



RESEARCH STUDIES 25

Russia's Aggression Against Ukraine: Concept, Ideology, Objectives, Means, Consequences

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Foreward

The security in the Black Sea region and the policy of the sovereign republics of the former Soviet Union, including Ukraine and Russia, has been for more than three decades a research interest of this author. A special angle of the enclosed studies has been the policy of NATO and the European Union (EU) in the broader Black Sea area.

The first and the second aggressive war of Russia against Ukraine precludes for the time being the construction of regional security community in the Black Sea region. At the same time, after Ukraine prevails and wins in its defensive war against Russia, prerequisites of developing such a security regime will be created. The future of the Black Sea region, to which Bulgaria belongs, is contingent on the results of the war. This explains the focus of the present study: what concept and ideology led Russia to launching its full-scale invasion in Ukraine, what have been the objectives and the instruments that Russia followed and used in its war. And, naturally – what are the consequences of this war.

Here is the list of earlier publications by the author on the security issues in the Black Sea area, the policy of Ukraine and Russia, NATO, US and the EU in this region:

From Nuclear Deterrence – to a Comprehensive, Mutual and Equal Security, (Plamen Pantev), Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridsky” Publishing House, Sofia, 1992, 207 pp. In Bulgarian.

Black Sea Basin Regional Profile: The Security Situation and the Region-Building Opportunities, (Plamen Pantev, Valeri Rachev, Tatiana Houbenova- Delisivkova), 17 pp., April 1999. Research Studies – 8. In English (only an electronic version). In the period 1999-2005 the author was Editor-in-Chief of the on-line electronic quarterly periodical “Black Sea Basin Regional Profile: the Security Situation and the Region-Building Opportunities”. In English. Published in the ISN Insight of the ISN Network – a Swiss Project of the country’s participation in the NATO/PfP Program.

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Turkey Looks Ahead, (Plamen Pantev), 29 June 2011, Research Reports – 21. In English. Published in the ISN Insight of the ISN Network – a Swiss Project of the country's participation in the NATO/PfP Program.

The Black Sea: A Forgotten Geo-Strategic Realm, (Plamen Pantev), 13 October 2011, Research Reports – 23. In English. Published in the ISN Insight of the ISN Network – a Swiss Project of the country's participation in the NATO/PfP Program.

The US/NATO ABM Defense Shield in the Black Sea Region, (Plamen Pantev), 08 December 2011, Research Reports – 24. In English. Published in the ISN Insight of the ISN Network – a Swiss Project of the country's participation in the NATO/PfP Program.

Ten Years in NATO, Ten Years Ahead, Forum of the Bulgarian Transatlantic Society, Sofia, 28 March 2014, GCMarshall Bulgaria, NATO Public Diplomacy Division, (Plamen Pantev, p.41-43), at: www.atlantic-bg.org/files/Book_28_03_2014_Eng . In Bulgarian and English.

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I Introduction

There is not yet a clear picture about the end of Russia's aggressive war against Ukraine, neither about all consequences of this biggest military mobilization and conflict since the Second World War in Europe. Russia started the war with the promise to finish it for days. Weeks and months passed and the "special military operation" could no longer hide the nakedness of a brutal and merciless war, aiming to grab territories of a neighbouring country.

What is sure for now is that the world is facing an undisputable from moral point of view situation, in which there is an aggressor with all features of an imperialist Nazi conqueror – the Russian Federation, and a victim of the aggression – a courageously defending its homeland Ukrainian people and state. It is clear also this war will not end soon and one of the probabilities is it may last for another year, two or more.

Though the fighting is still in progress, there is a need of a better and more systematically structured knowledge about this second war of Russia against Ukraine: what motivated the regime in Moscow to wage it, what are the factors that drive the tendencies leading to the end of the war and to its eventual results.

This analysis is needed also due to the fact that while the civilized world is fully in support of the Ukrainian people and its future has been linked to Kyiv's membership in the EU and NATO, the perspectives of the military nuclear superpower and aggressor – Russia, are bleak and dependent on various, including unforeseen for now, factors.

The study tries to outline interim conclusions about the concept, the ideology, the objectives and the tools used by the Russian federation in this barbaric war of attrition against Ukraine – a war of a nuclear superpower against a smaller neighbouring country.

The study does not aim to analyse the strange way the war is developing – Russians carry on military attacks in both a regular and terrorist manner

on the whole territory of Ukraine, while the Ukrainians are deterred to counter-attack the aggressor on the latter's own territory and to fight with longer-range arms even on their own land.

The author understands how many issues from the theoretic fields of international relations, foreign, security and defense studies need to be considered to understand in a holistic way the final result of the interaction of domestic Russian, international, political, economic, governance, psychological and other problems that led to launching an aggressive and devastating war in the European continent by Moscow.

The purpose of the study is not to outline the avalanche of mistakes in the policy of the collective West towards a showing for decades signs of revenge imperialist Russia. Neither it aims to point to the multitude of military mistakes by the aggressor in the last year.

The aim of the study is to outline and discuss the concept, the ideology, the objectives and the means of the Russian aggression. Revealing the Nazi-like behaviour of the Russian leadership and its armed forces could serve to construct the broader picture of the developing conflict and learn how to prevent a similar invasion by Moscow.

The study aims to prove that the legal and moral consequences of the war will be the conviction of the aggressor for the genocide and the war crimes. This would be the only possibility for normalising the life of the Ukrainians and the Russians as well as of the broader international relations system.

II Wrong Concept

The wrong concept of Russia's state leadership, giving as if the theoretic grounds to start this war, programmed the disastrous developments and consequences for Russia and led to the unimaginable sufferings of the Ukrainian people. Which is this concept and its main elements that convinced Putin to take the decision for starting the war? The concept is a combination of systemic (international and domestic) considerations and situational arguments that brought and keep already for a year the miserable life of the Ukrainians and degrade Russia's statehood and morale of its society.

The systemic international aspect of the concept is that in a world with fastly solidifying positions of the power centers with which Russia can compete only in the area of nuclear weapons – strategic and tactical, Moscow needs a major crisis or war that would provide a meaningful leverage in the bargaining process about the future of the global order that is supposed to follow. Russia's leaders view the short cut to a respectful great power status as achievable for the Russian federation only if it exploits to the best the combination of conventional and nuclear potential in its possession.

The Russian leadership portrayed its own incapacity to gradually catch-up since 1991 with the other centers of power in the international relations system in the economic, technological, social, political and other spheres of life as an evil attitude on the side of the collective West (whose achievements the Russian elite and its families lavishly used). The collective West, especially the USA, have been permanently accused of trecherous plans of demolishing the Russian federation. This same elite did not have the will and the intellect to realize that the dissolution of the USSR has been almost one hundred percent self-inflicted.

Such a concept conveniently passed to the available and very limited governance capacity to cope with the myriad domestic political, economic, social, ethnic and other issues, but also for preparing the Russians to the level of consciousness needed to militarize society. "The

Young Army” (“Юнная армия”) is just one example of the purposeful Nazification of the Russian society. Waging periodically wars (Georgia, 2008, Ukraine, 2014, Ukraine, 2022) was a powerful instrument of centralizing political life and keeping under control eventual democratic projects as well as separatist tendencies – on economic or ethnic grounds.

For decades the communist system was serving as the integrating factor of the multiethnic and multinational Soviet state with its huge territory and tens of nationalities and ethnicities. With the collapse of the Union of the Soviet socialist republics the Moscow elite chose Russian culture and language as the replacement for providing the needed cohesion of post-1991 Russia. The effort to sophisticate this role led to the creation of the “Russian world” (“Русский мир”) concept, which further added to the process of Nazification of the Russian society. The ambition to bring under the roof of “Russian world” the former constituent states of the Soviet federation and former Warsaw Pact countries never waned in the Kremlin minds.

Another aspect of the domestic systemic factors that were motivating the very conceptualization of the war has been the formulated and openly declared complex of cultural and spiritual superiority of the Russians over the rest of humankind and especially over Ukraine and the Ukrainians. The practice of defining superiority on ethno-spiritual grounds, exercised by Nazi Germany, has been discarded by history. The political leaders in Moscow baselessly divided human society into “us”, the “Russian world” and “them”, who did not belong to this “unique world of the Russians”. This intellectual trait of the Russian political thought can be traced back in this chauvinist country’s history, philosophy, literature and poetry.

In the specific case of Russian attitude towards the Ukrainians there is an absolutely groundless allegation that the latter are incapable of independent existence without the guidance of the former. This is another false argument motivating the ruinous conclusion to start another war on Ukraine with the delusive belief the Ukrainians would inevitably be unable and unskilful of military defense.

The situational aspect of the concept has international, domestic and psychological dimensions.

First, the “collective West”, as the term was devised by the Kremlin, has been perceived as internally divided – economically, politically and socially, i. e. easy to be overwhelmed in a potential conflict.

Second, in addition to that the “decadent” West has been calculated by the perceptual system of the the Russian federation and its government as having a lower threshold of bearing pain in comparison to the “heroic Russian people and its armed forces”.

Third, becoming victim of their own wishful thinking, the Kremlin-based “intellectuals” judged the February 2022 situation in Ukraine and in the world as similar to the February 2014 one around Crimea. In the words of the Russia’s late foreign-policy guru Primakov, speaking about the annexation of of this Ukrainian peninsula, “a possibility appeared and we used it” (“создалась возможность – и мы воспользовались”).

This clear bolshevik, opportunistic thinking easily triggered the readiness to bluff, including by threatening to use nuclear weapons, which are in excess in the Russian federation. Once the Kremlin realized its “special military operation” will last long, the same “intellectuals” invented the new narrative of Russia, possessing self-confidence and higher capacity of preserving ‘strategic patience’ in combination with readiness to wage a protracted war and a stronger will to win it – unlike the inferior Ukrainians and the collective West.

One may add to the wrong contents of the concept of waging war on Ukraine also the role of the Russian intelligence services. On one side they provided incorrect information and assessment of the situation in the country that was to be attacked. On the other side, in the circles of the so called “siloviki” there is a methodologically wrong overestimation of the social transformational capacity of the intelligence services.

When we add the sad and miserable role of the Russian social sciences and experts, choosing similarly as the intelligence services to please the

Tsar in the Kremlin by formulating ideas the latter prefers to hear, and not the sober, critical scientific arguments and proposals for action, it is just logical to expect a disastrous decision-making process at the highest level of state power.

Another judgemental error of the top Moscow decision-makers about the actual and evolving situation in the world has been the poor calculation of the international reactions to the aggression on Ukraine. Despite the warnings by the West Russian leaders could not realize what will be the pressure of the sanctions that were supposed to follow the eventual invasion on the country's economic, social and military machine.

