



Article

Russian Aggression against Ukraine: Past, Present, and Futures

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Abstract

The paper examines peculiarities and futures of the Ukrainian–Russian war, the hot phase of which began in February, 2022. Using causal layered analysis, the reasons for the large-scale war—as well as underlying theories, worldviews and myths—are identified and linked together. The main factors that have not allowed Russia to achieve the expected results in the first two months of the invasion are identified. The analysis concludes with four scenarios for future developments: “westernisation”, “Ukraine’s own way”, “postponed war”, and “apocalypse”.

Keywords

Ukrainian–Russian War, Causal Layered Analysis, Russian myths, Ukraine’s Sovereignty, Ukraine Crisis

Introduction

In 2022, the war in Ukraine unleashed by Russia has become the major problem of international policy. In many parts of the world, it has pushed the topics of coronavirus and climate change to the background and has foiled the plans of many politicians, businessmen, and ordinary people; and all this happened quite unexpectedly, which is not surprising in the modern world. Although there were many concerns about the extremely dangerous situation in Ukraine, as Russia had drawn a significant number of troops to the border, very few took this into account while making their plans for the future. As for the armed conflict itself, and prospects of its development, quite different and contradictory opinions were expressed. The most common of them are as follows: (a) there will be no full-scale invasion because if there were then it would defy rationality and would not be in economic and other interests of Russia; the strengthening of trade ties is the best safeguard against war; and (b) in the case of such an invasion, Russia will easily defeat Ukraine in a couple of days or weeks and will satisfy its desire. Both of them turned out to be completely unjustified. Ukraine as well as Russia were misunderstood, and the chaos and contradictions of historical processes in this region were misinterpreted. The factors that affect these processes are numerous and operate at various levels, so it seems that Causal Layered Analysis is an appropriate technique to understand the situation (Inayatullah, 1998, 2004).

The situation in this country has been previously explored using CLA in an article on Ukrainian democratic transition (Turchyn, 2020). This research takes into account the Russian factor and the corresponding worldview, and has resulted in outlining three scenarios around the situation related to democratisation and the reinforcement of liberal values that might develop in the future. One of the conclusions of the article is that the establishment of a pro-Russian government in Ukraine is unlikely, given the assumption that the gap between the Ukrainian and Russian worldviews is widening, not least due to Russia’s own efforts. It is steadily growing radicalization and aggression that have become the hallmarks of this country since Putin came to power.

Since the beginning of the large-scale invasion, numerous studies have appeared analysing the causes of Russian aggression, describing the international actors’ policies towards Ukraine and Russia, and outlining scenarios for the future. In particular, Inayatullah (personal communication, May 1, 2022) used CLA to explore the issue of the

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invasion and identified seven different worldviews that correspond to the positions of the major actors involved in the conflict: Ukraine, Putin's Russia, Russian dissenters, the US and UK, the EU, China, and humanity. The Ukrainian–Russian war is certainly a global event, forcing us to both look back at a number of international crimes that have overwhelmingly remained unpunished, and to reflect on the shortcomings of the global governance system and the futures of humanity, including the possibility of a nuclear war. Nonetheless, the lower level of analysis of this situation is equally important, since the global reality is so complex and multifaceted that any representation of it inevitably leads to great simplification. It results in overlooking some key factors and processes. Such oversight is often why predictions do not come true and unexpected events become common.

It now appears that the vast majority of scholars misunderstood Russia's intentions, and their predictions turned out to be wrong (Graham, 2017; Smith, 2017). Nevertheless, at present, one can still find many studies published in previous decades that explain the current Kremlin's actions and their underlying logic (Åslund, 2008; Blank, 2002), since Russia has always attracted the attention of numerous researchers from all over the world. On the contrary, much less attention has been paid to Ukraine's internal affairs, which have been commonly considered through the lens of foreign worldviews and myths, including those of Russia. Therefore, there is no wonder that few could correctly predict the course of the war after a probable Russian large-scale invasion. The same applies to many current assessments of the situation in Ukraine, based on certain speculations relating to the aspirations and yearnings of the Ukrainians.

Thus, the primary aim of this study is to outline a broad picture of Ukraine's reality in the context of the war, including relevant events, academic theories, worldviews, myths and metaphors, as of May 2022, when the preliminary results of Russia's full-scale invasion can already be evaluated. By using CLA, I shall try to identify the reasons for the war in Ukraine and anticipate developments on which global futures also depend. To do this, it is necessary to consider the problem at the four vertical layers of analysis.

