TOKAREV, Aleksey. Pochemu Moskva ne khochet i ne budet prisoyedinyat' Donbass [Why Moscow does not want and will not annex Donbas]. *Vedomosti*, 16.05.2021. Available at: <<https://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2021/05/16/869921-moskva-donbass/>>. Accessed on: 11.07.2022.

<sup>144</sup> AMOS, H., SALEM, H. Ukraine clashes: dozens dead after Odessa building fire. *The Guardian*, 02.05.2014. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/02/ukraine-dead-odessa-building-fire/>>. Accessed on: 11.07.2022.

<sup>145</sup> Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (NAN). Dodatok: tablytsi monitorynhovoho opytuvannya "Ukrayins'ke suspil'stvo - 2018" [Monitored poll tables "Ukrainian Society - 2018"]. NAN, Ukrayiny, 2018. Available at: <<https://i-soc.com.ua/ua/edition/ukrainske-suspilstvo/issues/>>. Accessed on: 20.05.2022.

<sup>146</sup> CHABARAY, Hanna. Po rusyfikovanykh mistakh. Shcho ukrayintsi dumayut' pro movnyy zakon ta «utysky rosiys'komovnykh». [In Russified cities. What Ukrainians Think About Language Law and "Oppression of Russophones"]. *Tyzhden*, 15.09.2020. Available at: <<https://tyzhden.ua/Society/247731/>>. Accessed on: 11.07.2022.

Ukrainian.<sup>147</sup>

Ultranationalist groups are more of a threat to minorities like the Roma than to ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking groups — indeed, they have Russian-speaking members and Russian is sometimes used as a *lingua franca* by them.<sup>148</sup> The fact that Russia has faced strong resistance from Russian-speaking eastern and southern regions shows that the language issue does not stimulate an automatic loyalty to the Russian state and Putin's expansionist ambitions; possibly, Moscow did not expect this reaction from the local population. Even in Donbas, solidarity with the "Russian World" in 2014 was ambiguous. Around 1.7 million inhabitants took refuge in Russia,<sup>149</sup> but another 1.4 million took refuge in other parts of Ukraine.<sup>150</sup> Public opinion polls in early 2014 showed that only 29% of the local population supported separatism.<sup>151</sup>

Putin's war has contributed to overcoming the historical national

<sup>147</sup> RATING Group. Simnadsyate zahal'nonatsional'ne opytuvannya: Identychnist'. Patriotyzm. Tsinnosti (17-18 serpnia 2022) [XVII National Survey: Identity. Patriotism. Values (August 17 to 18, 2022)]. 23.08.2022. Available at: <[https://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/s\\_mnadcyate\\_zagalnonac\\_onalne\\_opytuvannya\\_dentichn\\_st\\_patr\\_otizm\\_c\\_nnost\\_17-18\\_serpnia\\_2022.html](https://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/s_mnadcyate_zagalnonac_onalne_opytuvannya_dentichn_st_patr_otizm_c_nnost_17-18_serpnia_2022.html)>. Accessed on: 07.01.2023.

<sup>148</sup> WALKER, Shaun. Azov fighters are Ukraine's greatest weapon and may be its greatest threat. The Guardian, 10.09.2014. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/10/azov-far-right-fighters-ukraine-neo-nazis>>. Accessed on: 11.07.2022.

<sup>149</sup> OKOLO 1,7 mln ukrainsev s 2014 goda obratilis' k RF za ubezhishchem [About 1.7 million Ukrainians have applied to asylum in Russia since 2014]. Izvestiya, 09.06.2021. Available at: <<https://iz.ru/1176313/2021-06-09/okolo-17-mln-ukraintcev-s-2014-goda-obratilis-k-rf-za-ubezhishchem>>. Accessed on: 11.07.2022.

<sup>150</sup> MINISTRY of Social Policy (MSP) of Ukraine. Oblikovano 1 473 650 vnurishn'o peremishchenykh osib [1.473.650 internally displaced people were counted]. 06.07.2021. Available at: <<https://www.msp.gov.ua/news/20309.html>>. Accessed on: 11.07.2022.

Pereselentsi v Ukrayini: skil'ky yikh i v yakykh oblastiakh zareyestrovani. Slovo i Dilo, 29.07.2021. Available at: <<https://www.slovoidilo.ua/2021/07/29/infografika/suspilstvo/pereselenci-ukrayini-skilky-yix-yakyx-oblastyax-zareyestrovani>>. Accessed on: 11.07.2022.

<sup>151</sup> GIULIANO, E. Who supported separatism in Donbas? Ethnicity and popular opinion at the start of the Ukraine crisis. Post-Soviet Affairs, v. 34, n. 2–3, p. 158–178, 04.05.2018. About 15% expressed uncertainty and 52% were opposed. At the same time, 40% supported the adoption of a federal structure, 68% opposed radical nationalists and stated that the Right Sector party was a threat, as well as 68% defended Ukraine's entry into the Customs Union, an economic bloc promoted by Russia.

identity polarization between a pro-Russian east and a pro-EU/NATO west.<sup>152</sup> After 2014, positive attitudes toward Russia dropped significantly, while support for NATO membership, hitherto low, grew substantially (Chart 7). This is due, in part, to the fact that the most Russophile regions have fallen out of Ukrainian control, but also to a growing perception of Russia as an aggressor state, even in the east. Just after the February 2022 invasion, support for joining NATO reached a record 76% of the population (Chart 8). In the east, despite having recorded a lower percentage (55%), only 16% did not support the measure.<sup>153</sup>

The current war may provoke long-term effects on the relations between Ukraine and Russia. Resentment and animosity resulting from collective social traumas impact the very national identity and perceptions about the “other.” Anti-Russian tendencies, which gained momentum with the Russian aggression from 2014 onward, have been reinforced since February 2022. Between 2014 and 2019, the number of Russian-speaking schools was reduced from 621 to 194 and this trend has continued.<sup>154</sup> Accusations that Russia promotes the “genocide of the Ukrainian people” and discussions on the need to “decolonize” and “de-Russify” Ukraine have gained resonance. Russian and Soviet street names, monuments, and symbols have been replaced. The study of Russian literature in schools has been questioned. Classical Russian authors are being considered instruments of an

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<sup>152</sup> AREL, D. How Ukraine has become more Ukrainian. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, v. 34, n. 2–3, p. 186–189, 2018.

FERRARO, Vicente. A Guerra na Ucrânia: uma análise do conflito e de seus impactos nas sociedades russa e ucraniana [The War in Ukraine: An analysis of the conflict and its impacts on Russian and Ukrainian societies]. *Conjuntura Austral: Journal of the Global South*, v. 13, n. 64, p. 25–50, 2022. Available at: <https://www.seer.ufrgs.br/index.php/ConjunturaAustral/article/view/128157>. Accessed on: 04.01.2023.

<sup>153</sup> RATING Group. Zahal’nonatsional’ne opytuvannya: Ukrayina v umovakh viyny (1 bereznya 2022) [National survey: Ukraine in the conditions of war (March 1, 2022)]. Available at: [https://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/obschenacionalnyy\\_opros\\_ukraina\\_v\\_usloviyah\\_voyny\\_1\\_marta\\_2022.html?fbclid=IwAR2LvNLxicdO00IdLoQF3NvHPpAfi7PbbV2GjIHv2IzTSinKBF74u6Gzfz4I](https://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/obschenacionalnyy_opros_ukraina_v_usloviyah_voyny_1_marta_2022.html?fbclid=IwAR2LvNLxicdO00IdLoQF3NvHPpAfi7PbbV2GjIHv2IzTSinKBF74u6Gzfz4I)>. Accessed on: 11.07.2022.

<sup>154</sup> SHCHUR, M. HORBATENKO, S. Mayzhe 200 tysyach uchniv pereyshly na ukrayins’ku, i tse nezvorotn’o – movnyy ombudsmen [Almost 200,000 students have switched to Ukrainian, and that is irreversible - linguistic ombudsman]. *Radio Svoboda*, 03.09.2020. Available at: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/mayzhe-200-tysyach-uchniv-pereyshly-na-ukrayins%CA%B9ku-i-tse-nezvorotn%CA%B9o-movnyy-ombudsmen/30817619.html>>. Accessed on: 12.07.2022.

“imperial culture,” since on their works there is exaltation of the Russian Empire’s territorial conquests.<sup>155</sup> The proponents of these measures argue that Russian was disseminated by colonial policies with the repression of the Ukrainian language. Thus, the adoption of laws and efforts to disseminate the latter are conceived as an affirmative action policy and positive discrimination. The limits of “decolonization,” however, risk being blurred by Russophobia, affecting the rights of minorities. There are records of discrimination against internally displaced persons from the east.<sup>156</sup> Today, less than 10% of the population corresponds to ethnic Russians, but the identity issue in the country is still complex, involving linguistic, regional, historical and economic cleavages that are not necessarily congruent. The division between a Russian-speaking east and a Ukrainian-speaking west is a simplified abstraction of that reality.