The hopes in the minds of the Russian geopolitical engineers and political leaders in December 2021 have been to push NATO back to its geostrategic level before 1997. The war Russia started on 24 February 2022 was expected to achieve fastly this result as the verbal warnings to Washington and Brussels did not work. A few months after the beginning of the full-scale aggression, however, Putin and his gang received an "Alliance plus" on Russia's borders. Finland and Sweden, but also Ukraine *de facto* joined NATO and the Alliance equipped much better its first line of defense on the Eastern flank of the organisation and prepared it against an eventual Russian attack.

A specific additional factor, influencing the moulding of the concept to wage war on Ukraine has been the pathological inclination of Putin himself to steel property of others, in this case territory, that do not belong to him. A perverted, unscientific twisting of history by him and his servile lieutenants led to the decision to "return back" to mother-Russia what has been "once taken from her". The Russian president added this ingredient to the concept of starting war on Ukraine no matter he understood well he would crush with the boots of his soldiers European taboos from the periods after the Second World War, the Cold War and the post-Cold War.

The missing domestic component of the concept for war on Ukraine has been the kind of reaction and response of hundreds of thousands potential men in uniform to the call for mobilization. The preference to flee the

motherland and start their life in foreign countries but not risk life impressed the world. The bravado-like comments of the Kremlin that Russia does not need traitors and they'd better go away can hardly be perceived as sound reaction of leaders who should have efficient motivational capacity for military activity. The concept for waging war against Ukraine could not predict one of the most shameful chapters in Russia's military history.

Putin's complaint about the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century has been well heard by the world, especially by the perceptual systems of all great powers. It is well known that dramatic events happen in the history of international relations. The intriguing question has been which way would Russia take to compensate for the loss inflicted by the demise of the Soviet Union?

It could be the pragmatic, slower and laborious road of gradual civilizational modernization. This included exploiting to the best the opportunities provided by an eventual national democratic market economic social progress. At Moscow's disposal have been the readiness and hopes of the powerful Western economies to support the evolution of a new capitalist democratic Russia. The United States had already gratuitously provided financial help for preserving the safety of the Soviet military and other nuclear stockpiles in a period of economic and social hardship for the Russians.

Alas, Russia's choice was revengist, similar to the choice of Adolf Hitler after the First World War, though nobody humiliated the former Soviet totalitarian empire after its dissolution, neither its constituent states, unlike Germany in 1918. Today Russia is painfully failing. The concept to wage wars on Ukraine has been wrong, promising prolonged suffering for various reasons to hundreds of millions of people.

A missing sound concept for making a victorious war against Ukraine could not be compensated by a stubborn will of a dictator and his corrupt train. In the course of an unsuccessful war of Russia against Ukraine the conceptual background has been replaced by reaction and adaptation to the evolving events – on the battlefield and in the international relations

system. Nothing was any longer under Kremlin's control but the humiliating bluffing of using nuclear weapons against a defending Ukraine. Moscow does not have enemies in this war it initiated that threaten the existence of the Russian state but its own incompetent leadership.

The Kremlin's self-humiliation has been multiplied by the country's inability to reflect the high-speed degradation of Russia's authority in the world. This additionally diminished the state's great-power status. That is why it is important to understand what ideas dominated the reasoning of Russia's top leaders that led to the production of this suicidal conceptual geopolitical thinking and behaviour.

III Lame Ideology

The ideological cover of Russia's aggressive war against Ukraine was supposed to reach effectively a broad range of target groups and a broad spectrum of individual perceptual systems.

The key to creating a working ideological motivation and justification of the war was found in the eventual successful integration of the national historical achievements and memories with the actual, present-day political developments in the world, in the region of Eastern Europe, in Ukraine and in Russia. The safety-belt, if this did not work, was the traditional Russian mythology, production of fake news and "actualising" fake stereotypes.

The major target groups were the Russian society, the "would-be-liberated" Ukrainians, the international public and the Russian armed forces.

The concept of approaching the variety of individual Russians' perceptual systems was again opportunistic as in the case of the very conceiving of the war. A broad menu of "ideological hooks" has been distributed, ranging from traditional, conservative family and religious Orthodox Christian values, shifting to nostalgic pro-Soviet memories, to imperial patriotic great Russian motivation and culminating with the ever present threat perception of an evil West, its Anglo-Saxon core element and the institutions based on it – NATO and the EU.

Making this ideological "Macedonian salad" work required activating the respective institutions and personalities, especially in the professional circles of the Russian TV channels. However, these obviously contradicting ideas would not have worked unless the cohesive and integrating ingredient of the Russian state ideology – "derzhava"/"держава", its nucleus – the role of the "vertical"/"вертикал", and the latter's powerful disciplinating effect were not present. The democratic anti-war reactions in defense of freedom and peace after 24 February 2022 were drowned, without major protests, by

the brutal police force of the Russian state and the ideological sub-consciousness of the people to obey to the orders of the state.

Putin's personal state machinery created the illusion of such a "powerful vertical", but his real Russian state was not that strong. A full with superiority complexes president in Moscow, hiding the actual inferiority ones, was suggesting to the Russian public rather brutally that Ukraine and its young leader Zelenskyi are the weaker state and enemy by default.

This led to another methodological mistake – to believe each target group could be "ideologically fed" and effectively kept under control. If such an ideological foam screen worked initially to some extent to the Russians and their armed forces, the effect on the Ukrainians and the international community in the NATO, EU and even UN context was a complete failure. The following list of ideological excuses and explanations of the war against Ukraine could in no way justify the adventurous enterprise of Putin's regime:

First, traditional Russian spiritual and moral values standing in full contradiction with the Western ones and the latter's decadent practice. Historical myths have been linked to the obligation to work for strengthening the state institutions today in order to guarantee a Russian future domination in the world.

The so called "Russian traditionality and sound conservatism" borrowed from the ideological attraction of the Orthodox Christian church of patriarch Kiril of Moscow in several directions: a) remission of sins of the Russian soldiers as they die in the "just and defensive" war against the Ukrainians; b) blessing of the Russian soldiers and their weapons, including nuclear arms, when used in the name of "mother Russia"; c) as Putin states in his "historic" speech of 30 September 2022, this "special operation" bears all the features of a "holy war", a decisive fight against the "satanism" of the West, and again – especially of the Anglo-Saxons.

Second, those who do not find arguments in the above stated ideological options are offered the chance to view the "special operation" as a version of the "Great Patriotic War" (1941-1945) – a heroic fight against Nazi Germany and Japanese militarism. The preparation for that thinking took

many years with propaganda activities in the weeks around 9th of May – the Victory Day. The traditional military parades on that day in Moscow’s Red Square were the “spiritual” element of a snarling warmongering of the Russian state.

If the Great Patriotic War was a fight for the survival of the Soviet state and peoples, the war against Ukraine has been presented as a brave struggle against the collective West and its Nazi and militarist Ukrainian proxies. This time the survival of “mother Russia” in the 21st century is at stake. Even more, the propaganda narrative adds, the survival is needed not just for the Russians, but for the “great Russian civilization”, whose backbone is the Russian state.

The self-reflection as a superior to other civilizations draws important characteristics of modern Russian Nazism or Ruscism. According to the Kremlin ideologues this “great civilization” has been envied by the West and it aims to put an end of the existence of the Russian federation. The worst enemies are the traitors of “mother Russia” as in the fight against the German occupiers during the Great Patriotic War. However, the brave men and women of the Russian security services together with the Russian Orthodox church and state-controlled media are entitled to protect the values and the memories of the past and will continue to motivate the troops in their fight against the enemies.

However, the huge problem for the Kremlin is how to keep intact the “special military operation” in the colours of success and victory simultaneously with the effective brain-washing of the Russian society and the messianic claims of the Moscow empire.

Third, if these two ideological sources cannot reach individual Russians, including soldiers, then there is the option to trust directly the deepest and most sincere beliefs of the leader, Putin, as shared candidly on 30 September 2022:

“I would like to end my speech with the words of the real Russian patriot, Ivan Alexandrovich Illin – ‘if I consider Russia my motherland, it means that I love, contemplate and think the Russian way, I sing and speak Russian; I trust the spiritual power of the

Russian people. Its soul – is my soul; its destiny – is my destiny; its sufferings – are my pain; its flourishing – my joy”¹.

It deserves mentioning that while the fight against Nazi Germany remains a major ideological fundament in Putin’s Russia, the dictator’s fondness of Illin puts at odds the president’s declarations against fascism and Nazism. Why so? Because Illin himself has openly hailed the significance of fascism and Nazism: needed ideologies, according to him, that required being merged with Orthodox Christian religion in Russia in combination with the ruling of a powerful leader in a very centralised state². Illin strongly believed that

“fascism is a rescue excess of patriotic arbitrary action”³.

Russia is dipped in an ideological mess. Apart of the three ideological aspects of attracting the social consciousness another one should be added. The Tsar in the Kremlin completely negates the Leninist-Bolshevik-Communist-Soviet period of the Russian history.

Having in mind the plastic way of human mind’s adaptation to the evolving realities, such a dramatic ideological turn rather paralyses the motivation of large parts of Russian society instead of stimulating it for activity in favour of the fatherland. The paralysis is complete after the fruitless efforts to present a trustworthy vision of the future of “mother Russia”, for its people and state. The ideological confusion breeds unpredictable consequences for the masters in Moscow and for the country in general.

The only option left to present arguments in favour of the Russian war against Ukraine was to portray the surrounding world, dominated by the West, as degrading the Russian concept of normality. Adding flesh to such an intention required destabilizing the world, in which Russia succeeded to position itself as an insignificant actor, but possessing a universally recognized capacity to spoil and ruin what others have

¹ Полный текст обращения Владимира Путина 30 сентября 2022 года, стенограмма выступления о ДНР, ЛНР, в: Комсомольская правда, <https://www.kp.ru/online>, . Last visited on 23 January 2023.

² И. А. Ильинъ, О рускомъ фашизмѣ, Русскій Колоколь. Журнал волевой идеи. No 3, Редакторъ –Издатель, Профессоръ И. А. Ильинъ, 1928, с. 54-64.

³ Ibid., с. 60.

constructed. Russia's ace in the sleeve for such a destructive ability has been the created during the Soviet period strategic nuclear potential. The capacity to exterminate the "vices" of the West and the whole planet had to add arguments of some might to an otherwise sinking ideologically but having no safety belts, Russian elite.

The ideological toolbox by which Moscow had to legitimise in Russian society the "need to liberate the brotherly people" from the bad Nazis in power in Kyiv was not prepared to deal with the issue of Ukraine's democratic practice in the last 30 years. The Ukrainians have been holding periodically elections to mandate in a transparent and democratic way the institutions of the country with the power to rule.