Litany

Since February 24, 2022, reading the news has become a shocking thing for every Ukrainian. Most of them are dealing with a litany of messages about constant bombing of Ukrainian towns and cities, numerous acts of destruction of military facilities and civilian infrastructure, horrific human suffering, aggressive actions and rhetoric of the enemy. An ordinary Ukrainian begins and ends his day with reading and watching such news. Given the inappropriateness of entertainment during the war, a lot of free time is spent endlessly scrolling through news feeds on a smartphone. At the same time, people living in a war zone witness the flights of military planes and helicopters, and the movements of both military equipment and troops. Ukrainians live in underground shelters, hide from the attacks and become hostages or victims of bloody massacres. Such cases are so numerous that an army of officials, experts and journalists is needed to record every case, however, this army is often missing, and therefore, activists and ordinary citizens have to do this job.

If one examines a lengthy period of the development of the Ukrainian–Russian conflict many important facts can be observed. Since Putin came to power in Russia, first as prime minister and then as president, acts of aggression by Russian authorities and political elites have become an integral part of Ukraine's litany. Initially, it concerned mainly Russian internal politics. The bloodiest example is (obviously) the Second Chechen War, including explosions in four apartment buildings in Russian cities (it is still not clear who is responsible for them), the indiscriminate use of force in Chechnya, the complete destruction of cities, and other numerous war crimes (Politkovskaya, 2003, 2009). Subsequently, these aggressive attacks were more and more frequently targeted at Ukraine. The most important events in this context are: the Russian–Ukrainian conflict over the island of Tuzla in 2003; interference in Ukraine's presidential election, including the poisoning with dioxins of pro-European candidate Viktor Yushchenko (the perpetrators have not been identified) and undisguised Russian support for the other candidate Viktor Yanukovich (who nevertheless could not become president because of the Orange Revolution in 2004 (Karatnycky, 2005)); regular visits to Crimea by the mayor of Moscow and other Russian politicians, who repeatedly stated that the peninsula had been handed over to Ukraine illegally (Hansen, 2015); and the intensification of Russian propaganda spreading messages about the ethnic division in Ukraine and the oppression of the rights of Russian-speakers. Since then, the Russian media has consistently portrayed Ukraine as a

failed state; a non-viable entity; a mistake of history; an artificial crumbling construct of hostile forces; and have argued that Ukrainians are an integral part of the Russian people (Fedor, 2015; Hutchings, 2015; Lupion, 2018; Pomerantsev, 2015).

After the events of the Euromaidan in 2014 in which pro-Russian forces were severely defeated, Russia started a war against Ukraine by invading Crimea and sending troops to Donbas. For the first time since World War II, Ukrainians have faced war on their territory, accompanied by shocking events such as the Battle of Ilovaisk or the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17. Gradually, the war became more limited and Ukrainians got accustomed to reports of shelling and losses along the confrontation line. On the other hand, Russia's rhetoric became extremely radical, and even fascist. For example, in 2014, Russian propagandist and the director of the state information agency Dmitry Kiselyov, on a central Russian television channel, reasoned on air that Russia could turn America into radioactive ash and backed up his message with a vivid picture of a nuclear explosion. In his interview held in 2018, Putin said that in the event of a nuclear war "as martyrs, we will go to heaven and they will just croak." In July 2021, Putin (2021) published his essay entitled "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians" in which he denied the right to the self-determination of Ukrainians and the very existence of a separate Ukrainian people. In early April 2022, the Russian state-owned news agency RIA Novosti published the article entitled "What Russia should do with Ukraine", justifying the need for a real genocide of Ukrainians (Sergeytssev, 2022).

Thus, over the last decades, Ukraine's litany has undergone a radical transformation from one of pacifism, condemnation of violence in international relations, and friendship with all neighbours of this country, to one of constant reports of mass extermination of Ukrainians and the threat of nuclear strikes or genocide that could wipe the Ukrainian nation off the face of the Earth. Meanwhile, the transformation of Russia's litany has marked a shift from the freedom, chaos, and uncertainty of the 1990s to a reality that becomes increasingly similar to the times of Stalinism, including: the acts of aggression against other countries; sending to their death tens of thousands of soldiers; mass emigration of opposition leaders, journalists, and activists, or their murder (Anna Politkovskaya, Boris Nemtsov), poisoning or long-term imprisonment (Alexei Navalny); large-scale propaganda, and 70 per cent of Russians supporting "Putin's plan".

System

A vast majority of academic theories and sources deal with the situation that has led to the current war in Ukraine, and many of them merit consideration on the second level of CLA. Still, one should focus on the three theories that seem to be the most important, and which can clearly explain the behaviour of the key international actors involved in the conflict.