### III. The "just war" against Nazism

The “denazification” of Ukraine was another pretext widely mobilized by the Kremlin to justify its bellicose policies. Nearly 20% of Russians point to “denazification” as a fundamental reason for starting the “special military operation”, the third most mentioned justification.<sup>157</sup> Three elements have facilitated Moscow’s instrumentalization of this narrative: the identity policy of Ukraine’s central government, especially after the Orange Revolution in 2004; the performance of ultranationalist parties in some political events; and the formation of paramilitary groups, with neo-Nazi members, during the Donbas War of 2014 onward.

Since the mid-2000s, Ukrainian identity politics has been exalting the figure of some controversial historical personalities, such as the fighters of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). These groups fought for Ukraine’s independence

<sup>155</sup> BERKOVSKIY, Vladislav. Henotsyd – tse nevid'yemne zavdannya suchasnoyi rosiys'koyi kul'tury [Genocide is an integral task of modern Russian culture]. *Ukrayinska Pravda*, 13.07.2022. Available at: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/columns/2022/07/13/7357778/>>. Accessed on: 14.07.2022.

<sup>156</sup> SEREDA, Evhen. Yak v Ukrayini zhyvut' pereselentsi. Rozpovidayemo v tsyfrakh. [How displaced people live in Ukraine. We inform in numbers]. *Ukrayinska Pravda*, 05.07.2020. Available at: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2020/07/5/7257986/>>. Accessed on: 06.07.2022.

<sup>157</sup> LEVADA-CENTER. Konflikt s Ukrainoy [Conflict against Ukraine]. 31.03.2022. Available at: <https://www.levada.ru/2022/03/31/konflikt-s-ukrainoj/>>. Accessed on: 03.06.2022.

from the USSR and against Germany in the 1940s-50s, but some of their members collaborated with the Nazi occupation and participated in massacres of Poles and Jews. One such controversial leader was Stepan Bandera, who in 2010 was posthumously awarded the title “Hero of Ukraine” by then-pro-Western President Viktor Yushchenko — the decision was later overturned by the pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich. Overall, UPA fighters are seen in Ukraine’s western regions as heroes in the struggle for national independence and in the east as radical nationalists and Nazi collaborators. Just as in Russia there is a romanticization/idealization of Stalin’s image (in which his role in the defeat of Nazism is exalted while facts such as his relationship with Nazis before the invasion, draconian repression, mass torture and detentions, deportations of ethnic minorities and massacres are ignored or relativized), in Ukraine there is a similar situation with the UPA. Its links with Nazism and massacres are downplayed (sometimes even denied) and its struggle for independence exalted. The national identity polarization between east and west gained strength with these controversial topics and Moscow’s propaganda. The Kremlin associated the rehabilitation of the UPA with a process of “nazification” of the country – its propaganda machine often uses the term *banderovtsy* (Banderites, associated with Stepan Bandera) to refer not only to ultranationalist groups, but also to any group promoting Ukrainian identity from pro-Western/anti-Russian positions dissociated from Russia. In this regional identity polarization, stereotypes of a “Nazi” west and a “separatist” or “traitor” east (Russia’s “fifth column” of collaborators in Ukraine) gained currency.<sup>158</sup>

From the second half of the 2000s onward, the performance of ultranationalists, including neo-Nazis (albeit few in number), contributed to deepen this regional polarization. They were present majorly in the right-wing *Svoboda* (Liberty) party, whose electoral representation was until then low, with less than 1% of the electoral results. In the 2012 parliamentary elections, due to its strong opposition to President Viktor Yanukovich,<sup>159</sup> the party reached 10% of the electorate (37 seats from 450). Although the 2013-2014 Euromaidan movement counted on protesters from different ideological spectrums and social groups, leaders of *Svoboda* and another ultranationalist group, *Pravyi Sektor* (Right Sector), took part in the radicalization of the movement and the overthrow of Yanukovich. A former member and founder of the *Svoboda* party, Andriy Parubiy, was later appointed to high posts in the national security sector and in the Ukrainian parliament.<sup>160</sup> Such facts

<sup>158</sup> There are several regional pejorative terms such as *ukronazi*, *mankurty* and *separiy*.

<sup>159</sup> SHEKHOVTSOV, A.; UMLAND, A. Ukraine’s Radical Right. *Journal of Democracy*, v. 25, n. 3, p. 58–63, 2014, p.62.

<sup>160</sup> Andriy Parubiy was secretary of the National Security and Defense Council



facilitated the diffusion of the Kremlin's narrative that Euromaidan was a coup d'état promoted by neo-Nazis ("ukronazis") and a "fascist junta," which generated apprehension in parts of Ukraine's eastern Russian-speaking and Russophile population, facilitating the annexation of Crimea and the Russian interference in Donbas. *Svoboda's* performance did not last: in the 2014 elections: it obtained 4.71% of the votes (6 seats in 450), and in the 2019 elections, in coalition with other extremist parties such as *Pravyi Sektor* and the *Natsionalnyi korpus* (National Corps), only 2.15% (1 seat).<sup>161</sup>

Contrary to the Russian narrative that Ukraine is controlled by Nazis, the recent low performance of far-right parties reveals that ultranationalist ideas have low adherence in society, even in the face of external aggression and the (propitious to nationalism and radicalism) war that the country has been suffering since 2014. A survey by the Pew Research Center<sup>162</sup> shows that the incidence of phobia toward Jews in Ukraine is one of the lowest in Eastern Europe, much lower than in Russia; President Volodymyr Zelensky himself is of Jewish origin. The rates of xenophobia also did not show substantial variations in recent years,<sup>163</sup> although the number of registered cases of discrimination has seen significant growth.<sup>164</sup> The change may be associated both with a greater incidence of discrimination and a greater activity of the institutions that fight these crimes.

Regarding the performance of ultranationalist paramilitary groups with neo-Nazi elements, at least two stood out since the 2014 war in Donbas

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(RNBO) in 2014 and speaker of the parliament (the *Verkhovna Rada*) from 2016 to 2019.

<sup>161</sup> CENTRAL Electoral Commission of Ukraine. Pozacherhovi vybory narodnykh deputativ Ukrayiny 21 lypnya 2019 roku [Extraordinary election of people's deputies of Ukraine on July 21, 2019]. Available at:

<[https://www.cvk.gov.ua/vibory\\_category/vibori-narodnih-deputativ-ukraini/pozachergovi-vibori-narodnih-deputativ-ukraini-21-lipnya-2019-roku.html](https://www.cvk.gov.ua/vibory_category/vibori-narodnih-deputativ-ukraini/pozachergovi-vibori-narodnih-deputativ-ukraini-21-lipnya-2019-roku.html)>.

Accessed on: 17.07.2022.

<sup>162</sup> PEW Research Center. In some countries in Central and Eastern Europe, roughly one-in-five adults or more say they would not accept Jews as fellow citizens.

28.03.2018. Available at: <[https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/28/most-poles-accept-jews-as-fellow-citizens-and-neighbors-but-a-minority-do-not/ft\\_18-03-26\\_polandholocaustlaws\\_map/](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/28/most-poles-accept-jews-as-fellow-citizens-and-neighbors-but-a-minority-do-not/ft_18-03-26_polandholocaustlaws_map/)>. Accessed on: 06.07.2022.

<sup>163</sup> KIIS. Mezhetnicheskiye Predubezhdeniya V Ukraine [Interethnic prejudice in Ukraine]. 09.2019, Available at: <<https://kiis.com.ua/?lang=rus&cat=reports&id=904&page=1>>. Accessed on: 01.07.2022.

<sup>164</sup> STRAKH "chuzhoho". Chy ye v Ukrayini problema z rasyzmom i neterpymystyu [Fear of "different". Is there a problem with racism and intolerance in Ukraine?]. RBK Ukrayina, 10.09.2021. Available at: <<https://daily.rbc.ua/rus/show/strah-chuzhogo-ukraine-problema-rasizmom-1631182082.html>>. Accessed on: 01.07.2022.