Actually, this range of opportunistic ideological messages was aimed at hiding the real threat perception of the dictatorial regime in Moscow – the scare of freedom, democracy, human rights, political pluralism, rule of law – all of them linked to the destiny the Ukrainians have chosen for themselves. One thousand years ago Kyiv has become the birthplace of the statehood of Ukrainians, Belorussians and Russians. A Ukrainian state with democratic ideology, belonging to the European Union and the values of the democratic West was conceived as a direct danger to the authoritarian and dictatorial regime of Putin. Russia of Putin has been steadily sliding to a kind of huge territorially North Korea, defending the vitality of the regime with nuclear threats to the world. Any ideology and policy that would save the political regime in Moscow have been considered useful and good for application.

What happened was a lame effort by Putin and his lieutenants to attribute his own ideas, perceptions, "lessons learnt", emotions and assessments to the Russian people, Russian armed forces, the Ukrainians and the rest of the world. The reaction of Moscow to this failure was blaming those who did not join Putin's primitive thinking and ideas for bearing the responsibility of the continuation and escalation of the war and the destruction of human life and the Ukrainian infrastructure.

As this reaction did not produce the expected effects, Putin and his team periodically raised the stakes about the nature of the war they initiated by

shifting the ideological fire from the Ukrainians and their “corrupt Nazi leaders” to NATO and the collective West. The present day ineffectiveness and governance incapacity of Russia again tried to find answers for its policy in Peter the Great’s threat perception formula – “the enemies coming from the West”. This formula has been educated for centuries in an effort to save lame political regimes and ideologies in Moscow.

The “special military operation” against Ukrainian “Nazis and militarists” was expected to be a national celebration of the Russians, closing their ranks around the ideological power of Putinism – the new hope for a conceptual road-map for long-expected Russia’s bright and promising future. Months after the surrealistic war and real cruelty of the Russian armed forces in Ukraine this woul-be-success story turned into a grey and broken Potemkin village – again, after the failure of Soviet socialism and its Leninist and Stalinist ideology. This time, however, failed the neo-Soviet and/or neo-imperial ideology of which Putin was the symbolic flagship.

No matter how the war will continue and end in ideological terms Putinism sank similarly to the flagship “Moskva” in the Black Sea. The concept of the “Russian world” in the period after 24 February 2022 added in an accelerated way all major characteristics of totalitarianism, Nazism and fascism – the most ominous ideologies of the previous century. Many observers named already this ideology “Ruscism”.

For Putin and his regime this amoral ideology provides the opportunistic atmosphere of waging a long, probably a permanent war. Any call for change in Russia’s policy will be charged with the accusation of “surrendering to the enemies” and will be followed by brutal silencing of those who dared to oppose Putin and his war on Ukraine. Introducing martial law, repressions, threats of using nuclear weapons – these are the ultimate arguments of preserving the survival of and ideologically failed regime.

IV No-win Objectives

Barry Posen in his Foreign Affairs article of 4 January, 2023 writes that *“very few people know what Russia’s overall strategy is, if it even has one”*⁴ in waging the war against Ukraine.

One can hardly agree that Moscow did not follow an analytically clear road towards the various objectives it has set to reach by starting and hoping to end the war. However, the disparity of the objectives and the means of reaching them, the inadequate ranging and prioritizing of the former objectively hindered the development and application of a winning strategy.

Though there existed a number of strategic aims in different aspects, the intellectual deficiency to prove their sense and tie them in a functional whole, their combination with inappropriate means for realization led to transforming the goals into subjective wishes and longings of the current proprietors of the Kremlin. The disaster Putin and his crew created is obvious, though the expected logical end of his regime has the potential of being prolonged in time with all the devastating consequences for Ukraine, for Russia and many other states.

The assessment of the Russian objectives in its aggressive war against Ukraine is carried out along several critically important requirements:

First, are the aims in the war set as elements of a complex system, considering the broad variety of influential issues, especially the economic and the ecological ones, as well as the potentially evolving scenarios of the global development.

Second, is there a logical and dynamic interaction of the concept, the ideology, the objectives and the means of waging the war.

⁴ Barry R. Posen, Russia’s Rebound: How Moscow Has Partly Recovered From Its Military Setbacks, in: Foreign Affairs, <https://link.foreignaffairs.com>, January 4, 2023. Last visited on January 11, 2023.

Third, has Russia developed its aims, considering in an objective and rational way its own resources.

Fourth, has Russia formulated its objectives having realistically considered the resources of Ukraine.

Fifth, has Russia taken into account the variety of eventual Ukrainian reactions while structuring Moscow's aims and,

Sixth, has Russia tailored its objectives in the aggressive war against Ukraine in conformity with the UN-based international law⁵.

First, after the self-dissolution of the USSR the largest constituent state, the Russian federation, faced the issue of preserving in some way the *status of a great power*. The Russian leadership realized its military nuclear and conventional force, huge territory and possession of natural resources, especially of gas and oil, were not enough to preserve the attraction and appeal of a great power.

One of the historical reasons for the end of the Soviet empire was its staggering and backward economy. Putin's Russia needed to obtain in some way leadership positions in the economic field too, in addition to its strategic nuclear might. The efforts to change this situation in an accelerated way could not produce adequate results. Putin's Russia was not ready and capable to work hard and pragmatically, though slower than wished, in turning the federation into a sustainable and powerful free market economic actor.

After 20 years in power and unsuccessful efforts Putin continued to be the Tsar of an underdeveloped for great power status economy. The fast track he and his entourage chose to embark on to compensate the retarded modernization was trying to get hold of critically important natural

⁵ The requirements from third to sixth are theoretically borrowed from some of the methodological recommendations for analysis and forecasting international conflicts, developed by my good friend and colleague R. N. Dolnykova in her monographic research "Natural Laws and Reality. Theoretical and Practical Aspects of Forecasting the Foreign Policy: the System Analysis of Ideas" (Рисиме Николаевна Долныкова, "Закономерности и реалии, Методология и методика прогнозирования внешней политики. Опыт системной организации понятий", Изд. 2-е, переработанное и дополненное, Иерусалим, Филобиблон, 2008), p. 475.

resources that are crucial for the development of information and energy technologies of the future⁶. As a Carnegie Endowment for International Peace researcher points:

“Russian national security documents reveal that Putin understood years ago that climate change and geopolitical disruptions would lead to radical changes in energy and commodity markets, therefore requiring Russia to diversify its economy”⁷.

However, as mentioned, instead of choosing the hard, laborious way, Putin elected the Middle Centuries method of “grab and take away”. African countries with significant mineral resources as Mozambique, Madagascar, The Central African Republic and Mali were “assigned” to the military mercenary company Wagner Group, whose boss carries extractive activities there.

In a similar way Ukraine has been a lucrative option with over €6.7 trillion of estimated mineral wealth⁸. A large part of the Ukrainian mineral riches are in the eastern and the southern parts of the country.

As Lazard writes, Putin is using the cloak of history to design Russia’s role in climate-disrupted futures and behind ideological narratives the Russian aggressor wants access to resources and spheres of influence⁹.

In Russia’s list of objectives Ukraine was supposed to be a “fast track” in dealing in a zero-sum way with the economic issues of a planet with climate change. Russia chose geopolitical plunder for economic purposes in the Anthropocene, instead of reaching the level of a responsible great power actor, which develops its capacity to help solving global planetary issues of humankind.

We can conclude that the first rational aim – to add capabilities in taking an authoritative great power economic position by occupying Ukraine,

⁶ Olivia Lazard, Russia’s Lesser Known Intentions in Ukraine, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, at: <https://go.carnegieendowment.org> , 14.06.2022. Last visited on January 9, 2023.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ukraine: Investment Opportunities in Exploration and Production, Ukrainian Geological Survey, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine, Ukraine Invest, at: <https://www.geo.gov.ua/wp-content/uploads/presentations/en> . Last visited on January 9, 2023.

⁹ Ibid.

was practically head-on collision in an interdependent world, in which international peaceful cooperation is the key to solving global economic, technological and energy issues.

Second, it needs to be clarified how the concept of the war, the ideology behind it, the variety of objectives and instruments of this big military undertaking, causing unimaginable human suffering for the Ukrainian people, for the country's infrastructure are logically interconnected and interact with each other. The need stems from the constantly changing reasons and aims in the Russian narrative why the forces of Moscow are fighting in Ukraine.

Weeks before the invasion on 24 February 2022 Russia provided the world and first of all – the USA and the countries of NATO, with Moscow's demands, brutally hinting why 175,000 troops have been based on the borders with Ukraine. The draft-treaties of the Russian federation with the United States and with NATO¹⁰ - de-facto ultimatums, claimed that the Alliance withdraws its military forces and weaponry from the member-states that joined the organization after May 1997. The countries that joined the North Atlantic Alliance were the new democracies from Eastern, Central and Southeastern Europe. This Russian objective meant depriving these countries, including Ukraine, from their right to decide their own future and shape their policy free from outside interference.

The answers from both Washington and Brussels were negative to the insistence to compromise the key principles on which European security was built. The regime in Moscow took the adventurous decision to create a new factual geostrategic situation in Europe. Russia confronted the USA and NATO with an effort to impose *fait accompli* by quickly – according to different sources from 3 to 14 days, capturing Kyiv, toppling the President and government of Ukraine, occupy and subordinate the country according to the plans of the Kremlin.

¹⁰ Treaty Between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Security Guarantees (Draft), 17 December 2021; Agreement on Measures to Ensure the Security of the Russian Federation and Member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Draft), 17 December 2021, MFA of the Russian Federation, at: www.mid.ru, 17 декабря, 2021. Last visited on 11 January 2023.

The formal wording of this objective was “demilitarization and de-Nazification” of Ukraine – convenient for domestic digestion propaganda terms. In an effort to make this objective more trustworthy, again for propaganda purposes, the danger that NATO has been bringing with its eastward expansion¹¹ was projected as a leading explanation of the Russian “pre-emptive” moves.

But to make sure that if the whole range of inconsistent and ungrounded aims do not reach the perceptual system of the “patriotic” Russians, Putin repeated on every occasion the appealing message that Ukraine is part of Russia, culturally and historically, a “traditional historic Russian territory”. This, however, definitely shifted the objectives from regime change in Kyiv to ethnic cleansing war with the intention to subjugate both the sovereign Ukrainian state territory and its people.