Economic ties prevent war

The West forwards the systemic position of neoliberalism, within which an idea has been proliferated for a lengthy period of time that intensifying trade and economic mutual dependence between two countries reduces the probability of conflicts between them (Caruso, 2006; Geller, 2019). This also applies to foreign investments, an increase of which should prevent the war (Polachek, 2007). In this regard, an assumption is made that globalisation—accompanied by removing barriers to capital transfer and considerably increasing the flow of international finances—will lead to a more peaceful world. However, it is clear that things are not that simple: one must take into account a lot of additional parameters. For example, Li and Reuveny (2011, p.447) prove that rises in energy export do not really discourage conflict initiation, and on the contrary, promote it "because the initiator is more able to find other buyers than the target can find other suppliers." This case is just for Russia, but the West seemed not to take this into consideration. Instead, it relied on the general assumption that positive trade expectations for the future should discourage the country to start a war. On these grounds, Copeland (1996) forms the conclusion that Russia can make an attempt to occupy Ukraine if uncertainty arises about natural gas supplies to Western Europe by Ukraine, due to its ability to turn off the pipelines. In fact, something quite different can be observed. Ukrainians do their best to prove the opposite: that they are a reliable gas transit partner. Moreover, Russia built alternative pipelines bypassing Ukraine, and was about to put Nord Stream 2 into operation. Still, positive trade expectations (Statista Research Department, 2022) did not prevent Russia from starting an aggressive war.

In this connection, Stiglitz (2022) defines the present situation as “shock therapy for neoliberals.” What is meant here are not only the efforts of such countries as Germany to intensify trade with Russia, but also an approach according to which both political and safety risks can be measured in money. Obviously, the West failed to assess the risks of growing dependence from Russia and of pumping money into it. Still, Russia itself was quite aware of the logic with which the West lives. Among other things, this is testified by the fact that Russia, by way of injecting financial resources to international propaganda, setting up NGOs under its control, and bribing politicians and parties, managed to increase its influence considerably (Sampson, 2018). Yet, still more important is the fact that even now, during the war, Russia expects to avoid responsibility for international crimes and to normalise economic ties with the West, as it has managed to do more than once previously. Russia seems to be sure that despite everything, it still remains a very attractive economic partner, on the condition that one shies away from the things that have nothing to do with economics. Of the same opinion are not only Russia’s authorities, but also a vast stratum of the population for whom the West is unspiritual and materialistic, and Russia is too tasty a morsel to refuse from it (though, this is more about the third and fourth layers of CLA).

Great power politics

In regard to Russia, it can be concluded that in recent history it has never renounced the view of itself as a great power, despite numerous doubts about that expressed during the 1990s by outside observers. The main characteristics of a great power are offensive military capabilities, control over large territories, and, following World War II, nuclear superiority as well (Mearsheimer, 2001). In addition, there is one more essential characteristic highlighted by Max Weber (1946, p.160): great power prestige. Weber considered the striving for prestige as an essential feature of such a power that “pertains to all specific power structures and hence to all political structures.” In practice, it means “the glory of power over other communities” (p.160). Therefore, a great power is very often an expansive power. It “naturally prefers to have weak rather than strong neighbours” and strives to “challenge and call forth the competition of all other possible bearers of prestige” (p.160). After Putin came to power, all these characteristics have fit Russia well. At the very beginning of his presidency, he apparently set a goal to return the status of a great power to his country, regardless of sacrifices that would be required.

In Western establishment circles, it is not uncommon to take for granted Russia’s claims to Ukraine and there is a call for dialogue and cooperation with it. Meanwhile, many in the West have believed that Russia is not a real threat, as its economy is relatively small, and its understanding of strength is partial and outdated (Neumann, 2008). China is considered to be a much more dangerous threat, thus, even after serious acts of aggression committed by Russia, it is thought that it is equally important to create friendly relations with Russia, neglecting some of the principles and interests of the West in Eastern Europe (Chotiner, 2022). At the beginning of the Post-Cold War era, a similar conclusion was reached by Huntington (1993), who asserted that the West should maintain cooperative relations with Russia, whose culture seemed close to the West. Conversely, he himself acknowledged that it is virtually impossible for a Western democrat to carry on an intellectual debate with a Russian traditionalist, who had nothing to do with the legacy of Soviet Marxism. The main problem here is that the West has had little doubt that Russia is closer to it than to China, although Russia itself has repeatedly proved the opposite (Korolev, 2019). In this regard, suffice it to mention, for two decades the Russian ruling regime has been convincing the citizens that China is a friend and the West is an enemy. As a result, according to a public opinion poll carried out in Russia in 2020, 60% of Russians considered the United States an enemy and only less than 1.5% regarded the country as a friend, whilst the attitude to China was exactly the opposite: only 3% considered it an enemy and 40% called it a friend (Levada Center, 2020).