– the Aidar battalion and, mainly, the Azov battalion. Organizations such as Human Rights Watch,<sup>165</sup> Amnesty International,<sup>166</sup> and the United Nations<sup>167</sup> have accused these “volunteer battalions” of committing abuses, intimidation, torture and executions during the Donbas conflict. There are records that far-right extremist groups promoted attacks against Roma minorities, members of the LGBT+ community, feminists and activists<sup>168</sup> in addition to the desecration of religious temples (such as synagogues) and anti-Semitic, racist and pro-violence statements.<sup>169</sup> Freedom House declared that the actions of these extremist groups and the leniency of the authorities represent a threat to democracy in the country.<sup>170</sup>

In November 2014, after pressure to contain the action of paramilitary groups, the Azov battalion was incorporated as a regiment into the National Guard of Ukraine. Ukraine’s army relied on its support to repel attempts by pro-Russian military groups to conquer other areas of Donbas in

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<sup>165</sup> HUMAN Rights Watch; Amnesty International. “You Don’t Exist” Arbitrary Detentions, Enforced Disappearances, and Torture in Eastern Ukraine. 07.2016. Available at:

<[https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report\\_pdf/ukraine0716web\\_2.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/ukraine0716web_2.pdf)>.

Accessed on: 01.07.2022.

<sup>166</sup> AMNESTY International. Ukraine must stop ongoing abuses and war crimes by pro-Ukrainian volunteer forces. 08.09.2014. Available at:

<<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2014/09/ukraine-must-stop-ongoing-abuses-and-war-crimes-pro-ukrainian-volunteer-forces/>>. Accessed on: 01.07.2022.

AMNESTY International. Breaking Bodies: Torture and summary killings in Eastern Ukraine. 2015. Available at:

<<https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/EUR5016832015ENGLISH.pdf>>. Accessed on: 01.07.2022.

<sup>167</sup> OHCHR (UN). Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine, 16 February to 15 May 2016. 05.2016. Available at:

<[https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Countries/UA/Ukraine\\_14th\\_HRMMU\\_Report.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Countries/UA/Ukraine_14th_HRMMU_Report.pdf)>. Accessed on: 02.07.2022.

<sup>168</sup> HUMAN Rights Watch. Ukraine: Investigate, Punish Hate Crimes. 14.06.2018.

Available at: <<https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/06/14/ukraine-investigate-punish-hate-crimes>>. Accessed on: 01.07.2022.

<sup>169</sup> BORTNIK, R. O., M. Ye. Semenov, Ye.A. Antonenko. Ksenofobiya V Ukraine: Prichiny, Formy Sushchestvovaniya I Posledstviya [Xenophobia in Ukraine: causes, forms and consequences]. Dneps: Serednyak T.K. Ukrainskiy Institut analiza i menezhmenta politiki, 2019.

<sup>170</sup> LIKHACHEV, Vyacheslav. Far-right Extremism as a Threat to Ukrainian Democracy. Freedom House, 2018. Available at:

<<https://freedomhouse.org/report/analytical-brief/2018/far-right-extremism-threat-ukrainian-democracy>>. Accessed on: 01.07.2022.

2014 and 2015, as well as in the battle of Mariupol in 2022 against the Russian army. These episodes favored the social recognition of Azov battalion members as national heroes. The controversy over the group<sup>171</sup> reached the US Congress, which discussed its classification as a terrorist organization and the ban on sending weapons to this regiment in 2018.<sup>172</sup>

Part of the Ukrainian media claims that the association of Azov with neo-Nazism was a Russian propaganda strategy, successfully disseminated in the West, and that in the regiment there are volunteers from different ideological spectrums and ethnic groups, including Russians and Jews.<sup>173</sup> It is also argued that neo-Nazi and ultra-radical activists participated in the founding of the regiment in 2014, but left it later, and although human rights violations were recorded in Donbas by some of its members, they were not orchestrated in a systematic way (as in the case of the armed groups backed by Russia), and even the Russian media does not have conclusive evidence of war crimes.<sup>174</sup> After the 2022 Russian invasion, representatives of Azov declared that they “despise both Nazism and Stalinism,” since Ukraine was a victim of both regimes and ideologies.<sup>175</sup> Although the group denies such accusations, some of its members and founders are adepts of neo-Nazism and

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<sup>171</sup> The group was even banned on Facebook. Source: JAMAL, Urooba. Facebook is reversing its ban on posts praising Ukraine's far-right Azov Battalion, report says. Business Insider, 25.02.2022. Available at: <https://www.businessinsider.com/facebook-reverses-ban-praise-ukraine-far-right-forces-2022-2>>. Accessed on: 01.07.2022.

<sup>172</sup> KHEEL, Rebecca. Congress bans arms to Ukraine militia linked to neo-Nazis. The Hill, 27.03.2018. Available at: <https://thehill.com/policy/defense/380483-congress-bans-arms-to-controversial-ukrainian-militia-linked-to-neo-nazis/>>. Accessed on: 01.07.2022.

<sup>173</sup> SKLYAREVSKA, Gala. Pochemu «Azov» — ne «neonatsyst'skyi batal'on» [Why "Azov" is not a "neo-Nazi battalion"]. DM Media Sapens, 04.06.2022. Available at: <https://ms.detector.media/propaganda-ta-vplivi/post/29605/2022-06-04-pochemu-azov-ne-neonatsysts'kyi-batalon/>>. Accessed on: 01.07.2022.

<sup>174</sup> MOSKALENKO, Yuliya. Polk «Azov»: otvety na samyye rasprostranennyye na Zapade voprosy o spetsotryade Natsgvardii ["Azov" regiment: answers to the most common questions in the West about the National Guard special regiment]. Zerkalo Nedeli, 03.04.2022. Available at: <https://zn.ua/UKRAINE/polk-azov-otvety-na-samye-rasprostranennyye-na-zapade-voprosy-o-spetsotryade-natshvardii.html>>. Accessed on: 02.07.2022.

<sup>175</sup> ETRENKO, Roman. Polk "Azov" obratilsya k rossiyanam i pozhelal svergnut' Putina ["Azov" regiment addressed the Russians and wished to overthrow Putin]. Ukrayinska Pravda, 28.03.2022. Available at: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2022/03/28/7335237/>>. Accessed on: 02.07.2022.

its official symbols make references to Nazism.<sup>176</sup> Among the foreign volunteers fighting in the conflict, there are supporters of the extreme right.<sup>177</sup>

There is evidence of the actions of these groups and the leniency of the authorities — discussing the extreme right issue has become a taboo in society for fear of feeding Kremlin propaganda. Nonetheless, it is incorrect to claim that Ukraine is a “Nazi” state or has a “Nazi-oriented” society.<sup>178</sup> According to representatives of the Counter Extremism Project, far-right actors are present on both sides of the conflict (including in Russia and the Donbas areas controlled by separatist armed groups), but there is a bias in associating the problem only with Ukraine.<sup>179</sup> For Likhachev, this problem stems in part from Russian state propaganda and disinformation efforts to legitimate the occupation.<sup>180</sup>

In fact, there are normative contradictions in the Kremlin’s justification for combating Nazism, since in Russia itself there are ultranationalist groups (with neo-Nazi members), some of which count on the connivance and even collaboration from the Kremlin<sup>181</sup> in the so-called “managed nationalism” strategy aimed at mobilizing the support of these

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<sup>176</sup> WALKER, Shaun. Azov fighters are Ukraine's greatest weapon and may be its greatest threat. *The Guardian*, 10.09.2014. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/10/azov-far-right-fighters-ukraine-neo-nazis>

<sup>177</sup> HARP, Seth. Foreign Fighters in Ukraine Could Be a Time Bomb for Their Home Countries. *The Intercept*, 30.06.2022. Available at: <https://theintercept.com/2022/06/30/ukraine-azov-neo-nazi-foreign-fighter/>. Accessed on: 02.07.2022.

<sup>178</sup> COLBORNE, Michael. Silence won’t make the Ukrainian far right go away. *The New Statesman*, 22.02.2022. Available at: <https://www.newstatesman.com/world/europe/ukraine/2022/02/silence-wont-make-the-ukrainian-far-right-go-away>. Accessed on: 02.07.2022.

<sup>179</sup> COUNTER Extremism Project. New CEP Report: Career Break or New Career? Extremist Foreign Fighters in Ukraine. 04.05.2020. Available at: <https://www.counterextremism.com/newsfreetags/azov-regiment>. Accessed on: 02.07.2022.

<sup>180</sup> LIKHACHEV, Vyacheslav. Ksenofobiya v Ukraine posle Maydana: chto izmenilos'? [Xenophobia in Ukraine after the Maidan: what has changed?]. Helsinki Association for Human Rights, 28.04.2014. Available at: <https://ccl.org.ua/ru/positions/ksenofobyia-v-ukrayne-posle-majdana-chto-yzmenilos/>. Accessed on: 02.07.2022.