Another direction of trying to devise objectives for the war on Ukraine that would be embraced and motivate the society has been the definition of the boundaries in which the Russians resides – a centuries old and unclear for the Moscow bosses issue. The Kremlin Tsar decided to enlighten his people on this question – by simply de-Ukrainising the state of the Ukrainians. It remained a free choice for the Russians what objective to pick – liberation, demilitarization, de-Nazification and even de-Ukrainisation.

The major concern about the variety of purposes has been their effectiveness of motivating the collective national consciousness of the Russians and to prepare them for the waves of mobilizations in the armed forces. That is why to the variegated ideological menu, trying to satisfy all tastes, the regime in Moscow served a similar variety of purposes to the Russian population. Changes were taking place often, depending on the evolving military situation.

A peculiar wish of the ‘architects’ of the “Russian world” has been its boundaries be never fixed, preserving the opportunity to integrate in the federation also those who live in other countries, as well as all who

¹¹ The issue of “NATO endangering Russia” has been treated by this author in earlier publications. See, for example, Plamen Pantev, Perceptions and Reflections of the Security Crisis in the Black Sea Region, in: Black Sea Security, Analytical Journal No 4 (36), 2019, p. 25-29.

sympathize with Russia and/or Russian language. In an effort to underline the significance of the “Russian world” and provide arguments for the start of the war on 24 February 2022, Moscow blamed the Ukrainian government of “genocide against Russians” in the Donbas region in the period 2014-2022.

This was a false statement, denied by the authorities of the OSCE, positioned in the region and carrying out their obligations under the Minsk Agreements. The war in Eastern Ukraine has been raging since 2014, many Ukrainian citizens of Russian origin have become victims of the exchanged fire between the Moscow invaders and the regular and irregular Ukrainian forces – however not in the falsified “Kremlin style” numbers. The people killed in Donbas in the period of eight years have been victims not of the “Ukrainian-generated genocide”, but of the first Russian aggression in 2014.

To make sure every Russian was convinced Putin’s regime has been on the right side of history and the Ukrainians – on the evil one, the permanently changing objectives of the war reached at some point a new definition. Russia announced it is fighting nuclear terrorism as the Ukrainians have been accused of preparing “dirty bombs”, loaded with radioactive material. Kyiv was accused also of constructing biological weapons with anti-Russian purposes.

The escalation of crazy accusations continued by injecting in the previous ones the subtle addition that in the end Moscow is fighting Satanism¹² - whatever this could mean for a deluded Russian society. The notion of fighting a “holy war” against the “Anglo-Saxon evil” that has permeated the “collective West” and its institutions – NATO and the EU, might have served as an attractive objective, mobilizing and motivating to conquer the neighbouring state.

¹² Полный текст обращения Владимира Путина 30 сентября 2022 года, стенограмма выступления о ДНР, ЛНР, Ор. Cit., Last visited on 26 January 2023; See also: Peter Dickinson, NATO, Nazis, Satanists: Putin is running out of excuses for his imperial war, at: <https://mail.atlanticcouncil.org>, The Atlantic Council, November 8, 2022, last visited on 26 January 2023.

So we face a cacophony of aims in waging the war with the hope that once fighting has started, soldiers and civilians have begun to die, a new psychological and political atmosphere and dynamics would start to dominate the battle, the Russian soldiers and eventually the broader international community. For example, all of a sudden, the food issue came to the fore. An avalanche of connected problems became the new focus – hopefully for the Russians, lessening for some time the pressure on them of the major question: why did they start this full-scale war.

Another aspect of the inadequacy and unattainability of the different objectives of Russia in its aggression against Ukraine was the changing tactics that led to changing the means and from here – the aims that have been ordered to the soldiers and the officers on the ground. The Russian military use rape of females from 4 to 80 years of age on a massive scale as a weapon, attack and occupy nuclear power plants, destroy critical infrastructure on the whole Ukrainian territory, especially electric power grids with the idea to cause genocide because of the freezing temperature in the cold winter. All these methods have been explained as ‘legitimate military purposes and tools’ by the Kremlin bosses. It is important to highlight the terrorist nature of these Russian objectives as when the war ends precisely they will provide most of the legal arguments of punishing the Russian war criminals from the commander-in-chief to the regular private.

As for the major aim – elevating Russia’s big power status to the point of obtaining a decisive ‘say’ in the eventual “Board of Directors” of the world, this war portrayed Moscow instead as a backward 18th century imperial conqueror. This characteristic, despite the country’s superpower strategic nuclear armaments, logically disqualifies Putin’s Russia from the desired great power status.

Brutal colonial conquests have nothing to do with 21st century “great power” behaviour. Returning “historical Russian lands” that have been “taken” from Moscow is no explanatory variable for a dozen of former empires, even for more countries, if we go further back in history. Putin had to ask whether the almost 200 states of the world accept his “Ekaterina the Great” thinking that he will not be concerned about

Russia's security only when his troops are well fortified on the other side of the federation's territorial borders.

The memories of the Soviet imperial socialist experiment are fresh and the present Russian objectives in its war against Ukraine are totally unacceptable for the former satellites of the USSR and for all but few UN member states. Moscow's try to make equal Russia's expansion through invasions to the NATO enlargement – the result of sovereign and free decisions of the democratically elected national institutions of the contending for membership countries, indicates a huge democratic, but also intellectual deficit.

Third, the Russian aggression started with the intention the invaders to march victoriously in Kyiv one or two weeks after the intervention. The real full-scale war continues for one year and a legitimate question needs to be answered: has Moscow drafted its objectives after having soberly considered its own resources for this adventure. As the transparency of the Kremlin decision-making process is close to zero and, as mentioned, after one year of war it should be possible to judge retro-agnostically in an objective way what the answer of this question might be.

The first step in understanding how the Russian leadership defined what resources are needed for the outlined objectives is answering the question to what extent Putin realized what deficiencies led to the dramatic collapse of the USSR – ‘the biggest geopolitical failure of the 20th century’, according to him. The most significant structural reasons that caused the end of the Soviet Union were the economic and technological retardation from the Western historic competitors in combination with systemic violation of human rights and freedoms of the individual citizens of the socialist federation.

In his more than twenty years reign of Russia Putin and his regime could not deal with these deficiencies that badly influenced the drive for ‘great power’ status of his country. The autocratic leader consistently prioritized in his policy the need to keep alive the glorious memories of ‘the country that won the Second World War’. True to his manipulative style Putin extracted from this historical moral capital the contributions of the

Western allies and the peoples of the other constituent Soviet republics, throwing light only on the glory of the Russian people. In a similar way the mounted nuclear strategic capacity of Russia has been attributed only to the people of this country, ignoring the huge contribution of the other Soviet republics as well as of the allies from the Warsaw Pact Treaty Organisation (WPTO).

However, being winner in the Second World War and possessing second best strategic nuclear force were not enough to mount all the needed capacities of an influential and attractive great power state. Claiming and launching a comprehensive political operation of situating in a compelling way Russia in the group of countries, configuring the multipolar great powers' relationships, suffered from the major deficit of policy-making – wrong timing of the activity. Russia was unable to compensate the contributions, flowing once to the Soviet Union's great power status from the other constituent republics of the USSR and the WPTO. One reason was the incapable governance of a huge territory with multitude of ethnicities and nationalities. The worst deficit, however, was the inability to catch up economically, technologically and to internalize the lessons of what freedom, democracy and human rights mean for the ambitions to reach and sustain great power status. That made the Russian federation unprepared for the claims of belonging to one of the power poles in the international relations system.

If this has been the priority methodological mistake for judging wrongly the state of the resources for launching the war against Ukraine, another one was the inappropriate conceptual and ideological arsenal as discussed in the preceding chapters. The conceptual and ideological resources of Russia's first war on Ukraine in 2014 were not enough for starting a full-scale war in 2022 against the big neighbouring country. The success story of annexing Crimea lulled the Russian leadership it can freely proceed with implementing the plan of Russia's imperial, great power resurrection in a 'blitzkrieg'.

The wrong judgement of Russia's own resources was intensified by the false tuning of the obedient national governing institutional system to the autocratic leader in Moscow. The total absence of democratic oversight

and a high level of corruption in the Russian security sector led to creating a “Potemkin village” from the armed forces and intelligence services. The complacency on these issues in the top leadership in Moscow paved the way for the hundreds of thousands killed and injured Russians during the first year of the war and diplomatic shame of global proportions. The diplomatic service was turned into a war propaganda machine which led to the isolation of Russia in the international relations it has not experienced in the last five centuries.

The worst judgement of Russia’s own resources was at the level of organising and implementing the so called “special military operation” for demilitarisation and de-Nazification of Ukraine. The real objective of the war has been de-Ukrainizing the neighbouring state and after the eventual success – turning it into a resource base of Moscow for proceeding further with territorial grabbing. Putin and his team did not have and could not find the resources for completing this goal.

Thus Russia positioned itself in an unfavourable situation once it started the war. The changing concept of how many troops are needed to proceed “according to plan” in the “special military operation” – from elite military professionals, to Chechen fighters of the Kadyrov army, to private military company Wagner, to hired prisoners, to mobilization one, to an unannounced mobilization, to mobilization two, etc. – all this demonstrates the awkward loss of perspective of an initially enthusiastic aggressor. Engaging the Russian General Staff to be directly in charge of the “operation” displays the rising worries about the local domestic social and political developments and preparing for a longer military standoff.

Fourth legitimate question, concerning setting Russia’s objectives in its aggressive war against Ukraine is to what extent Moscow properly assessed and took into account the resources of the attacked country and its capacity to confuse the plans of the Kremlin.

There are several layers of wrongly perceived and calculated Ukrainian resources to fight back in an aggressive war by the decision-makers in Moscow. Firstly, the belief of Putin that there is no such people as “Ukrainians”; they are, according to him, just ‘misled by the Western

propaganda Russians'. This belief of the Tsar turned to be a fundamental message to the Russians, the state institutions and the armed forces. The meaning of the message was the Ukrainians who still resist to be Russians should be treated as traitors and subjected to punishment. The invaders interpreted the message as encouragement and allowance to rape, to torture, to steal and to kill indiscriminately.

On a broader scale this misperception of the Leader led to underestimating the reality of an existing, functioning and ominous for the aggressor vital Ukrainian identity. The Leningrad street fighter Putin has learnt the "wise" lesson that if you have an enemy, it's better for you to strike first. The eventual judo wrestler Putin, however, never reached to the wisdom of well-instructed and trained sportsmen that you should never underestimate your opponent.

An avalanche of Russian military failures followed one after the other. The Russians misunderstood the major resource of the Ukrainians – their courage, will, intelligence and firm social commitment to govern sovereignly their free and independent country.