One more problem is that, over the past thirty years, people in liberal democracies have become unaccustomed to looking at the world through the lens of great power politics and Cold War-era theories. Instead, they have constantly heard about the triumph of humanistic values, morality, democracy, and human rights. Thus, it is now almost impossible for many to embrace the opinion expressed recently by Mearsheimer that, in politics “when push comes to shove, strategic considerations overwhelm moral considerations” (Chotiner, 2022). Western authorities have to reflect popular sentiments, despite what they consider to be strategic priorities. That is why countries like Germany are in quite a difficult situation. In this regard, Habermas (2022) highlights the current conflict between German foreign policy towards Russia and the position of younger generations of Germans, who have been brought

up to be sensitive to moral issues and who demand that their politicians be more committed to principles when it comes to the problem of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Roughly the same applies to Ukraine. Since 1991, its political system and the political consciousness of its people have been developing within the paradigm of superiority of liberal-democracy, and accordingly, to a belief that Russia had completely lost any grounds to the authority over Ukraine after its defeat in the Cold War. For the Ukrainians, it is clear what Western supporters of reconciliation with Russia prefer not to notice: that Russia, as a great power, could not, under any circumstances, tolerate a successful Ukraine on its borders. A democratic and economically strong Ukraine is an existential threat to Russia in its present state. Therefore, in the case of Ukraine, it is impossible to separate issues of foreign policy and development—a neutral Ukraine sandwiched between great powers could only be a zone of constant conflict, economic instability, and chaos, and would provoke new armed confrontations; especially since Russia sees Ukraine as its integral part, without which it definitely loses its status of a great power and becomes just an ordinary country with a large territory rich in natural resources (Brzezinski, 1997).

Russia as an empire

As for Ukraine, its closest academic theories treat Russia as an empire that managed to preserve its original state while its rivals disintegrated long ago, and if their successors even continue imperial policy at present, it is quite different from what Russia does. Russian imperialism is well-researched in numerous works. Still, it was only after Putin came to power that it became obvious to many scholars that the Russian empire is not only a phenomenon of the remote past, but probably also of the nearest future (Åslund, 2008; Blank, 2002; Rywkin, 2007). It was only after the large-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 that there were hardly any other efficient theories left to explain the aggressive strategy of the Kremlin. Therefore, it became quite popular to embed the present actions of Russia into an orderly logic of its imperial policy throughout its history of the last centuries (Hartnett, 2022). Besides, modern Russia no longer hides that it is an empire and constantly refers to imperial attributes of the remote past. For Ukrainians, it means continuation and essential strengthening of the historical narrative about the lasting, many centuries-long struggle for their country's independence from Russia. That narrative comprises, among other things, important episodes such as Hetman Ivan Mazepa siding with King Charles XII in the Northern War of Sweden against Russia (1709–1713) and the War of Ukrainian People's Republic for its existence against Soviet Russia (1917–1921) (Plokyh, 2015).

Analysis on the systemic level demonstrates absence of the single paradigm concerning events around the Ukrainian–Russian War. The solution of the problem depends on the selection of theory, and alongside it, a choice of the worldviews and myths underlying it. For instance, in the present hot phase of the Russian–Ukraine war, for the West to go on relying on neoliberal concepts would mean continuing attempts to re-educate Russia by removing *bad* Putin, encouraging formation of the new power, and returning to the strategy “business as usual.” (McFaul, 2020) At the same time, if one draws upon the theory of Russian imperialism, it becomes obvious that it is impossible to change Russia as long as it remains imperial. To resolve the problem, it is necessary to demolish empire and decolonise the conquered peoples. The great powers theory persuades the West to seek allies. This means extending a hand to Russia until it becomes clear (to the Ukrainians it became clear long ago) that Russia is definitely on the opposite side of the confrontation.

Worldview

Previously, in the article on Ukraine's democratisation, Turchyn et al. (2020) singled out five worldviews typical for Ukrainians: “liberal-democratic”, “national-patriotic”, “socio-populist”, “global-progressive”, and “imperial”. Such an approach seems to be suitable for analysing the current dynamic of the war, with the only difference that here, the first two worldviews are combined and considered as one—liberal-national—because to draw a clear line between them during wartime is next to impossible.

Liberal-national

In Ukraine, the liberal-national worldview is based on the dissident movement in Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, the memory of which is still alive amongst many people. This movement meant an uncompromising struggle for the rights of the people, against the totalitarian empire, and its participants often ended their lives in Gulag camps. The prime example is the prominent Ukrainian poet Vasyl Stus, who died in one such camp in 1985 (Pavlyshyn, 2010; Svitlychna, 1986). It is noteworthy that his public defender, who argued Stus's "crimes" deserved punishment, was Viktor Medvedchuk—the current leader of the pro-Russian forces in Ukraine, and whose child's godfather is Putin. At present, the adherents of liberal-national positions do not accept any strategic compromises with Russia, because this means, in their view, new mass atrocities in the coming decades, a rapid decline in human rights, and a denial of the rights of the Ukrainian nation. They are also often deeply disappointed by Western actions. They believe the West betrays its own principles by treating Russia as a partner, despite numerous horrendous crimes committed by Putin's regime over the last two decades. Thus, there may be a particularly sharp reaction of people in Ukraine to initiatives to reconcile Ukrainians and Russians by portraying them both as innocent victims of political circumstances: it is important to clearly distinguish between a perpetrator and his victim, and an unpunished criminal will inevitably commit even greater crimes. The culprit in this case is not only Putin and a few people around him, because this story has long roots stretching back to times when Putin did not even exist (Plokhly, 2015). The main evidence in favour of this worldview is that the bloody crimes of Stalinism, and their enormous scale (Applebaum, 2017), have not been condemned internationally, as was done to Nazism, so they are repeated again and again in Chechnya, Syria, and Ukraine.