<sup>181</sup> HORVATH, Robert. Putin’s fascists: the Russian state’s long history of cultivating homegrown neo-Nazis. *The Conversation*, 21.03.2022. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/putins-fascists-the-russian-states-long-history-of-cultivating-homegrown-neo-nazis-178535>. Accessed on: 02.07.2022.

groups to the regime.<sup>182</sup>

In the second half of the 2000s, Russia recorded a high number of violent racist attacks (including homicides) against ethnic minorities, mainly immigrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia.<sup>183</sup> An activist and a journalist were murdered by neo-Nazis in 2009.<sup>184</sup> Since the early 2000s, there were at least seven cases<sup>185</sup> of major local ethnic clashes between ethnic Russians and minorities. A major episode, of great resonance, happened in 2013, after the murder of a Russian and ended with riots (*pogroms*) in street markets run by minorities on the outskirts of Moscow<sup>186</sup> and mass arrests of immigrants.<sup>187</sup> The problem of xenophobia, with attacks on minorities, still persists, albeit on a smaller scale.<sup>188</sup> The nationalist slogan “Russia for (ethnic) Russians”<sup>189</sup> has enjoyed significant support (51% in 2020).<sup>190</sup>

<sup>182</sup> HORVATH, R. Putin’s fascists: Russkii Obraz and the politics of managed nationalism in Russia. Routledge, 2021.

<sup>183</sup> SEVORTYAN, Anna. Ksenofobiya v postsovetskoy Rossii [Xenophobia in Post-Soviet Russia]. The Equal Rights Review, No 1–7 (2008–2011). Available at: <<https://www.equalrightstrust.org/ertdocumentbank/Anna%20Sevortyan.pdf>>. Accessed on: 28.06.2022.

RUSSIA’S new racism. The Guardian, 06.10.2006. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2006/oct/06/guardianweekly.guardianweekly11>>

<sup>184</sup> RUSSIA nationalist leader jailed for life over hate crimes. BBC News, 24.07.2015. Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33657409>>. Accessed on: 28.06.2022.

<sup>185</sup> Kondopoga (2006); Stavropol (2007); Manezhnaya square in Moscow (2010); Udomlya (2013); Pugachev (2013); Biryulyovo Zapadnoye, in Moscow (2013); Chemodanovka (2019).

<sup>186</sup> BESPORYADKI v Biryulevo [Disorder in Biryulevo]. Kommersant, 30.12.2013. Available at: <<https://www.kommersant.ru/gallery/2319324#id933209>>. Accessed on: 28.06.2022.

<sup>187</sup> AMNESTY International. Russia: Detention of 1,200 migrants ‘discriminatory and unlawful’. 15.10.2013. Available at: <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2013/10/russia-detention-migrants-discriminatory-and-unlawful/>>. Accessed on: 28.06.2022.

<sup>188</sup> YUDINA, Nataliya. Ksenofobiya v tsifrakh: Prestupleniya nenavisti i protivodeystviye im v Rossii v 2017 godu [Xenophobia in Numbers: Hate Crimes and Fighting them in Russia in 2017]. Sova-Center, 31.01.2018. Available at: <[https://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/publications/2018/01/d38732/#\\_ftn5](https://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/publications/2018/01/d38732/#_ftn5)>. Accessed on: 28.06.2022.

<sup>189</sup> Russia is a multinational (multi-ethnic) country. Nearly 20% of the population are non-ethnic Russians.

<sup>190</sup> LEVADA-CENTER. Ksenofobiya i natsionalizm [Xenophobia and Nationalism].

Another social minority, the LGBT+ community, has long been suffering homophobia and repression by the Russian state and radical groups.<sup>191</sup>

Controversial nationalist leaders, like the recently deceased Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, have received widespread media attention on major state channels. Zhirinovskiy was known for his xenophobic statements, such as the proposal to “encircle” the territory of the North Caucasus (a region that concentrates several ethnic groups, mostly Muslims) with barbed wire and to introduce restrictive measures to reduce the birth rate in the region.<sup>192</sup> His party, the LDPR, won 7.55% of the votes in the 2021 parliamentary elections. Although it presents itself as an opposition party, it often endorses government initiatives. Another controversial nationalist group is the Imperial Russian Movement, which played a significant role in the onset of the war in Donbas in 2014.<sup>193</sup>

In recent years, Moscow’s ties with ultranationalist groups have been remarkable, such as with the European extreme right (Marine Le Pen<sup>194</sup> in France and the German AfD party<sup>195</sup>), the Russian mercenary group “Wagner” (Rusich unit, which has neo-Nazi members and operates in conflicts abroad, including in Ukraine),<sup>196</sup> and nationalist paramilitary groups

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23.09.2020. Available at: <<https://www.levada.ru/2020/09/23/ksenofobiya-i-natsionalizm-2/>>. Accessed on: 28.06.2022.

<sup>191</sup> KURTANIDZE, Elene. Dismantling LGBT+ rights as a means of control in Russia. Freedom House, 30.04.2021. Available at: <<https://freedomhouse.org/article/dismantling-lgbt-rights-means-control-russia>>. Accessed on: 28.06.2022.

<sup>192</sup> VASILIEV, Viktor. Zhirinovskiy i Kavkaz «za kolyuchey provolokoy» [Zhirinovskiy and the Caucasus “behind barbed wire”]. Golos Ameriki, 28.10.2013. Available at: <<https://www.golosameriki.com/a/vv-zhirinovskiy/1778404.html>>. Accessed on: 29.06.2022.

<sup>193</sup> CENTER for International Security and Cooperation. Russian Imperial Movement. 2021. Available at: <[https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/russian-imperial-movement#text\\_block\\_22704](https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/russian-imperial-movement#text_block_22704)>. Accessed on: 29.06.2022.

<sup>194</sup> NIKOLSKAYA, P., LOWE, C. Putin hosts French presidential contender Le Pen in Kremlin. Reuters, 24.03.2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-france-lepen-putin-idUSKBN16V1CP>>. Accessed on: 29.06.2022.

<sup>195</sup> GERMANY’S far-right AfD lawmakers visit Moscow. Deutsche Welle, 10.03.2021. Available at: <<https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-far-right-afd-lawmakers-visit-moscow/a-56829773>>. Accessed on: 29.06.2022.

<sup>196</sup> TOWNSEND, Mark. Russian mercenaries in Ukraine linked to far-right extremists. The Guardian, 20.03.2022. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/20/russian-mercenaries-in-ukraine-linked-to-far-right-extremists>>. Accessed on: 29.06.2022.

that took part in the Donbas war, especially the Sparta battalion (with neo-Nazi members and accused of torture and summary executions in the conflict;<sup>197</sup> one of its leaders, Vladimir Zhoga, received the official title of “Hero of Russia” after his death in the 2022 war).<sup>198</sup> In Russia there are numerous reports of human rights violations by the *kadyrovtsy*,<sup>199</sup> military groups subordinated to the governor of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov.

Since Russian interference in Ukraine in 2014, a pejorative term for the Putin regime has gained space in Ukraine: *rashizm* (Russian fascism). After the full-scale invasion in 2022, the term gained resonance abroad, especially with the articles by historian Timothy Snyder in The New York Times.<sup>200</sup> Snyder argues that three characteristics allow classifying Putin’s regime as fascist: the cult of the leader, the cult of the dead (the victims of World War II) and the mythical vision of a golden past of imperial greatness, which can be restored through war (the cult of violence). On the other hand, Russian political scientists, such as Grigoriy Golosov<sup>201</sup> and Alexander

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<sup>197</sup> AMNESTY International. New evidence of summary killings of Ukrainian soldiers must spark urgent investigations. 09.04.2015. Available at: <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/04/ukraine-new-evidence-of-summary-killings-of-captured-soldiers-must-spark-urgent-investigations/>>. Accessed on: 29.06.2022.

AMNESTY International. Breaking Bodies. Available at: <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/EUR5016832015ENGLISH.pdf>>. Accessed on: 29.06.2022.

OHCHR (ONU). Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine. 05.2015. Available at: <<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Countries/UA/10thOHCHRreportUkraine.pdf>>. Accessed on: 29.06.2022.

<sup>198</sup> KREMLIN official website. Meeting with father of Hero of Russia Vladimir Zhoga. 09.05.2022. Available at: <<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/68369>>. Accessed on: 29.06.2022.

<sup>199</sup> HUMAN Rights Watch. *Worse than a War: Disappearances in Chechnya—a Crime Against Humanity*. 03.2005. Available at: <<http://hrw.org/backgrounder/eca/chechnya0305/>>. Accessed on: 29.06.2022.

<sup>200</sup> SNYDER, Timothy. The War in Ukraine Has Unleashed a New Word. The New York Times, 22.04.2022. Available at: <<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/22/magazine/ruscism-ukraine-russia-war.html>>. We Should Say It. Russia Is Fascist. 19.05.2022. Available at: <<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/19/opinion/russia-fascism-ukraine-putin.html>> Accessed on: 04.07.2022.