Another underestimation of the Ukrainian resources was their motivating power to live in a democratic and free society, which elects on a regular basis periodically its leaders and institutions. The fundamental misperception of Putin of democracy as a weak, vulnerable and easy to manipulate social and political organisation generated the intellectual incapacity to imagine firm Ukrainian resistance in defense of the people's free post-Soviet life.

Russia calculated wrongly the Ukrainian resources also in three other major directions: armed forces, intelligence and diplomacy.

During the fight for eight years in defense of Ukrainian territory in Donbas, the armed forces of the attacked country collected battle experience that they demonstrated in the first year of the full-fledged aggression that started on 24 February 2022. The Ukrainian armed forces (3CY) demonstrated skills, bravery, smart adaptation to the evolving

situation at the different battle theatres, which means that Russia miscalculated the resources of the enemy when it started the war.

In a similar way the Ukrainian intelligence proved to be able to change and keep at the level of effectively facilitating victorious fighting and leaving no breathing space for the Russian aggressors.

Ukrainian diplomacy was capable and active enough to take the initiative and win the foreign political and moral battles with the Russian counterpart. From the very beginning of the war throughout the period till nowadays Ukrainian diplomacy outdid Lavrov's propagandists both in the multilateral fora and on the bilateral diplomatic front.

The underestimation by Russia of these three purely Ukrainian resources of power led to the universe of problems for Moscow after one year of war. The advantages and impact of the armed forces, intelligence and diplomacy of Ukraine have been multiplied many times by the intensifying Western support as well as from the help coming from democracies in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Fifth critically important requirement when drafting Russia's objectives in this war should have been considering the variety of Ukrainian reactions to the aggression.

The eventual reactions have not been treated by serious academic research and/or intelligence experts' scrutiny and the potential advice – sincerely sent to the Moscow decision-makers. Shy signals from Russian polling agencies that an eventual war was not popular could hardly reach the dictator's mind. An adventurous decision to restore Peter the Great's glorious empire (and more of it) required persistent and courageous academic and professional intelligence pressure to change the course towards war.

The Ukrainian reactions have been a total surprise to a presumptuous aggressor. The Ukrainian defense included positioning of the state in the camp of democratic nations, which oppose and confront authoritarian and dictatorial regimes. This very appropriate and practical Ukrainian

reaction has been presented to the Russian public as a confirmation of the negative “Nazi” image of the attacked country. The Ukrainian reaction was assessed as a servile attitude to the forces of “Satanism” and their main weapon – the Anglo-American axis.

Another strange Russian adaptation to the unexpected fierce Ukrainian resistance has been the introduction of an induced competition between the regular armed forces of the aggressor and the private fighters of Kadyrov and Wagner Group of Prigozhin in an effort to overwhelm the defending country. For the observers in the Kremlin the ongoing war in Ukraine was perceived as a kind of a laboratory experiment who would perform better – the soldiers of Gerasimov, the Chief of the Russian General Staff, or the mercenaries of the Chechen Kadyrov and the entrepreneur Prigozhin. This imitation of the ‘glorious’ Second World War battles is a shameful part of the Russian military history.

Even less successful have been the Russian efforts to calibrate the initial objectives to the military reactions of the Ukrainians. The failure to capture Kyiv, the sinking of the Russian Black Sea flagship “Moskva”, the bombing of the Kerch bridge, the effective attacks on strategic targets deep into Russian territory, the missing for one year serious military success – all these facts are indicative of a poorly prepared setting of objectives and of a bad adaptation preparedness to the various eventual scenarios of the unfolding war. Russia’s counter-reaction has been terrorist bombardment of civilians and of critical infrastructure with artillery, missiles and drones.

Sixth requirement when drafting the goals of the war has been their correspondence to Russia’s obligations with the norms and principles of contemporary international law. Again, as in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine, the aggression and the military performance of the armed forces of the invader flagrantly violated the principles and norms of the UN Charter-based international law.

Moscow has already trampled down in 2014 a long list of international political and legal treaties¹³. It has been hard to be conceived by international legal scholars how was it possible for the Russian diplomacy to present so simplistic arguments to exculpate the aggression against Ukraine. The imperative international legal principle of self-determination has been highlighted by Russia as the sacrosanct UN Charter norm that has paved the way for the “righteous” military intervention in Ukraine in 2014. It is a notorious theoretical truism that imperative international legal norms and principles act in a system and no state or its foreign ministry is allowed to pick one and ignore the others to explain and justify acts that violate the UN Charter.

Russia never explained after 2014 why did it violate bilateral and multilateral legal and political treaties with Ukraine, in which the inviolability of the state borders of the two sovereign and independent countries has been agreed after voluntary, free and transparent negotiations. Moscow never explained why it deprived the Ukrainian state of organizing a referendum in Crimea as provided by the Ukrainian Constitution and legal system. Violating other countries’ national legal norms as well as international law instead of fulfilling them became a key feature of the Russian armed forces – regular and mercenary, of the servile diplomacy and all the other state institutions. The ‘rule of law Russia style’ has been displaced for years already by the administrative commands of the supreme leader in the Kremlin.

It took some time to realize that implementing the norms and principles

¹³ The Helsinki Act of 1975 provides inviolability of borders unless peaceful negotiations lead to other solutions; The Belovezh Agreement of 1991 for the dissolution of the USSR provides for guarantees of the territorial integrity of the constituent Soviet republics and for the inclusion of Crimea as an autonomous part of the Ukrainian state; The Lisbon Protocol of 23 May 1992 of Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Belorussia, the Russian Federation and the United States about the mechanism of formalizing the accession of all 5 states to the START, and for Belorussia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan – to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1968 as non-nuclear states; The Budapest Memorandum of 5 December 1994 of the United Kingdom, United States, Russian Federation and Ukraine that guarantees the security of Ukraine in light of the country’s accession to the NPT against nuclear attack and of its territorial integrity; The Bilateral Treaty of the Russian Federation and Ukraine of 2003 for the regulation of the border between the two states – signed by Putin and ratified by the Russian Duma, and, The Harkov Agreement of 2010 between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, signed by Medvedev and Yanukovitch, about the right of Russia to base its Black Sea Navy in Sevastopol by 2042.

of international law – a normal foreign-political strategy, has become part of the Russian war-making arsenal. The term “lawfare” was born recently – a combination of “law” and “warfare”, describing a form of asymmetric warfare. What is specific of Russia’s misuse of the international legal arguments in the context of its “lawfare”?

A perfidious Russian hybrid foreign-political strategy is “Russia – a defender of international law”. In its aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2022 this argument was declared as the solid, undeniable ground for launching the war. The argument has been Russia had to defend international law against the acts of genocide against Russians in the Donbas region.

As already mentioned, the permanent mission of the OSCE in this area rejected categorically this statement. Genocide of Russians by Ukraine became another futile excuse of the treacherousness of the aggression. Ukrainian, other nations’ governmental and nongovernmental institutions and organisations have collected evidence of the Russian-committed genocide against Ukrainians. Sooner or later the perpetrators of this crime will be put on trial and convicted. The present Russian president Putin will surely lead the group of war criminals for his army’s crimes against humanity and for the orders he has given to start the war and to commit so many evil acts and atrocities.

The Russian lawfare trick with deluding public opinion at home and abroad relies on the exploitation of the lack of legal expertise of the large majority of people. Claiming all Russia does in its international relations is based on international law requirements suggests the position of Moscow is the moral one (“Our war is just and the victory will be ours”). The defenders of international law are considered the moral leaders and examples in an anarchic international system.

Though this Russian “maskirovka” (disguise) has worked from time to time, the aggressive full-scale war against Ukraine pulled down the mask of this false policy. A famous aspect of Russia’s “intellectual” contribution to the beloved “maskirovka” methods dwindled away. The total disunity between the Russian objectives in the war and

contemporary international law led to the mobilization of the democratic people and countries of the world against the aggressive war. Furthermore, Russia's violations of international law led to unprecedented and ever mounting sanctions against the invaders. Tens of countries provide military support to the Ukrainian armed forces (ЗСУ). Ukraine's international status grew up – the country is already a candidate for EU membership and a *de facto* member of NATO. Russia's status of a permanent member of the UN Security Council has been strongly diminished politically and morally. Moscow's isolation in the UN General Assembly – with the exception of 6-7 countries out of 193, is a fact of life.

V Ineffective Means

The logical chain “interests – objectives – means of reaching them” in the case of the Russian aggressive war against Ukraine is compromised in all its elements.

The interests of returning to great power status have been wrongly formed and formulated. Such a status was incorrectly conceived as a heightened ability to scare the neighbouring countries, the immediate regions and the world in general, using the “argument” of the national strategic nuclear arms.

On the basis of this wrong premise have been drafted the objectives as discussed in the previous chapter. The lack of clarity in the objectives turned Russia’s aggression in a potentially no-ending war and a chance to declare a no-ending martial law on the territory of the Russian federation, prolonging for life Putin’s regime and for ever, eventually, Putinism as the state doctrine of this country.

The messy objectives normally generated the need for various means to complete successfully the “special military operation” – Putin’s euphemism of a full-scale war of de-Ukrainization. The constantly changing strategies, tactics and armaments applied to reach the aims of the dictator’s war have been proving ineffective after one year since the intervention began. Why so?

Despite the substitution of objectives and efforts to re-conceptualize the war, two distinct purposes emerge of Russia’s longer-term behaviour and especially of the developments during the second war against Ukraine that was started in February 2022.

- 1) Return to the great power status it has lost after the dissolution of the USSR and the thirty unproductive, practically lost years of efforts to come back in the group of most influential centers of power in the international relations system.
- 2) De-Ukrainizing the state of Ukraine in an eventual show of unquestionable might, demonstrating a pompous return to the old

imperial status of “great Russia”, a return, accompanied by blood, human suffering and victims – a demonstrative warning for those who would stand on the way of Putin’s “glorious” riding over history.

A broad range of sub-objectives, needed for the realization of the two major ones, have been set and worked on during the first year of the war. Here the focus will be on the two fundamental ones and mainly – what instruments for their implementation have been chosen.

In the style of terrorist organisations Putin’s Russia reminded the world anything its armed forces do is under the powerful umbrella of the strategic nuclear forces. Not counting the declarations of the Russian president before the invasion how modern technologically and powerful Moscow’s nuclear arms are, only in the course of one year of war Putin used the nuclear bluff at least 7-8 times. The everyday “nuclear” babble of Putin’s lieutenants is not taken into account.