Populist

The populist worldview is very common in Ukraine. To some extent, this can be explained by the fact that until 1991, Ukrainians—with only a few exceptions—did not have their own state and did not trust government authorities, so had to organise themselves into communities. In 2019, proponents of such views formed the core of Volodymyr Zelensky's voters in presidential and parliamentary elections. The main components of their worldview are: a distrust of power; a confidence in self-organised social structures; the idea of the transfer of power to the people; the demands of punishment for corrupt public officials; greater equality; and improving the standard of living (Kuzio, 2012, 2019b). To the surprise of many, the persistence of such a worldview in Ukraine does not only mean growing instability and chaos. On the contrary, at a critical time, it generates extremely effective popular movements, as was proved by the Orange Revolution in 2004 and the Euromaidan in 2013–2014. The same thing has been happening during the present war, which has united the authorities, the army, civil society, and ordinary people in their struggle against the aggressor.

One and a half centuries ago, similar characteristics of Ukrainians were observed by the prominent historian Mykola Kostomarov (1861). In particular, he pointed out the democracy of Ukrainians and compared it with the aristocracy of Poles and the obedience of Russians to a master or tsar. He believed that the typical community of Ukrainians was a voluntary association of independent individuals and owners of private property. Everyone did or did not participate in the affairs of the community by their own choice, and the relationships within it aimed at ensuring the safety and well-being of each member. Not surprisingly, such a community becomes as cohesive as possible when security challenges grow to an enormous scale. On the other hand, community ties may weaken significantly, and internal conflicts erupt, just after the external pressure decreases. Under the present war conditions, the adherents of populist positions, obviously, seek support from the West as well as NATO's protection, but if Western leaders do not want to accept Ukraine, it is not considered to be a tragedy. Instead, they have to provide all necessary weapons and Ukrainians would be able to defend themselves.

Global-progressive

A global-progressive worldview in wartime means a clear distinction between “progress” embodied in Western achievements or institutions, and “backwardness”, represented by contemporary Russia. Although, until 2014, when Russia was considered an ally and partner of the West, possessing huge resources and money, it also looked attractive to many cosmopolitan Ukrainians. From the global-progressive point of view, war is a misunderstanding and a mistake of history. Therefore, one just need to wait a bit and the world will return to good old normality, where everything works properly and one can do business and make plans for the future. This can be guaranteed only by Ukraine’s accession to the West; that is, joining the EU and NATO as a full member. Until February 24, the notion of a broader agreement between Russia and the West, resulting in Ukraine’s neutrality, was, to some extent, popular among Ukrainians. But now very few would believe Russia’s promises, despite any agreements it may sign. A global-progressive worldview also means that true democracy is not so important, and a kind of technocratic power can be much more attractive (Hallstrom, 2007; Picciotto, 2020). Therefore, after the war, it is necessary to introduce elements of external control in Ukraine, carried out by the West, to quickly rebuild the country and bring it to the standards of a *civilised* world. However, at present, confidence in the effectiveness of international institutions and the power of the West has been severely shaken by their inability to prevent Russian aggression and stop the war. Furthermore, Ukrainians well remember the failure of the security guarantees provided to Ukraine by the great powers in the *Budapest Memorandum*, in exchange for the renunciation of nuclear weapons. Ukrainians are, thus, very sceptical of any talk of future guarantees of Ukraine’s neutrality, or of non-aggression by Russia, other than NATO membership. As such, strengthening of the global worldview in this country in the near future is possible only after substantial reform of the international system.

Imperial

The imperial worldview has collapsed in Ukraine after the start of a full-scale invasion, although it has been reinforced in Russia itself. At the heart of this worldview is the idea of Russia’s special role in world history (Kuzio, 2019a; Laruelle, 2008, 2016). In international politics, Russia competes for leadership with other superpowers, most notably with the United States and the West. Moreover, it claims to bring order, great culture, and true values into the world, while the West degenerated long ago and is now forcibly trying to impose its dominance on the world, including its corrupting, materialistic values (the latter position is echoed by many opponents of the West from around the globe, and therefore they see Russia as their natural ally) (Koschmal, 2008). According to this worldview, all countries that lie between the “real” West and Russia are defective and dependent. Nothing better illustrates this vision than Russia’s draft agreements with NATO and the United States, published by the Kremlin in December 2021 (MFA Russia, 2021). This is considered especially true in the case of Ukraine, which is portrayed as a Western project aimed at splitting and destroying Russia and its “Orthodox civilization”.