<sup>201</sup> GOLOSOV, Grigoriy. *Fashistskaya Rossiya?* [Fascist Russia?]. Riddle, 30.05.2022. Available at: <<https://ridl.io/ru/fashistskaya-rossiya/>>. Accessed on: 04.07.2022.

Kynev,<sup>202</sup> consider the use of the term inaccurate, once these characteristics are common to several authoritarian regimes. Among other elements often associated with *rashizm* by critics of Putin are: the regime's Manichaeism and socio-political intolerance toward dissidents; the use of the letter "Z" to distinguish those who support the regime in its "special military operation" (compared to the use of the swastika), massive state propaganda in mass media, the instrumentalization of nationalism, the recurrent use of security services and censorship for repression, the corporate state, the spread of conspiracy theories, and the use of war strategies implemented by the Nazis, such as territorial annexation on the basis of ethnicity, the *blitzkrieg*, the total encirclement (suffocation) of large cities, and the pursuit of the destruction of Ukraine as a state and nation. The Ukrainian press sometimes refers to Russian soldiers and Kremlin supporters as "occupier *rashists*," "fascists" and "orcs". Putin is "Putler" (in analogy to Hitler) and Russia is a "terrorist state."

On different occasions, Putin and high-ranking members of the Russian elites have quoted Ivan Ilyn, the ideologue of Russian fascism in the 1930s.<sup>203</sup> Putin's expansionist ambitions and its "Russian World" doctrine are also related to arguments by influential ultranationalist ideologues, such as Alexander Dugin (the most prominent Eurasianist intellectual) and a series of regime propagandists (journalists, analysts and commentators) in the major state TV channels.<sup>204</sup> Publicly opposing the war or even calling it a "war" instead of the official euphemism "special military operation" can incur administrative and criminal sanctions:<sup>205</sup> over 20,000 people were detained for their anti-war stance from February to December 2022.<sup>206</sup>

In face of the aforementioned contradictions, one can affirm that the

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<sup>202</sup> KYNEV, Alexander. An autocracy tightening the screws. Russia.Post, 01.06.2022. Available at: <<https://russiapost.net/society/autoritarizm>>. Accessed on: 04.07.2022.

<sup>203</sup> BARBASHIN, Anton. Ivan Ilyin: A Fashionable Fascist. Riddle, 20.04.2018. Available at: <<https://ridl.io/ivan-ilyin-a-fashionable-fascist/>>. Accessed on: 04.07.2022.

<sup>204</sup> Popular nationalist journalists recurrently endorse Putin's actions and narratives, such as Dmitry Kiselyov, Vladimir Solovyov and Margarita Simonyan.

<sup>205</sup> V ROSSII vynesli pervyy prigovor po stat'ye o diskreditatsii VS RF [In Russia, the first sentence was handed down under the article on discrediting the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation]. TASS, 08.07.2022. Available at: <<https://tass.ru/proisshestviya/15164537>>. Accessed on: 15.07.2022.

<sup>206</sup> OVD-Info. Repressii v Rossii v 2022 godu. Obzor OVD-Info. [Repression in Russia in 2022. Overview by OVD-Info]. 12.2022. Available at: <<https://data.ovdinfo.org/repressii-v-rossii-v-2022-godu#1>>. Accessed on: 07.01.2022.



Kremlin's argument on the "denazification" of Ukraine corresponds to a rhetorical instrument of "demonization" and "dehumanization" of the opponent for political and military purposes, mainly to boost nationalism, bolster support for the regime, and facilitate war mobilization. Such a strategy had several precedents, such as the "war on terror" discourse, widely used to legitimize US interventions in the Middle East and which contributed to the growth of Islamophobia in Western societies.<sup>207</sup> A study of Russian media outlets in Crimea from 2014 to 2017 found that hate speech was promoted for years in the region, with the association of Ukrainians to fascism.<sup>208</sup> The "denazification" argument has been mobilized to justify the dismemberment and extinguishing of Ukraine as a state and nation. Such a conception was evident in an article ("What Russia Should Do with Ukraine") by an ideologist of the "Russian World" doctrine, published in one of Russia's largest state newspapers in April, openly advocating collective punishment against the "Nazified" population:

[...] in addition to the elites, a significant portion of the population, which is passive Nazi, an accomplice of Nazism, is also guilty. They supported the Nazi regime and favored it. [...] The peculiarity of modern Nazified Ukraine is the amorphousness of ambivalence, which allows it to mask Nazism, aiming for "independence" and the "European" (Western, pro-American) path of "development" (in reality, of degradation), stating that there is "no Nazism in Ukraine, only individual excesses.". After all, there is no main Nazi party, no Führer, no full-fledged racial law (only its truncated version in the form of repression against the Russian language). As a result, there is no opposition and resistance to the regime. [...] Ukroneazism poses not a lesser but a greater threat to the world and

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<sup>207</sup> See TYRER, D. *The Politics of Islamophobia: Race, Power and Fantasy*. Pluto Press, 2013.

<sup>208</sup> *Hate Speech in the Media Landscape of Crimea: An Information and Analytical Report on the Spread of Hate Speech on the Territory of the Crimean Peninsula (March 2014 – July 2017) / under the general editorship of I. Sedova and T. Pechonchuk*. Kyiv, 2018. 40 p. Available at: <https://crimeahrg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Hate-book-EN-1.pdf>>. Accessed on: 04.07.2022.

to Russia than Hitler's version of German Nazism. The name “Ukraine” apparently cannot be preserved as the title of any fully denazified state formation in the territory liberated from the Nazi regime [...] Denazification will inevitably be de-Ukrainianization [...] Unlike the Baltic countries and Georgia, Ukraine, as history has shown, is impossible to exist as a national state, and attempts to “build” such a state lead naturally to Nazism. Ukrainianism is an artificial anti-Russian construction that does not have its own civilizational content, a subordinate element of a foreign, alien civilization. [...] the denazification of Ukraine is also its inevitable de-Europeanization. [...] The social “swamp” supporting [the Nazi elites] actively and passively by action and inaction, must survive the pains of the war and learn the lived experience as a historical lesson and redemption for its guilt. (SERGEYTSEV, 2022)<sup>209</sup>

Vladimir Putin has also questioned the existence of Ukraine on different occasions, suggesting that its current borders are the result of flawed Soviet ethnic policies and that Ukrainian identity is an artificial anti-Russian construct. In June 2022, former President Dmitry Medvedev declared that within two years Ukraine may no longer exist on the map.<sup>210</sup> The de facto territorial annexations in the south and east of the country by Russia and the forced cultural assimilation (the issuance of Russian documents to the local population, the replacement of Ukrainian flags by Russian and separatist ones and the Russification of school contents) have heightened concerns in Ukrainian society that Putin's real intention is indeed the extinguishing of Ukraine as a state and a nation.

Manichaeism and “dehumanization”/“demonization” discourses

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<sup>209</sup> SERGEYTSEV, Timofey. Chto Rossiya dolzhna sdelat' s Ukrainoy [What Russia Should Do With Ukraine]. RIA Novosti, 03.04.2022. Available at: <<https://ria.ru/20220403/ukraina-1781469605.html>>. Accessed on: 04.07.2022.

<sup>210</sup> MARTYNOVA, Polina. Medvedev ne iskluchil otsutstviya Ukrainy na karte mira cherez dva goda [Medvedev did not rule out Ukraine's extinction from the world map in two years]. RBC, 15.06.2022. Available at: <<https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/62a98a859a79471ec85ad632>>. Accessed on: 04.07.2022.

spread among soldiers from different parts of the conflict can have detrimental consequences on the battlefield, leading to the promotion of atrocities and war crimes. After an attack in the center of Vinnitsa, with many civilian casualties (including a child), state officials and regime propagandists claimed that there was a “temporary Nazi shelter” on the site.<sup>211</sup> Once again, the “double standard” Kremlin's approach is remarkable: the civilian deaths in the conflict against separatists in Donbas represent a “genocide” committed by Ukraine, while the deaths of civilians after the Russian invasion are a justifiable side effect of the “fighting against Nazis,” or even the price of redemption for their “guilt” for colluding with Nazis. The demonization discourse also makes it difficult to conduct negotiations and establish peace agreements. For Russians it may not make sense to negotiate with a state “dominated by Nazis” and that represents a paramount “threat” to Russia. Likewise, for Ukrainians, what seems to be at stake in the war is not the issues of NATO, Donbas or Crimea, but the very existence of Ukraine — therefore, it would make no sense to negotiate with a “terrorist” and “genocidal” state.

#### **IV. Other arguments for Putin’s “just war” against Ukraine**

In addition to the three arguments analyzed above, other justifications were mobilized by the Kremlin to endorse its intervention, such as the risk of Ukraine developing nuclear and biological weapons.