For those who follow the history of strategic nuclear relationships is perfectly understandable what is the value of talking on these issues, and most of all – frightening other countries with the devastating effect of using such weapons. The meaning of introducing nuclear threats to Ukraine, NATO, including the USA aimed at least a threefold effect:

First, to discourage the fierce and effective Ukrainian resistance;

Second, to raise the spirit of Russian “patriots”, already disappointed by the failures of the “blitzkrieg” and the “special military operation” in general and,

Third, to frighten and withhold the West – mainly the USA, NATO and the EU, from providing the effective weaponry to the courageous and smart Ukrainian forces that would help pull back from Ukrainian territory the Russian aggressor.

First, the Ukrainian armed forces (ЗСУ), but also the Ukrainian people, did not blench to the nuclear overtures of Russia. The nuclear deterrence

theory, applied practically on them by the invaders did not work. Nuclear blackmailing was a spectacular and impressive failure of the effort to promote the Russian spirit, will and capability as performed by Putinists as dominant over the Ukrainians.

In military terms the Ukrainians reminded not only the Russians, but all other nations, observing from a distance “the war in Ukraine” that courage and dignified spirit is the most significant weapon and most effective part of a victorious war. The Ukrainians demonstrated to the nuclear armed aggressor that radioactive devastation was a permissible choice for the 40 mln people when competing with the option of surrendering its freedom and independence to the occupiers.

From that moment on the Russian leadership was deprived of strategic initiative and this state of the relations of the warring countries is irreversible, no matter what novelties the Russian CiN (commander-in-chief) and his servile subordinates would introduce in the weeks, months or years to come.

Second, the Russian “patriotic” spirit was not raised, despite the leaders and their servile media were becoming louder when frightening the listeners and spectators with the “almighty Russian strategic nuclear triad” and its “magic” and “unique” technological improvements. Russian patriotism did not become more enthusiastic when the Russian Orthodox Church (PPII) started blessing these armaments as well as the atrocities of the soldiers in the “holy war” against the “satanists” in Ukraine.

An objective indicator the Russian military nuclear strength was no longer motivating for patriotic self-sacrifice and military discipline has become the emigration of hundreds of thousands men, trying to escape the calls for mobilization in the army. Thus the Russian nuclear forces remained a too expensive argument in service of the people’s patriotism with no effective motivation for fighting the Ukrainian “Nazi” and “militarist” enemy. These arms remained the last guaranty for keeping the regime of the dictator in the Kremlin.

Third, the only well calculated effect of the nuclear bluffing was the anxiety and fear of the Western friends of Ukraine that practically led to slowing down the needed military help. A timely supply of the appropriate defensive and offensive weapons had the potential to protect and save civilian lives from the missile and armed drones terror of the Russians. Providing heavy armaments to a capable and motivated armed force as the Ukrainian army (3CY) would have accelerated driving away the Russian aggressor.

The Western allies of Ukraine are providing huge, incomparable since the Second World War military and economic support to a country in war against an aggressor in Europe. Still, however, the “rational” argument that “we cannot risk a Third World War”, which will be a nuclear one, was a good excuse of a slowly getting rid of the policy of a shy appeasement of the Russian militarism to which the West had conveniently adapted even after the first war against Ukraine in 2014.

The brutality of Russia’s war against the Ukrainians, the overacting with the nuclear bluff, the diplomatic pressure of the West to make China and India demonstrate their disagreement with Moscow’s eventual use of nuclear weapons diminished seriously the psychological effect of the nuclear sabre rattling on Kyiv and NATO. One should seriously take note of the sober and cool warning of the US CIN (Commander-in-Chief) and his military staff to their Kremlin counterparts that any use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine will be responded by devastating US and NATO conventional blows to all Russian military assets on the Ukrainian territory, and beyond if need be. The Russian CIN has been reminded that his personal whereabouts are closely watched and no bunker can save him. High-level military and intelligence phone-calls and meetings between Russian and American representatives confirmed how seriously Washington considers the role of nuclear issues in the bilateral relations.

At the same time US government sources have been sending clear messages that nobody in the White House and even in the collective West is planning and preparing for regime-change in Moscow.

The toolbox Russia invented and applied in implementing the second major goal of the war – de-Ukrainizing the attacked country with all possible means, paves the way to future war tribunals. Although the instructions to commit the various atrocities in Ukraine have been given by Russia’s political and military leadership, everyone who committed acts of genocide and any war crime will stand trial and receive just punishment.

The organisation, the sites for torture and “filtration”, the full repertoire of executing the instructions, the mass rapings and other sexual crimes – this is how Russia tried to carry out its “liberation mission of the Ukrainians from the Nazis”. The Russian occupiers had the freedom to do whatever they consider appropriate – just for the sake of making the Ukrainians forget they have identity and belong to the humankind, unlike the “superior liberators”.

The means that the Nazis have used during the Second World War for subjugating ethnic and racial groups, the methods of crushing human dignity and self-identity, perfected by Stalinism and Soviet special services – all that arsenal of killing and humiliating men and women, has been applied practically by the Russian invaders and will be never forgotten and forgiven by the civilised peoples. The universe of practices for nullifying Ukrainian identity for the sake of conquering the cradle of “mother Russia” – Kyiv, all this required a false and chauvinistic historical narrative of which Putin became with personal satisfaction the speaker.

The Russian people will pay for generations the heavy price of the unfortunate, cruel and unsuccessful effort to de-Ukrainise a proud, brave and highly intelligent people. The institutions and staff for seeking justice by the civilised nations of the world for the crimes committed by Russia are in a process of establishment and preparation to work.

VI The Logical Consequences

The consequences of Russia's aggressive war against Ukraine – concept, ideology, objectives and means, shall be analysed in the following directions:

- 1) Consequences for the international relations system – centers of power interaction, global and regional security developments, EU-NATO relations, the United Nations Organisation, state of the international order.
- 2) Consequences for the future of Ukraine and for the future of Russia.

First, the consequences for the international relations system are multipronged.

The introduction of *nuclear war bluffing* by Russia increased global political instability. Exploiting the world's vulnerability from the eventual option to cease to exist because of wrong and/or limited in time for decision-making (probably less than 10 minutes) about using or not nuclear weapons had to reach, from Putin's perspective, easy win of the battle for Ukraine. The Kremlin earnestly expected success of the "blitzkrieg" and fast surrender of the Ukrainians.

In the atmosphere of political instability the chance of an accidental nuclear war became more probable. It would not have been a rational response on the part of the USA, NATO and the EU to just doubt the readiness of Russia's leaders and people to commit suicide. That is why the so much hated by the Kremlin "collective West" acted wisely by highlighting Putin's overtures as civilizationally inferior, irresponsible and dangerous.

The risk of the potential devastation of the natural environment and human life on planet Earth led to the universal condemnation of Russia's adventurous juggling with nuclear threats and arms. It deserves to quote the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz:

“When I visited Beijing in November [2022], Chinese President Xi Jinping and I concurred that threatening the use of nuclear weapons was unacceptable and that the use of such horrific weapons would cross a redline that humankind has rightly drawn. Putin should mark these words”¹⁴.

Russia’s nuclear blackmail, however, had a certain effect on the international relations. A very precious and highly respected diplomatic instrument – *international negotiations*, has been dragged into the discussion how to end the war of Russia against Ukraine. Henry Kissinger, for example, proposed a roadmap for discussing this topic¹⁵. Kissinger is an old Cold War politician, close interlocutor of Putin and having no empathical insight of the nature of this war. The bargaining result of his suggestion would have been the following: Russia promises to provide peace and the Ukrainians pay with national territory to the aggressor. This would mean victory without fighting for Putin, boom of nuclear proliferation and an effectively working blueprint for world autocrats and dictators to try it in their neighbourhoods.

It is hard from today’s perspective to see exactly the end of Russia’s invasion in Ukraine. The Kremlin tsar insists he would achieve his objectives and Ukrainians and the West are firm on not allowing him to succeed. More than 94% of the Ukrainian citizens see the war as a fight for national survival against an openly genocidal enemy. This means that people of various ethnic and national groups, living in Ukraine, including Russians, share this opinion.

My guess at this point as an international negotiation scholar is that there is no bargaining space and chance for shaping a compromise agreement. The good side of this setback for the negotiation option is that the Ukrainians provided time for the Western leaders to stop panicking by Putin’s bluffs. This saved the West from repeating in the 21st century a version of the “Munich policy” of 1938 that led to an agreement, aiming

¹⁴ Olaf Scholz, The Global Zeitenwende: How to Avoid a New Cold War in a Multipolar Era, in: Foreign Affairs, January/February 2023, at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com> . Last visited 29 January 2023.

¹⁵ Henry Kissinger, How to avoid another world war, in: The Spectator, 17 December, 2022, at: <https://www.spectator.co.uk> . Last visited on 29 January 2023.

to appease Hitler's Nazi Germany by granting it parts of then Czechoslovakia. Making territorial concessions to Putin would mean preparing of Russia for its next aggression and turning West's nuclear deterrence potential into an unnecessary financial burden.

A deal in which the promise of peace is paid with tearing parts of the national territory of sovereign and independent Ukraine would mean also a stupid reading of Russia's declared "injured emotions" about its own failed greatness. The geopolitical status of this country in 1991 when the Soviet Union ceased to exist was the problem of the USSR's inadequacies in various social, political and economic areas. The West at that time was watching and not believing initially that the Soviet federation and political system have been crumbling down.

Putin's reading of the history of his country's failures cannot become the needs and interests of the free democratic countries. The leading power of the democratic West warned for months Russia has been preparing for invasion. This helped the democratic world to learn its lessons for hours and days after the invasion began. After all, despite the nuclear sabre rattling the democratic West stands firm in defense of freedom and international law.

Though Russian-Ukrainian relations are not yet "ripe for negotiations", there is a formula, proposed by President Zelenskyi¹⁶, which takes into consideration all significant factors that can lead to an agreement. Though the hunger of Moscow for territorial grab is not satisfied by this plan, the prospective and vital Russian interests are considered and taken into account by this negotiation formula.

Another extremely important consequence of the developing war is the high level of civilian and military casualties. There is a possibility the war will last long and probably turn into another frozen conflict. Nevertheless, the Ukrainian government and its Western allies are mobilized and firm in their resolution to ***bring to justice all who committed genocide and***

¹⁶ President Zelensky's 10-point peace formula, full text of the speech to G20 in Bali, Yahoo!news, November 15, 2022, at: www.news.yahoo.com . Last visited on 20 January 2023.

war crimes of unseen proportions after the Second World War. The EU has already qualified Russia as a “state-sponsor of terrorism”.

The governments and law-enforcement services of all Western countries with adequate and appropriate capacity, together with the Ukrainian counterparts have been working for months already to collect, document and prepare for court procedures the Russian war crimes. Russia has a history of brutally violating human rights and killing innocent people, including in the 1930s, on the territory of Ukraine (killing by hunger).