Russia considers itself nothing more than civilisation. Therefore, the theory of the clash of civilisations by Huntington was very popular in Russia after the collapse of the USSR. In his article, Huntington (1993) singles out a separate “Slavic–Orthodox” civilisation concentrated around Russia, even though Russia itself is a multinational state and many non-Slavic and non-Orthodox peoples live in it, and the Russian Orthodoxy is very specific when compared with other modern Orthodox churches (Epstein, 2022). The name Slavic–Orthodox civilisation cannot possibly be accepted by such Orthodox people as the Greek, nor, moreover, by such Slavic ones as the Polish, who even in a bad dream cannot assume reunion with Russia into one civilisation. It is noteworthy that, according to Huntington (1993), the borderline between the Western and Russian civilisations passes through the territory of Ukraine. Probably, the map depicted in his work inspired numerous supporters of the Great Russia in the 1990s to work out strategies of revenge after the failure in the Cold War; all the more so in light of the fact that various maps of Russia’s zone of influence spread by contemporary Russian propagandists are very similar to it.

The Russian historical narrative that has taken root in Ukraine over the centuries is based on the assertion of the secondary and subsidiary place of Ukrainians in comparison with “Great Russians” (Kappeler, 2003), in terms of culture, language and even personal qualities. In recent decades, the Kremlin has relied heavily on this assumption while developing its geostrategies. In particular, it has been sure that Russian-speaking Ukrainians who have strong ties to Russian culture will definitely support the project of restoration of the empire and the reintegration of Ukraine. However, this could be the main reason for their failure. It may be assumed that at some point in the past there was

a split in the imperial worldview, resulting in the fact that Russians and pro-Russian Ukrainians began to move in different directions. This point could be, for example, the Second Chechen War, during which most Russians turned a blind eye to war crimes and the civilian destruction committed by their army in the spirit of a bloody imperial past, in exchange for guarantees from Putin's regime of Russia's security and stability. According to Russian opposition journalist and blogger Arkady Babchenko (2020), the point of no return was the failure of the 2011–2012 Russian protests against the increasing authoritarianism in Russia. After that, as Babchenko noted, there was only one way left, and it was the establishment and strengthening of the "Reich", which necessarily would start aggressive wars against its neighbours. His prediction turns out to be surprisingly accurate. At the same time, pro-Russian Ukrainians were concerned about Ukraine's internal problems, and their imperial consciousness remained at the level of the late-Soviet era when a war was regarded as evil and the West was considered a partner and a major source of aid.

In early 2022, the new incarnation of the Russian Empire turned out to be extremely radical and aggressive. It acquired clearly fascist and misanthropic features, and this came as quite a shock to the vast majority of pro-Russian Ukrainians. The best proof of this is an article entitled "What Russia should do with Ukraine" which was published on April 3, 2022 on the website of the Russian state-owned news agency RIA Novosti (Sergeytssev, 2022). It calls for a real genocide against Ukrainians, including: a widespread use of the death penalty, imprisonment, and forced labour; a ban on the name Ukraine and Ukrainians; depriving Ukrainians of sovereignty and a division of their country into several territories under Russia's control; "re-education" of a large part of the population, "which is achieved by ideological repressions (suppression) of Nazi attitudes and strict censorship: not only in the political sphere but also in the sphere of culture and education" *over the next 25 years*. What should be eradicated in Ukraine is not only everything Ukrainian but also "Western totalitarianism, the imposed programs of civilizational degradation and decay, the mechanisms of subjugation to the superpower of the West and the United States" (Sergeytssev, 2022).

Myth and Metaphor

Regarding the fourth layer of CLA, in wartime it is worth paying attention to the opposition and confrontation between the myths constructed by Russia and those that became the basis for the resistance of Ukrainians. It is noteworthy that Russian myths have significantly lost their influence in Ukraine as a result of a full-scale invasion, the mass bombing of Ukrainian cities, bloody massacres of civilians, and other atrocities committed by the Russian army. Therefore, the main confrontation at the level of myth and metaphor is now taking place outside Ukraine. Ukrainians are trying to convey to the world their image of the reality, but Russia has much more institutional and financial resources, experience, and agents of influence to promote the Russian world mythology. Besides, it takes advantage of dissatisfaction with the West and the US and thus attracts supporters from all over the world among people that know little about what modern Russia really is; only the myths it has been creating for centuries.