A few days before the onset of the war, when Ukraine was already surrounded by Russian troops and under the imminence of an invasion, Volodymyr Zelensky announced that he could withdraw the country from the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, the agreement through which Ukraine handed its nuclear weapons to Russia and forsook its nuclear-armed status in exchange for security guarantees (respect for its sovereignty, independence and borders) by Russia and other global powers. In practice, given the annexation of Crimea and the intervention in Donbas since 2014, Putin had already violated the memorandum. Zelensky’s statement was promptly exploited by Moscow to claim that Ukraine posed a nuclear threat to Russia. Shortly before the invasion, Putin announced that the threat “had been heard.”<sup>212</sup> The Russian press also gave wide coverage to the issue at the time.

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<sup>211</sup> SIMONYAN: udar v Vinnitse nanesli po punktu razmeshcheniya natsionalistov [Simonyan: Attack in Vinnytsia was carried out in nationalist accommodation point]. RIA Novosti, 14.07.2022. Available at: <<https://ria.ru/20220714/vinnitsa-1802446632.html>>. Accessed on: 15.07.2022.

<sup>212</sup> ROSSIYA uslyshala zayavleniye o yadernykh ambitsiyakh Ukrainy, zayavil Putin

To exemplify, an article published in a major media outlet highlighted the need for an armed intervention:

When the president of the Russophobic Ukraine, Vladimir Zelensky, announced his plans to withdraw from the Budapest Accord, Russia was left with no alternative. The special military operation is now a forced but most humane solution to the crisis. (TSOTS, 2022)<sup>213</sup>

Despite the resonance in the period, the subject quickly faded in the official discourse. There have been other attempts to present Ukraine as a real threat, such as the alleged development of biological and chemical weapons in cooperation with the US,<sup>214</sup> but these also have fallen into disuse.<sup>215</sup> The risk of NATO expansion, the protection of the Russian-speaking communities and the fight against Nazis remained the main *casus belli* mobilized by Moscow to justify its bellicose policies.

## Conclusion

In this article, I showed how the main arguments propagated by the Kremlin to justify the invasion of Ukraine present a series of contradictions. Firstly, although the Russian elites' arguments against NATO enlargement

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[Russia has heard the statement on Ukraine's nuclear ambitions, Putin announced]. RIA, 22.02.2022.

Available at: <<https://ria.ru/20220222/putin-1774442412.html>>. Accessed on: 15.07.2022.

<sup>213</sup> TSOTS, Evgeniy. Yadernoye oruzhiye Ukrainy — ugroza dlya Rossii, kotoruyu uzhe ne otbit' [Ukraine's nuclear weapons are a threat to Russia, which can no longer be defeated]. Regnum, 27.02.2022. Available at: <<https://regnum.ru/news/3518785.html>>. Accessed on: 15.07.2022.

<sup>214</sup> MO RF soobshchilo o razrabatyvayemom na Ukraine biologicheskom oruzhii pri finansirovanii SSHA [The Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation has announced that biological weapons are being developed in Ukraine on US funding]. 06.03.2022. Available at: <<https://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/13987899>>. Accessed on: 15.07.2022.

<sup>215</sup> MOSKVA zayavila o razrabotke v Ukraine biologicheskogo i khimicheskogo oruzhiya. Chto ne tak s etim obvineniyem? [Moscow has denounced the development of biological and chemical weapons in Ukraine. What's wrong with that accusation?]. BBC News, 11.03.2022. Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-60709478>>. Accessed on: 15.07.2022.

have legitimate grounds, the invasion, as previously expected, had the opposite effect to those claimed by Moscow: it has contributed to strengthening NATO and reinforcing its military presence near Russian western borders, with troops, weapons, military equipment, training, defense systems and a strong economic and military support to Ukraine. States with a historical position of neutrality now aim to join the alliance. The formerly anachronistic argument of the “Russian threat” now seems plausible, providing the organization with a legitimate *raison d'être* in the post-Cold War period. Furthermore, since the beginning of the 2000s, members of Ukrainian elites have expressed their intention to join NATO, but there was no evidence that this was about to be consummated in the short or medium terms. If containing the alliance were indeed his intention, Putin could have resorted to less costly alternatives with greater potential of effectiveness, such as ultimatums, military alliances and economic bargains. In short, the European balance of power is now much more favorable to NATO than before the 2022 February invasion.

Secondly, the Ukrainian state has committed human rights violations when trying to recover the Donbas territories, but Russia’s humanitarian intentions present several contradictions. There was no evidence that the conflict had been intensifying, and the Russian invasion generated a humanitarian catastrophe much greater than the war in Donbas itself: in a few months of intervention more civilians died than in eight years of conflict. Not by chance there has been an intense resistance against Russian troops exactly in the Russian-speaking regions that would supposedly be “liberated” — something that Putin probably was not expecting. The war has revealed the double-standard approach adopted by the Kremlin. Civilian deaths resulting from Ukraine’s attempt to retake Donbas are conceived as a genocide, but civilian deaths resulting from its own shelling are just the “side effect” of a legitimate fight against Nazis. However, thousands of civilians were killed in the war in which Moscow re-established control over its breakaway region, Chechnya. The resistance to the invasion observed so far and the growing support for NATO membership even in the eastern and southern Russian-speaking regions show that cultural and language ties to Russia do not necessarily generate loyalty to the Russian state and Putin’s expansionist ambitions.

Finally, with regard to the argument of combating Nazis, although there is leniency on the part of the Ukrainian authorities toward certain radical groups, there is no evidence that neo-Nazis enjoy significant support in Ukrainian society and politics. Furthermore, the Russian state itself has links with extreme right-wing groups (some with neo-Nazi members) and paramilitary organizations known for a history of human rights violations inside and outside Russia. The discourse of “combating Nazism” corresponds

to a strategy of demonizing the opponent, with potentially deleterious consequences in the war, by encouraging and justifying excessive violence. Ideologues of the “Russian World” doctrine referred to “denazification” to plead for the extinction of Ukraine as a state and a nation. The death of civilians is considered by them as a cost to be paid, a “redemption for their guilt.”

What then were Putin’s real motivations and interests for invading Ukraine? I have discussed his true motivations in different articles.<sup>216</sup> In summary, three major factors have possibly guided his decision: (1) the ideological legitimization of his autocracy (the domestic factor), using external and internal threats to boost nationalism, authoritarian attitudes and support for his repressive rule, as several authoritarian regimes do. Putin needs a hostile West for self-legitimation; (2) his ideological, nationalist and neo-colonial stance toward Ukraine, questioning its right to exist as a sovereign state, and presenting himself as a new “Peter the Great” (the ideational factor); and (3) the maintenance of Russian hegemony in the Post-Soviet Space by force (the geopolitical factor), aiming at curbing eventual spillover effects from “Color Revolutions” that can endanger his influence in neighboring countries and his own grip on power. Contrary to Putin’s alleged intentions, it is unlikely that Ukraine will voluntarily return to the Russian orbit of influence. The collective trauma and animosities caused by the war may have detrimental long-term consequences for Russian-Ukrainian relations. Wars shape states and identities.<sup>217</sup>

Many “realist” approaches indirectly endorse the Russian invasion, arguing that NATO expansion and the Western “democracy promotion” policy prompted Russia to such an outcome. According to this view, Putin has just spontaneously reacted to maintain the European balance of power, performing what any other realist leader would have done. In this normative perspective, they ignore the domestic, ideological and agency factors that motivated the Kremlin’s action. Regime survival is also a *realpolitik* concern. These approaches disregard the security interests and strategies of Ukraine (also “realist”), as if Ukrainians were just an irrational pawns in the hands of

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<sup>216</sup> FERRARO, Vicente. O que está por trás da crise entre a Rússia, Ucrânia e Otan? Poder 360, 05.03.2022. Available at: <<https://www.poder360.com.br/opiniao/o-que-esta-por-tras-da-crise-entre-a-russia-ucrania-e-otan/>>. Accessed on: 15.07.2022.

<sup>217</sup> FERRARO, Vicente. A Guerra na Ucrânia: uma análise do conflito e de seus impactos nas sociedades russa e Ucrainiana [The War in Ukraine: An analysis of the conflict and its impact on Russian and Ukrainian societies]. *Conjuntura Austral: Journal of the Global South*, v. 13, n. 64, p. 25–50, 2022. Available in: <https://www.seer.ufg.br/index.php/ConjunturaAustral/article/view/128157>. Accessed on: 04.01.2023.

Western powers, easily deceived by liberal ideologies and naively handled in a geopolitical dispute. As I have shown, even from a “realist” perspective of international relations, the invasion is not justified, since the European balance of power is much more favorable to NATO now than before the invasion, and this was already expected before the war. Furthermore, if Putin’s intention were solely to contain NATO, there would be no need to recurrently mobilize different *casus belli* to legitimize his faulty decisions, and to promote an ideological project of territorial annexation and dismantling of Ukraine, the largest land grab in Europe since Nazi expansionism in World War II.