Mass executions, engaging in sexual violence, abductions and tortures on all territories that Russia occupied since 24 February 2022, the forced deportations, the indiscriminate bombings that killed thousands and turned into rubble cities, towns and villages – all these crimes are closely monitored and filed. The criminals, including the ones giving orders will be subjected to just trials and punishment.

The creation of conditions for a second turn of the genocide of the 1930s during the winter of 2022-2023 by methodically destroying the critical infrastructure of Ukraine, depriving civilians from heat, electricity and water – none of these atrocities is forgotten and nobody who committed them will be forgotten and forgiven. The Nazis of the 21st century – the Russian invaders of Ukraine, will be held accountable for all they did to the Ukrainian people. Without justice the peace in the traumatised by the war country cannot be restored.

A special work will be needed for organising a *special tribunal* to try Putin and the whole Russian leadership for starting the aggression and giving orders for committing tens of thousands of war crimes. This would be the only meaningful way of assessing the magnitude of the criminal and absolutely illegal war Putin started, aiming to crush the international law-based world order, trying to de-Ukrainise a sovereign people and state and create a new Russian empire.

There are consequences of the war also for *the security situation in different parts of the world* – the Far East, Central Asia, the Middle East and Europe.

The Russian invasion in Ukraine has the potential to spill over in the Indo-Pacific region and shake the foundation of the stable post-Second World War international order. The National Security Strategy of Japan, issued on 16 December 2022 after approval of the National Security Council and the Cabinet states:

“Russia’s aggression against Ukraine has easily breached the very foundation of the rules that shape the international order. The possibility cannot be precluded that a similar serious situation may arise in the future in the Indo-Pacific region, especially in East Asia”¹⁷.

Japan joined the US and EU sanctions on Russia and sent humanitarian and defensive assistance to Kyiv. Japan took part in the Madrid summit of NATO in June 2022. Russia’s aggressiveness adds to the traditional challenges for Japan of the policies of North Korea and China. Putin’s threats to use nuclear arms strongly motivated Japan to intensify its activity as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council regarding disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.

At the same time Japan is gradually expanding its military activity and capacity. On 11 January 2023 Tokyo signed a defense pact with the United Kingdom. Japan is fully allied with the USA, NATO and the EU in defending the rules-based international and economic order. All these changes were forced by Putin’s adventurous decisions and aggressive policy performance.

Developing changes in the security situation may be observed also in Central Asia. The short definition of these changes is ‘withering away of Russia’s influence’. An Uzbek fellow of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (CEIP) wrote recently:

“Just one year ago Russia’s positions in Central Asia were so solid that even China’s growing presence in the region was not a threat. That all changed with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. With every missile it fires at Ukrainian cities, the Kremlin is destroying

¹⁷ National Security Strategy (NSS) of Japan, 16 December 2022, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, at: <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryon/221216anzenhoshou/nss-e.pdf> p. 2.

*Russia's influence around the world, above all in the post-Soviet space*¹⁸.

Russophobia is gathering momentum among the Kazakhs due to the war and the atrocities of Russia in Ukraine. The Kazakh journalist Arman Shuraev openly opposed the Russian ambassador to Kazakhstan Borodavkin, after the Kremlin's diplomat accused the Kazakh people of Nazi behaviour:

*“Borodavkin, if you want to see Nazis and fascists in Kazakhstan, look yourself in the mirror and you will see the major Nazi and fascist. Glory to Ukraine! Forward Kazakhstan!”*¹⁹.

The involvement of Iran in the war of Russia against Ukraine as supplier and instructor of using hundreds of armed drones, enlarged the zone of tension to the Middle East. Iran and Russia are already cooperating for years in the war in Syria. The Iranian drones have caused enormous damage in Ukraine – both on infrastructure and on human beings. A group of Israeli experts wrote recently – Russia is giving something to Iran in return:

*“... in the conventional military sphere (aircraft and air defense); regarding its status in Syria; and a possible blind eye to the leakage of nuclear knowledge and components to Tehran”*²⁰.

Obviously Russia's aggressiveness as a big nuclear power has far reaching consequences for the security in the world. However, the highest level of reactions to the Russian invasion have been in Europe and the Euro-Atlantic area. EU and NATO states have a clear and strong moral case to stand with Ukraine and there is no wavering on this issue.

Russia's second aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2022 provoked tectonic strategic consequences that will have repercussions for decades.

¹⁸ Temur Umarov, *Russia and Central Asia: Never Closer, or Drifting Apart?*, in: *Carnegie Politika*, at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika?lang=en>, 23.12.2022. Last visited on 19 January 2023.

¹⁹ Arman Shuraev, On YouTube: “Russia Invades Ukraine – Russia Threatens Kazakhstan” (In Russian with translation in English). Last visited on 30 January 2023.

²⁰ Sima Shine, Arkady Mil-Man, Sarah Lerech-Zilberberg, and Bat Chen Druyan Feldman, *Deepening Cooperation between Iran and Russia*, in: *INSS Insight*, No 1677, January 3, 2023, p. 1., at: www.inss.org.il (Publications).

Russia's war gave NATO a renewed purpose about the enlargement of the military alliance in Scandinavia. Sweden and Finland will join soon the Alliance²¹. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, all Scandinavian countries, all Baltic Sea nations but Russia are already members of the North Atlantic Alliance. Ukraine is a *de facto* member of NATO and will become also a formal one.

Another aspect of these tectonic changes is the altering strategic posture of the Alliance in Eastern, Central and Southeastern Europe. The capabilities of the organisation are constantly augmenting its strategic posture for defense against eventual Russian attacks. The solidarity within NATO is as high as it has not been in the last thirty years. Putin and his regime succeeded to import Russophobia in the former Soviet constituent republics and in the rest of the former European satellite countries. Kremlin was no less successful in creating a bigger and more powerful NATO. Allies are investing now more in defense and develop capabilities that would prevent any attempt of tyranny and oppression to win over freedom and democracy.

The EU also demonstrated an unprecedented unity in cutting economic and energy links and dependencies with the Russian federation. Here Russia also "succeeded" to crush the optimistic EU intentions of the 1990s to create "a single economic zone from the Atlantic to Vladivostok" in which peace, trade and cooperation would flourish. The Union strengthened fast its resilience and deprived for less than a year Russia from dividing the EU by the leverage of the hydrocarbon resources, provided for years to the European countries.

The EU, the USA and the other major democracies around the world managed to pull out the Russian federation from the global economy, narrowing the Kremlin's chances to invest in war. Russia was left to its own economic capabilities and to the calculated interests of a few economic actors like China, India and Turkey.

²¹ Anna Wieslander, Eric Adamson, Jasper Lehto, How allied Sweden&Finland can secure Northern Europe, in: Atlantic Council Issue Brief, January 6, 2023, at: www.atlanticcouncil.org . Last visited on 19 January 2023.

The EU embarked on a courageous geopolitical course by providing the prospects for membership in the Union of its Eastern neighbours, but Russia. The Union rose decisively its defense expenditures and assumed faster than expected the status of a global strategic actor and center of power in addition to its economic one.

A significant feature of this developing political process has been the close coordination of the EU with both the United States and NATO. On 10 January a Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation has been signed by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. The EU-NATO partnership, which is founded on shared values reinforces the capabilities of both organisations with a focus on fighting Russia's aggression against Ukraine. The decision is to take the partnership to the next level when threats and challenges require it. Non-EU NATO allies as well as non-NATO EU member states are encouraged to involve to the fullest possible level in the initiatives of both organisations²².

The aggressive war of Russia against Ukraine influenced *the international order and the UN regulative*.

Russia shattered the European and international security order by starting the first war against Ukraine in 2014 and after launching a full-scale aggression on 24 February 2022. The agreement that was reached in 1975 in Helsinki that no change of borders would be taking place in Europe except after peaceful negotiations was a historical achievement after two world wars that started on this continent and after 30 years of Cold War with highest level of military confrontation ever again on European soil.

Russia's barbarism was demonstrated also against the UN Charter by brutally riding over fundamental imperative international legal principles as: the use of force or threat of using force to reach political ends; respect for independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of states. In a violent

²² Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, NATO Press Office, 10 January 2023, at: <https://nato.email20.com/t/r-l-tjhlqty-bvdruihjr-t/> . Last visited on 30 January 2023.

imperial style Russia has started redrawing borders of neighbouring countries, pushing the international relations into bloc divisions and claiming spheres of influence. Moscow's ultimate argument in carrying out all that activity has been the possession and operational ability of using its strategic and tactical nuclear arsenal.

The institutional regulative system of the United Nations was also affected by the Russian aggressive behaviour. The regulative effectiveness of the multilateral institutional system has been diminished with the start of the full-scale war of Russia against Ukraine. The UN Security Council was unable to produce effective results for putting an end to the military activity of the aggressor. The governing subjects in the Kremlin killed the UN Charter's philosophy and the UN Security Council's reliability by making Article 6 of the UN Charter meaningless. The Article states:

“A Member of the United Nations which has persistently violated the Principles contained in the present Charter may be expelled from the Organization by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council”²³.

The majority of the UN member states would be ready to expel Russia, but as a UN Security Council permanent member it would never allow such a recommendation to be adopted.

An avenue of unblocking the possible exclusion of Russia from the UN Security Council has been a claim, supported by the Ukrainian diplomacy that the Russian federation illegally succeeded the place of the USSR in the UN Security Council. There is a serious international legal case about the succession of the Soviet Union in the UN Security Council by Russia – a case that other former constituent republics of the USSR and now independent states support. But as long as it is solved, Article 6 of the UN Charter cannot be activated.

The chances to utilize in a practical way the potential of the UN and the UN Security Council in the present situation of an aggressive Russian

²³ Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice, San Francisco 1945, p. 4, at: <https://treaties.un.org/Publication/CTC/uncharter.pdf>.

war against Ukraine are not many. On one side, the UN and the UN Security Council should be kept as a public forum for diplomatically degrading the Russian federation due to its war crimes. Keeping this forum open to Moscow is also an asset as it gives the opportunity to project to the international public opinion the obvious lies and clumsy “maskirovka”/Russia style, trying to disguise the truth about this country’s atrocities in neighbouring Ukraine.

On the other side, preserving one of the very few remaining communication channels between the two nuclear superpowers – the USA and Russia, is a significant pragmatic possibility. This option is crucial in a period of Russian political adventurism.

Neither of these options, unfortunately, would accelerate the withdrawal of the Russian armed forces back on their own territory. The same holds true for the voluntary payment of the reparations for the damages caused on the Ukrainian people and territory. However, both will happen – sooner or later, as the civilised world will never accept Russia’s interpretation of the facts on the battle ground they created in Ukraine.