The central myth of the Russian imperial worldview is greatness, which means a superiority of everything connected with Russia (Liñán, 2010; Thompson, 2000), i.e. the Great Russian language, culture, literature, people, spirituality, soul, army, and victory in World War II. In contrast, everything Ukrainian is considered to be insignificant, backward, ridiculous, provincial; and almost everything Western (at least contemporary—especially American), is regarded as degenerate, devoid of spirituality, and exclusively materialistic, as well as selfish, rotten, and poisonous. In the international arena, Moscow sees itself as the "Third Rome" and "Saviour of Europe and the whole world" (Moss, 2017; Østbø, 2016). Regarding relations with Ukraine and Belarus, the main Russian myths are: "one nation" or "three fraternal peoples" among which Russia itself is the "Elder brother".

Almost everyone in today's Ukraine understands that "fraternal peoples" is a key notion of the Russian world mythology used to justify military aggression against Ukraine. That is why Ukrainians react adversely to calls made endlessly by Western politicians and activists for reconciliation of the Ukrainian and Russian "fraternal peoples". Instead, Ukrainians offer a much more relevant metaphor of the executioner and his victim, between whom neither fraternity nor true understanding is possible. The biblical myth of Cain, who murdered his brother Abel and does not deserve forgiveness from God or man, is also used. In Ukraine, the events of the war generally fit into the myth of the eternal struggle of good against evil. According to this, the Russian army is regarded as a stupid and cruel horde of "orcs" (a race of disgusting, demonic beings in the fantasy writings of J. R. R. Tolkien). Notably, Russian

propagandists often accept this myth calling themselves, jokingly or seriously, the “horde of Mordor”. Probably, this, as well as the horrific massacre of civilians in Bucha and other places, is done in order to intimidate the population with the enormous demonic power of Russia. Ukrainians, on the other hand, portray themselves as the biblical David who defeats the much stronger Goliath.

Another important myth used to justify Russian aggression is the “Great Victory of Russia over fascism/Nazism” in the “Great Patriotic War” that is a part of World War II, with the participation of the USSR during the period from 1941 to 1945 (Tumarkin, 2003). It does not take into account the well-known facts that the USSR was an ally of the Third Reich and they divided Europe together in 1939; that Nazi Germany was defeated not only by the Russians, but also by many other peoples including Ukrainians, whose victims and contributions were among the greatest; and that the crimes of Stalinism are commensurate with those of the Nazis. The contemporary Russian propaganda machine systematically disseminates lies about “Nazis in Ukraine” (Hutchings, 2015; Lupion, 2018), despite the fact that, unlike many European countries, politically extreme parties have no seats in the Ukrainian parliament and no representative of any nationalist party has ever been about to become the president or prime minister of Ukraine. In the early months of 2022, Russian officials and state media began to characterise everything Ukrainian as “Nazi” and demanded its complete destruction. In response, the name Rashism (Russism or Ruscism) became common in Ukraine to denoting a radical Russian nationalism that had transformed into fascism. Meanwhile, many in the West continue to rely on myths and metaphors of reconciliation (such as the “dove of peace”) that, according to Ukrainians, are not relevant in the current environment and do not take into account the context of centuries of Ukraine–Russia relations.

Four Scenarios for Ukraine’s Future

The conducted four-level analysis can help to explain some features of the current stage of the Ukrainian–Russian war. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine has not led to the results expected by Russia, and also by many in the West; at least in the first two months. Ukraine withstood numerous attacks from a much stronger enemy, and the war became protracted. This is due to the fact that Russians did not take into account several important factors:

1. Before full-scale invasion, the worldview and myths of the Russian world were significantly different among Russians and pro-Russian Ukrainians; that is why the number of supporters of Russia in Ukraine has decreased drastically after February 24.
2. Russia’s inhumane actions have substantially strengthened the populist and liberal-national versions of the worldview as well as the myths underlying them.
3. In the face of a major external threat, Ukrainians have been able to overcome their internal conflicts that stem from the peculiarities of their history; the government, the army, civil society, and the people have come together to resist the invaders.
4. In confronting the enemy, Ukrainians rely on the traditions of their long national liberation struggle, popular resistance against imperial power, and the dissident movement of the Soviet era; all of these traditions include the experience of struggle and confrontation with a much more powerful enemy.

Under such conditions, Ukrainians cannot accept sacrificing national interests, in whole or in part, on the enemy’s terms. For them, since Russia has proved in word and deed that it is not going to stop, a partial defeat means an endless continuation of the war. A complete defeat, they believe, is tantamount to a return to the horrors of Stalinism, including millions of deaths, mass repressions, and large-scale deportations. Given these and other considerations, four scenarios for future developments can be envisaged with the focus primarily on the prospects for Ukraine, since to anticipate global changes one has to take into account many factors not addressed in this research. However, on the other hand, in order to outline global-level scenarios related to the current war, it is necessary to understand the range of Ukraine’s possible futures.