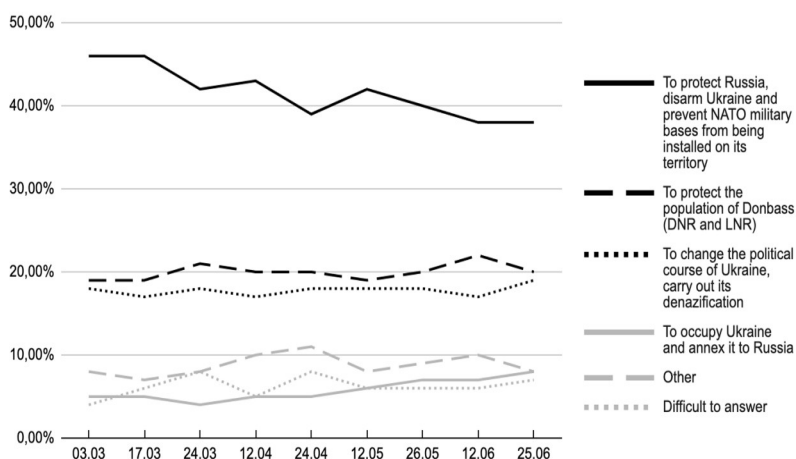
To conclude, Putin’s narratives may have gained resonance in different countries due to several reasons, such as: Russia’s machine propaganda effectiveness; Russian-centrism among scholars that conduct research on the Post-Soviet Space; the lack of access to Ukrainian original sources (or lack of interest thereof); the superficiality of some International Relations analyses that ignore domestic, ideological and agency factors; the Soviet nostalgia among some scholars (the utopic perception that Putin’s politics represents a viable and positive alternative to an American liberal and capitalist world-order); and the suspicions toward Western powers’ political stances (and media), motivated by resentment for their history of imperialism, colonialism, and interventionism in the Global South. Paradoxically, there are scholars that condemn Western imperialism in the Middle East (for example), but consent to Putin’s incoherent justifications for his imperialist aggression against Ukraine, and turn a blind eye to his blatant authoritarian and repressive policies in Russia.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> FERRARO, Vicente. 'Vladiminions' acadêmicos condenam imperialismo americano, mas veem Putin como messias [Academic 'Vladiminions' Condemn US Imperialism, But See Putin as a Messiah]. Folha de São Paulo, 09.05.2022. Available at: <<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrissima/2022/05/vladiminions-academicos-condenam-imperialismo-americano-mas-veem-putin-como-messias.shtml>>. Accessed on: 15.07.2022.

## Appendix of Charts

**Chart 1. In your opinion, what is Russia's main objective for conducting the special military operation in Ukraine?**

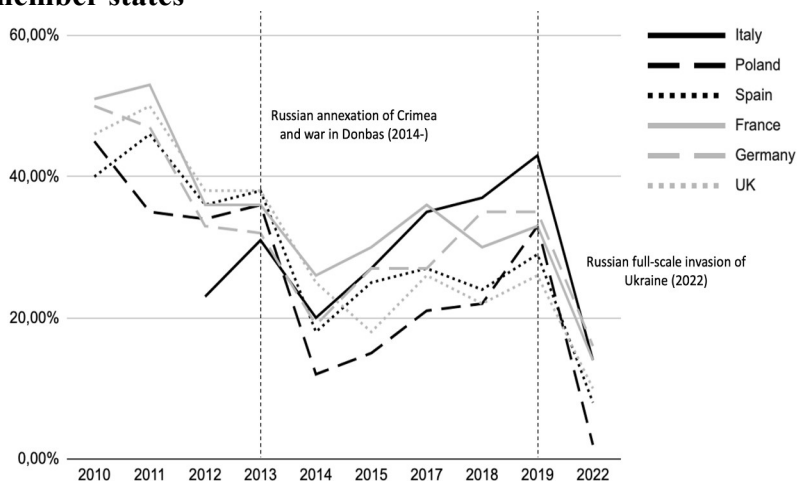


**Source:** compiled by the author based on data from the Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion (WCIOM).<sup>219</sup>

<sup>219</sup> WCIOM. Spetsial'naya voyennaya operatsiya: monitoring [OSpecial military operation: monitor]. 30.05.2022. Available at: <<https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/cpecialnaja-voennaja-operacija-monitoring>>. 30.06.2022. <<https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/specialnaja-voennaja-operacija-monitoring-20223006>>. Accessed on: 15.07.2022.

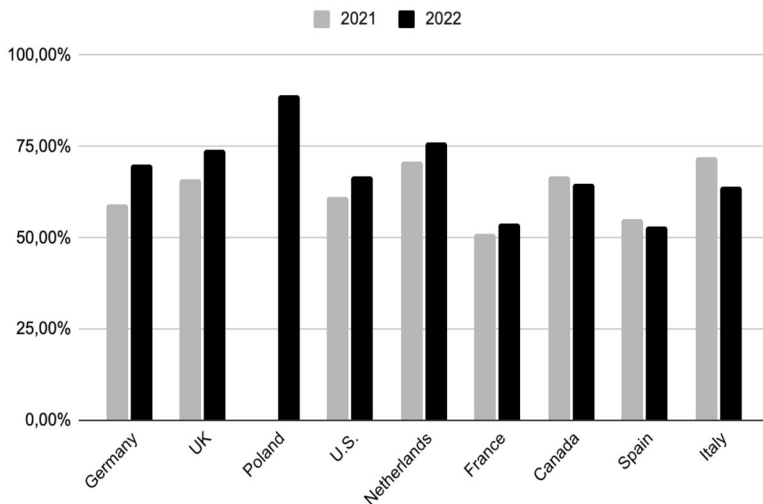


**Chart 2. Favorable views of Russia among NATO member states**



**Source:** compiled by the author based on data from the Pew Research Center (2022).<sup>220</sup>

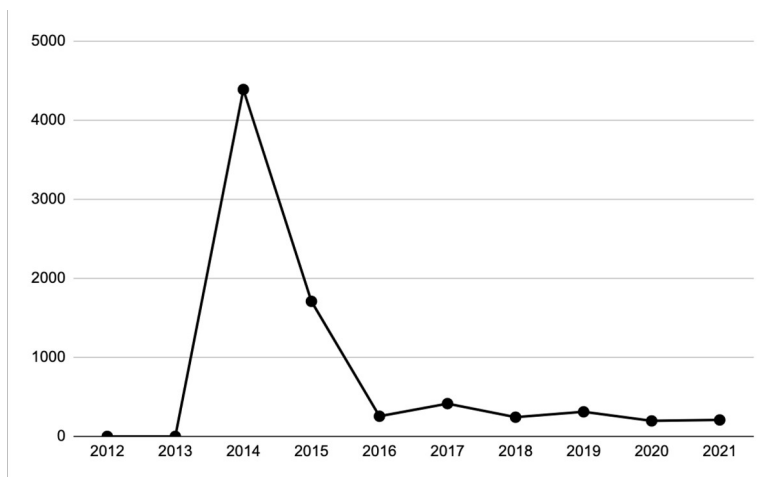
<sup>220</sup> WIKE et al. International attitudes toward the U.S., NATO and Russia in a time of crisis. Sharp decline in favorable views of Russia. Pew Research Center, 22.06.2022. Available at: <[https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2022/06/22/international-attitudes-toward-the-u-s-nato-and-russia-in-a-time-of-crisis/pg\\_2022-07-22\\_u-s-image\\_3-02/](https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2022/06/22/international-attitudes-toward-the-u-s-nato-and-russia-in-a-time-of-crisis/pg_2022-07-22_u-s-image_3-02/)>. Accessed on: 05.01.2023.

**Chart 3. Favorable views of NATO among its member states**

**Source:** compiled by the author based on data from the Pew Research Center (2022).<sup>221</sup>

<sup>221</sup> WIKE et al. International attitudes toward the U.S., NATO and Russia in a time of crisis. Positive ratings for NATO. Pew Research Center, 22.06.2022. Available at: <<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2022/06/22/positive-ratings-for-nato/>>. Accessed on: 05.01.2023.