Lastly, the second war of Russia against Ukraine ***influenced the configuration of multiple centers of power in the international relations system.***

Russia contends for elevating its status of big country to the status of “great power”, presenting only one argument – its huge strategic nuclear potential. The present structural level of centers of power relationships in the international system functions in the situation of a destabilised world order. There is no institutional regulative authority – very much thanks to the discredited role of the UN Security Council after the start of an aggressive war by one of its permanent members, the Russian federation. There are no practically implemented guiding authoritative imperative international legal norms and principles in the relations among the USA, the EU, China and the Russian federation – due to the brutal violation by Moscow of the UN Charter.

What also is missing is a clear single hegemonic power that would be able to prevent the international relations system plunge into anarchical movements. There is a certain level of harmonious and cooperative attitudes in the relations between the USA and the EU. There is a level of understanding and collaboration between China and Russia. There is a combination of competition and cooperation in the relations between the USA and China and the EU and China. We live in a period of conscientiously induced by Russia hostility in its relations with the USA and the EU.

There is an interesting overlap in this configuration of multipolarity: USA, China, France – an EU member state, the UK, a NATO member, and the contending for great power status Russia, possessing nuclear armaments. All these countries are permanent members of the UN Security Council and the only “legal” possessors of nuclear weapons, according to the Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968.

Unfortunately, there is no collective subscription by these five states to the guiding authority of the UN Charter. The Russian federation unsubscribed itself by starting the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The USA, France and the UK condemned the aggression. China abstained of doing it, but did not support it. Russia was alone in supporting its own aggressive war among the permanent members of the UN Security Council. And Russia possesses the second biggest nuclear arms arsenal.

Next, the USA is no longer in the position it was for two decades after the end of the Cold War – the uncontested superpower hegemon of the international relations system. China is close to collecting all the ingredients of the super-power status.

In this situation of flux of the multipolar configuration of powers the sole effective regulator of their relations, a kind of a common denominator to all five big countries’ measure of regulating power, unfortunately, remained their nuclear weapons and the eventual deterring effect they induce. This has been the *de facto* regulative fundament of more than 60 years of nuclear strategic interdependence between the USA and the USSR, later Russia. Today the only remaining legal confirmation of this

regulative relationship is the New START Treaty, expiring in 2026. However, the war of Russia against Ukraine sent signals that the rationality of the START relationship is dangerously compromised and probably less valid. Not allowing US onsite inspections by Moscow in violation of the Treaty proves the validity of this assessment²⁴.

Another meaningful signal that stimulates the anarchy in the multipolar relationship of big and great powers was the forgotten pledge in the beginning of January 2022 by the P-5 countries – the permanent five members of the UN Security Council and at the same time – “legal” possessors of nuclear weapons. They jointly declared on 3 January 2022 that nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought²⁵.

The nuclear sabre rattling by Russia weakened both the value of the US-Russia START treaty and the Joint Statement of the leaders of the P-5 of January 2022. The nuclear bluffs of Russia, its declarations that these are not bluffs, but serious warnings – all that introduced a high level of emotionality and irrationality in the strategic interrelationships. The logical consequence was degrading, re-writing the psychological scheme of deterrence that served effectively global stability for six decades.

The only case in the years prior to 2022 when the rationality of deterrence has been questioned practically has been while Islamic terrorists threatened to use nuclear or radioactive weapons as a form of political pressure on Western countries. Putin’s Russia followed their way. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Chinese position on non-acceptance of this “nuclear language”, but also by the President of India and the pressure by the UN International Atomic Agency cooled for some time Russia’s top decision-makers’ heads on this topic.

As long as this war continues, however, the nuclear issue remains actual and needs vigilance by the international community. It must remain a special focus also for the three poles of comprehensive global power – the USA, the EU and China, as well as of the four countries (United States,

²⁴ Ellen Mitchel, US accuses Russia of violating major nuke treaty, The Hill, 01/31/2023, at: <https://nxslink.thehill.com> . Last visited on 1 February 2023.

²⁵ Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races, January 3, 2022, at: www.whitehouse.gov . Last visited on 30 January 2023.

the UK, France and China) of the P-5 grouping. A permanent vigilance on nuclear weapons preserves also NATO.

Second, the consequences for the future of Ukraine and Russia are contingent on how the war will finish. The variety of possible scenarios and the eventual unforeseen from the present perspectives end of the aggression are not considered by this study.

However, there is a single option, stemming from the individual author's perceptions and reflections of the war and of the multitude of tendencies – political, military, economic, financial, social, psychological, domestic, regional, international, legal and institutional, linked to the military conflict. The short definition of the single conceived scenario is: “Victory Day for Ukraine and a disgraceful end of the war for Russia. Full integration of Ukraine in NATO and the EU. Favourable conditions for Russia to embark on a gradual democratic revival and reconceptualising its place and role in the global affairs”. The present possibility this war will be indefinitely prolonged does not change the context of the end result and the most probable scenario as formulated.

The list of issues **Ukraine** will have to deal with after “Victory Day” is long and will require huge efforts to return to normality and accelerate the historic development of the nation. Coping with the bruises of the war, the human toll, the destroyed infrastructure, the return of the emigrants, dealing with the psychological recuperation, the realization of justice to those who caused the war and the tens of thousands of crimes – this will be a gigantic task of incomparable for the Ukrainians proportions.

For the solution of these tasks and for the integration of Ukraine in NATO and the EU this country will not be alone. Most of the countries of the world and especially the friends of the Alliance and the Union will do their job as needed. Ukraine has already accumulated experience in different social and military areas that makes the country a needed partner and ally. For example, no other country has gathered the experience how to deal with the Russian aggressor as Ukraine has done. The latter will be a unique partner in coping with disaster-relief operations after the lessons learnt during the barbaric war of Russia against it.

The most significant asset of Ukraine – its “human capital”, the intelligence and proven organisational capacity of the Ukrainians will make this country a natural leader in Europe and the world. The experience of defending and fighting for freedom and democracy has already placed Ukraine in this respectful position. Ukraine will influence the changes in the EU, in which the role of the Eastern European countries will become more important as the Union transforms into a global geopolitical and strategic actor.

After **Russia** loses the war the country will experience a dramatic stress both psychologically and politically.

While Ukraine is preparing the prerequisites for a post-war accelerated progress, Russia – thanks to its police regime in the Kremlin, is limiting the factors that could help the revival of the country. Despite Russia has been qualified as “the Nazi state of the 21st century”, its fate is in a worse position, compared to the defeated Nazi Germany after 1945. Germany after the Second World War was just a territory, on which a democratic experiment has been carried out – the build-up of the Federal Republic of Germany with the stewardship of the USA. The experiment led to turning Germany today into one of the leaders of the European integration and one of the most prosperous countries in the world.

In the Russian case we shall witness the remnants of an unsuccessful imperial try with a variety of disastrous consequences for its state institutions. The disappointment, the disillusionment of the Russians in combination with a depressed economic situation will not cancel the need of the rest of the world to hear answers why this war was started. The world will demand from Russia to reconstruct itself into an entity which will be a normal and peaceful neighbour that will not possess objectively the capacity to invade other countries. Another demand will be a responsible Russian behaviour in preserving the safety of the country’s nuclear arms.

For dealing with these issues NATO and the EU will be ready to provide support. Helping Russian society and state to hold accountable all who initiated the war and committed war crimes and genocide will guarantee

the next step in stabilizing the state – economically and socially. The Russians must face at last soberly the real situation: no Westerner, including “Anglo-Saxons”, wants to redraw the geographic and political map of their federation. Rather the present dictatorial leadership of their country is practically trying to change in its favour, satisfying its imperial whims, the geographic and political maps of neighbouring states. An important initial step by the society and the next generation political elite should be getting rid of the imperial, generated by a misleading propaganda “unique missionary role of the Russians” in the world, of the complex of arrogant superiority over other nations.

The Russian interpretation and practice of this role and emotions were seen during the war against Ukraine and will be never allowed to be repeated again. The task of proving Russia will never again assume and perform the Nazi role will not be an easy one. According to some Russian analysts and commentators it will take decades, even a century. In the meantime, however, Russia will have to pay the reparations for what it ruined in Ukraine.

The pay-off of all these hard decisions and actions by Russia will be living in a non-aggressive environment, preparation for peaceful cooperation with the other countries.

VII Conclusions

Going back to the first war of Russia against Ukraine in 2014 it becomes more than clear that the defeatist-leaning thinking and practice in favour of Moscow created the “soft-Munich 1938 policy” of the West, obediently appeasing the aggressor. Russia read this behaviour of the West as the open door for the second war that started on 24 February 2022.

Now peace and preventing new imperial aggression will be possible only if Ukraine wins the war and the war criminals face justice.

The full-scale aggression of Russia on Ukraine is definitely a strategic mistake of historic proportions with devastating for Moscow political, diplomatic, economic, military, moral and legal consequences.

This in no way underestimates the courage, resilience, smartness and creativity of the Ukrainian people. The false stereotypes that Russia has been producing for decades about the Ukrainians as incompetent, inferior, incapable and even with non-existing national identity disappeared after the first weeks of the war. On 14 April the Kremlin Navy’s Black Sea flagship “Moskva” sank after being hit by two R-360 Neptune anti-ship missiles made in Ukraine. It was proved that Ukraine was not just a former Russian province, not just a nation with unique identity, but also the real positive model how Russian society and state should develop.

Another huge mistake by Russia was that it believed the wrong “soft-Munich 1938 policy” of the West will be continued after 24 February 2022. The “collective West” demonstrated to Moscow that the rules-based international system matters for the free and democratic countries and that military decisions of sending as much as needed weapons to the brave and capable Ukrainian Armed Forces (3CY) for defeating the aggressor will not stop.

The fight for the sovereignty, freedom and independence of Ukraine is also in defense of the norms and principles enshrined in the UN Charter

and the Helsinki Final Act of 1975. International peace and security cannot be protected without these legal and political norms. The Ukrainian Peace Plan of 10 Points is a possible and feasible blueprint for negotiations with Russia.

Bulgaria has historical, linguistic, cultural and spiritual links with Kyiv and the Ukrainians. Ukraine is a close Black Sea neighbour and its victory in the war with imperial Russia is Sofia's best option for the security of Bulgaria as a NATO and EU member state. Future historians will write what roles played the different nations in this unjust Russian aggressive war against the peaceful Ukrainian nation. While the war is still raging, the more military and economic help to the invaded country is provided on time, the sooner Victory Day for Ukraine and the world will come.

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