(1) Westernisation

This scenario is possible in the case of Ukraine’s partial or complete victory in the war, and its further integration into Western structures. This will happen if the energy of resistance is exhausted by factors such as a lengthy

duration, or huge destruction and casualties that still do not cause a defeat. As a result, the global-progressive worldview and underlying myths of constant progress and the dominance of economic factors will be strengthened. Some kind of Marshall Plan for Ukraine will be implemented and a technocratic government that includes Western experts will be appointed. Ukraine may be transformed into a parliamentary republic; it will join the EU and probably NATO. In this case, the re-invasion of Russia in Ukraine in many years, if it still exists as an empire, will already mean a direct attack on the West.

(2) Ukraine's own way

Partial or complete victory over Russia with the preservation or increase of the internal energy, under the conditions of a simultaneous crisis in the West, will lead to attempts to create Ukraine's own model of democracy. This means an increase of friction between the liberal-national and populist versions of the worldview. The most controversial issues that will be hotly debated include the deliverance from Russian narratives, status of the Russian language, and various aspects of state-building. The emergence of new divisions within society is highly possible. However, Russia's influence will be much smaller, and it is precisely Russia that was the main catalyst and sponsor of internal tensions in Ukraine in the past. Moreover, by that time, Ukrainians will already have wide experience in dealing with conflicts and complex situations. Thus, this scenario may turn out to be relatively positive, although a lot remains unclear.

(3) Postponed war

Partial defeat of Ukraine will lead to imposing a certain variant of neutrality on Ukraine and will ensure that it does not join NATO. Russia will make an attempt to organise something similar to what happened in 2015, preserving earlier occupied territories and, probably, newly invaded ones. In Ukraine, everybody will feel disappointment and internal conflicts are going to be aggravated. Still, despite different views, any Ukrainian government would have no better choice than to look for real allies abroad and get ready to repulse the next armed aggression of the eastern neighbour. Russia will continue to build up its military potential and get ready for a new big war. The way the West is going to act will become a decisive factor. If Western countries, under the pretext that Russia has agreed to a ceasefire, and taking into account the complicated economic situation, simply restore economic ties with Russia whilst retaining the possibility to bypass sanctions, and produce empty rhetoric about supporting Ukraine instead of real actions, then the situation will develop in the direction of a new war and the realisation of the fourth scenario. Conversely, if the West takes into account the experience of 2014–15 and sacrifices their interests for the sake of achieving strategic security aims, then one can hope for a regime collapse within Russia itself.

(4) The apocalypse

In this fourth scenario, let us assume that Russia will win by using weapons of mass destruction and committing large-scale military crimes. In Ukraine, people will be fully demoralised and massive migration abroad will take place. On the newly occupied Ukrainian territories, Russia would start terrorising the population, committing crimes against humanity and genocide. The final consolidation of the totalitarian fascist regime in Russia itself and suppression of the remnants of dissidence would take place, regardless of whether Putin remains in power or not. The authorities of this state, having at their disposal numerous resources, the price and demand for which will steadily grow, and having gained many allies in the world, since everybody likes to make friends with the winners, will prepare for further advance into Europe, launching World War III.

Conclusion

This article has used CLA to unpack the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The battle is not just in the arena of war and military strategy, but between worldviews and myths. For the past decades, Russia has used the myths of “greatness”, “spiritual superiority over the West”, and “victory over fascism coming from the West” as one of the main tools to both increase its influence in Eastern Europe and restore its great power status. At the same time, since 2014, and especially in 2022, Russia’s actions have contributed to the destruction of these myths in Ukraine. Clearly, the narrative of three brothers, with Russia as the elder brother, and the speculation on the existence of Slavic–Orthodox civilisation centered in this country are no longer tenable. In contrast, the myth of the centuries-old struggle of the Ukrainian people for “independence from Muscovy” and the myth of Russia as the “Kingdom of Evil” have become more powerful.

Since the actions of the belligerents are based on significantly different and conflicting worldviews and myths—liberal-national and populist for the Ukrainians and imperial for the Russians—a peaceful solution, including neutrality of Ukraine, can only stem from the global-progressive worldview and underlying myths. However, they have never been powerful in Ukraine and, moreover, their influence has declined due to the inability of international institutions and the West to thwart Russia’s efforts to turn the wheel of history more than three decades backwards. In Russia itself, the global and other alternative worldviews are far from being mainstream. That means there is no reliable basis for a peaceful and definitive resolution of the war. In addition to the events on the battlefield and the influence of external actors, Ukraine’s future depends on how the liberal-national and the populist worldviews will evolve and combine. The future of the world depends on whose myths and values will dominate in it and who is willing to make sacrifices for establishing and protecting them.

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