**Chart 4. Number of deaths in the Donbas war according to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP)**

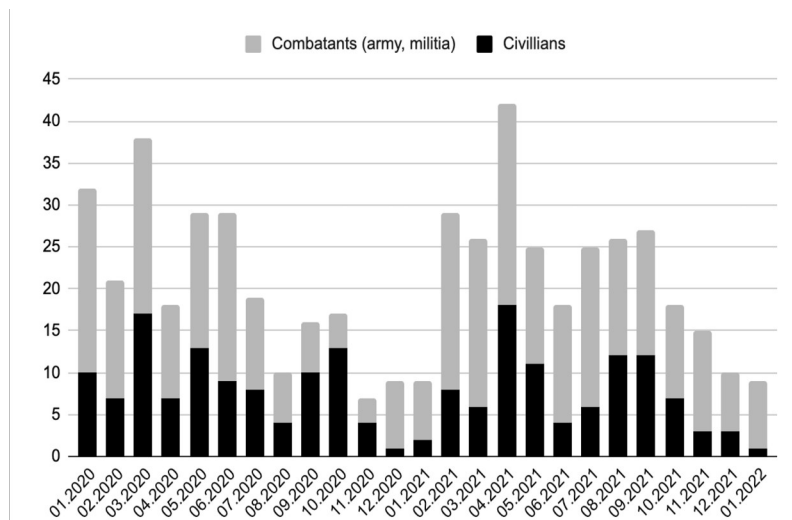


**Source:** compiled by the author based on data from the UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset version 22.1.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> DAVIES, Shawn, Therese Pettersson & Magnus Öberg. Organized violence 1989-2021 and drone warfare. *Journal of Peace Research* 59(4). 2022. Note: The UCDP toll differs from other official statistics, but its inclusion is valid as it allows assessing the variation in the intensity of the conflict over time.

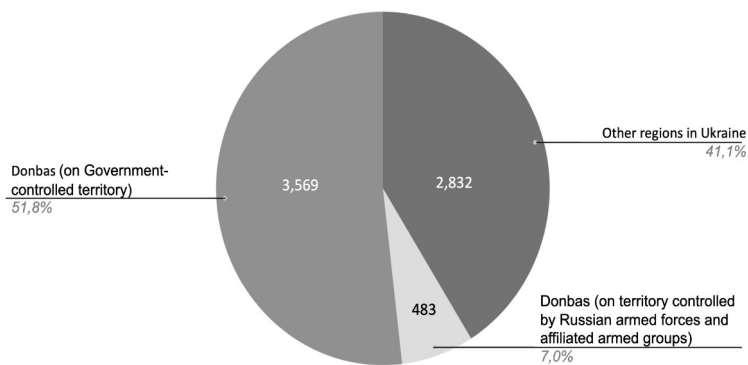
**Chart 5. Number of deaths in Donbas in the months before the Russian 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine according to Crisis Group**



Source: compiled by the author based on data from Crisis Group (2022).<sup>223</sup>

<sup>223</sup> CRISIS Group International. Conflict in Ukraine's Donbas: A Visual Explainer. 02.2022. Available at: <<https://www.crisisgroup.org/content/conflict-ukraines-donbas-visual-explainer>>. Accessed on: 08.07.2022.

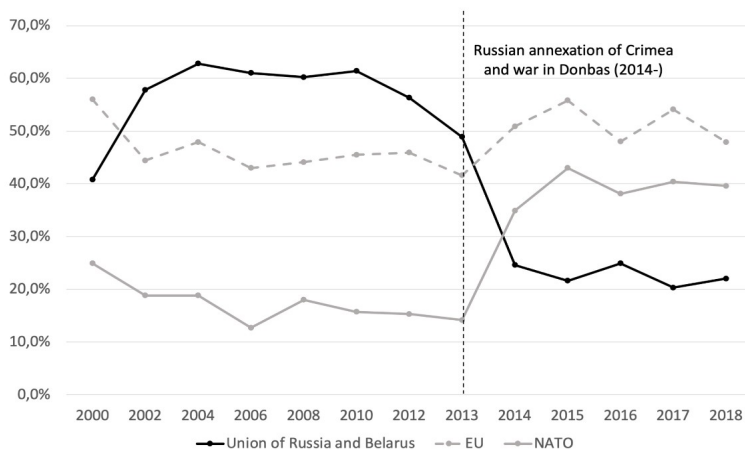
**Chart 6. Civilian death toll in the war in Ukraine from 24 February to 26 December 2022**



**Source:** compiled by the author based on OHCHR data (2022).<sup>224</sup>

<sup>224</sup> UNHCR (ONU). Operational Data Portal: Ukraine Refugee Situation. 27.12.2022. Available at: <<https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-civilian-casualties-26-december-2022-enruuk>>. Accessed on: 02.01.2023.

**Chart 7. Support for Ukraine's membership in the Union of Russia and Belarus, the European Union and NATO<sup>225</sup>**

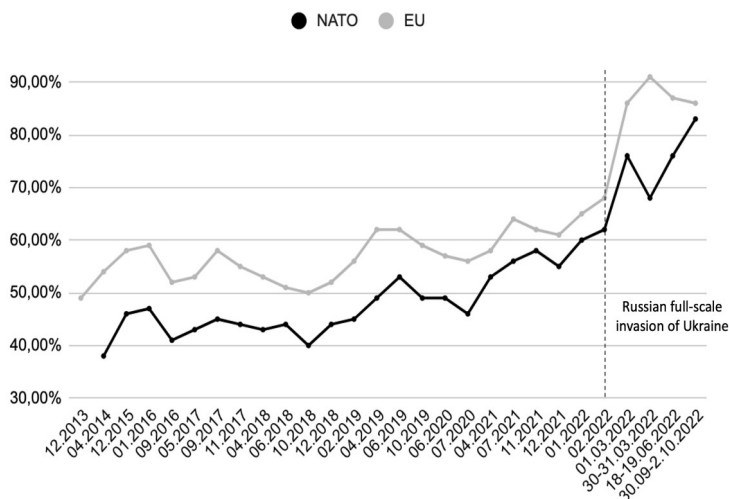


**Source:** compiled by the author based on data from the report “Ukrayins’ke suspil’stvo” by the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (2018).<sup>226</sup>

<sup>225</sup> The survey offered three responses regarding attitudes towards Ukraine's entry into these blocs ("probably positive", "probably negative" and "difficult to answer").

<sup>226</sup> Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (NAN). Dodatok: tablytsi monitorynhovoho opytuvannya "Ukrayins'ke suspil'stvo - 2018" [Monitored poll tables "Ukrainian Society - 2018"]. NAN, Ukrayiny, 2018. Available at: <<https://i-soc.com.ua/ua/edition/ukrainske-suspilstvo/issues/>>. Accessed on: 20.05.2022.

**Chart 8. Support for Ukraine's membership in the European Union and NATO**



**Source:** compiled by the author based on data from Rating Group

(2022).<sup>227</sup>Presented also in Ferraro (2022).<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> RATING Group. Stavlennya ukrayintsiv do vyrishennya pytannya okupovanykh terytoriy [Attitude of Ukrainians towards the issue of occupied territories]. 02.10.2019. Available at:

[https://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/otnoshenie\\_ukraincev\\_k\\_resheniyu\\_voprosa\\_okkupirovanykh\\_territoriy.html](https://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/otnoshenie_ukraincev_k_resheniyu_voprosa_okkupirovanykh_territoriy.html). Accessed on: 20.10.2022.

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[https://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/obschenacionalnyy\\_opros\\_ukraina\\_v\\_usloviya\\_h\\_voyny\\_1\\_marta\\_2022.html](https://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/obschenacionalnyy_opros_ukraina_v_usloviya_h_voyny_1_marta_2022.html). Accessed on: 06.10.2022.

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Patriotyzm. Tsinnosti (17-18 serpnya 2022) [XVII National Survey: Identity.

Patriotism. Values (August 17 to 18, 2022)]. 23.08.2022. Available at:

[https://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/s\\_mnadcyate\\_zagalnonac\\_onalne\\_opytuvannya\\_dentichn\\_st\\_patr\\_otizm\\_c\\_nnost\\_17-18\\_serpnya\\_2022.html](https://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/s_mnadcyate_zagalnonac_onalne_opytuvannya_dentichn_st_patr_otizm_c_nnost_17-18_serpnya_2022.html). Accessed on:

04.10.2022.

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[https://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/dinam\\_ka\\_zovn\\_shno-pol\\_tichnih\\_nastro\\_v\\_naseleennya\\_1-2\\_zhovtnya\\_2022.html](https://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/dinam_ka_zovn_shno-pol_tichnih_nastro_v_naseleennya_1-2_zhovtnya_2022.html). Accessed on:

05.10.2022.

<sup>228</sup> FERRARO, Vicente. A Guerra na Ucrânia: uma análise do conflito e de seus impactos nas sociedades russa e Ucrâniana [The War in Ukraine: An analysis of the conflict and its impacts on Russian and Ukrainian societies]. *Conjuntura Austral: Journal of the Global South*, v. 13, n. 64, p. 25–50, 2022. Available at:

<https://www.seer.ufgrs.br/index.php/ConjunturaAustral/article/view/128157>. Accessed on: 04.01.2022.



