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The road to the Russo-Ukrainian war

The article provides an analysis of lessons from the initial stage of a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2024, which may be useful for political analysts and strategic planners. The issues of the sources of national resistance of the Ukrainian people, as well as miscalculations of the Russians at the stage of preparation for a full-scale invasion, are revealed. The Ukrainian perspective on the historical background of the relations of state entities with the centres in Kyiv and Moscow or St. Petersburg is presented as well as the issue of common origin and different trajectories of the development of Ukrainian and Russian statehood, the consequences of Russian control over Ukrainian lands, and the policy of the current Russian regime towards Ukraine. Recommendations that may be useful for specialists in relations with Russia have been formulated.

Keywords: Russo-Ukrainian war, national resistance, Russia-Ukraine relations, Russian expansion.

One of the main lessons of the Russo-Ukrainian war, which should be taken into account as a result of full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, is the need to increase the reliability of political forecasts and military-strategic prognosis during the formation of political strategies and military campaign planning. All the forecasts made by the world's most authoritative analytical centres and political figures before the beginning of the Russian invasion about the inevitability of Russian victory were disproved by Ukrainian resistance and the real state of the Russian state and armed forces [1]. Before the full-scale invasion, the dominant opinion in strategic forecasts was that Ukraine would not last more than three days and a new geopolitical reality would come in which Russia would control Ukraine. However, the reality is totally different from the forecasts and offers lessons that should be taken into account during strategic prognostication of armed conflicts, or the development of strategies in relation to Russia. After all, in the aforementioned forecasts and calculations, the strength of Ukrainian resistance was underestimated, while the capabilities of the Russian armed forces were overestimated.

I. Historical background. Ukrainian perception

Thus, one of the main reasons that Russia did not take into account in the first place, and which led to the adoption of one of the worst strategic decisions in history, not to mention too technocratic approach to forecasting the course and results of the conflict on the part of strategic consulting companies, was the failure to take into account the factor of morale, and precisely the readiness of Ukrainian nation to resist.

The sources of readiness for resistance lies deep in the history of Ukraine and its relations with Russia. In order to avoid turning the understanding of resistance into a historical discussion, we will consider the sources of Ukrainian resistance precisely from the point of view of Ukrainians. It is even more important to highlight the Ukrainian perception of the relationship between Ukrainians and Russians due to the fact that Ukraine did not have the opportunity to promote its own view of the historical sources of Ukraine's origin, since it did not have independent statehood for a very long time. Due to long centuries of Russian control over the territories that include Ukraine today, the Russian historical narrative in relation to Ukraine is very widely represented in the world. The well-known phrase «History is Written by Victors» reflects, like no other, why the world today does not understand how Ukrainians differ from Russians and very often leads scientists to use historical narratives that are artificially created and interpret historical facts in favour of Russia. Therefore, this article is dedicated to presenting the Ukrainian view on the history of relations with Russia and the Ukrainian vision of what Russians can bring to Ukraine.

On 11 September 2022, in his daily address, the President of Ukraine described the essence of Ukrainian vision of what the Russians are bringing to Ukraine. «Cold, hunger, darkness and thirst are not as scary and deadly for us as your ‘friendship and brotherhood’» [2]. Already in this short phrase, an understanding of what almost any regime with its Moscow or St. Petersburg centre brings for Ukrainians. And this same phrase reflects what Ukrainians aspire to – to build an independent self-standing state that will occupy a worthy place in the European family of nations.

At the same time, the leadership of Russia, the Russian political elite and Putin himself completely deny the possibility that Ukraine can build a state that will not be dependent on Russia. In all his speeches, communications, and addresses, Putin emphasizes that Ukraine is not even a state [3], that Ukrainians and Russians are one nation that are doomed to a common future on account of their common past. Putin constantly expresses the idea that Ukraine is an artificially created country, positioning itself as an anti-Russia, or that Ukraine is the result of the policies of the Bolsheviks and Lenin himself. In this way, a stable narrative is followed, which Putin formulates for the perception of Ukraine before his own population and the world audience:

- Ukrainians are one nation with Russians
- Ukraine cannot be a separate independent state.

Therefore, Russia's war against Ukraine contains a significant historical narrative and a different understanding of the history of modernity and the future of Ukrainians and Russians.

The Origin

Indeed, Russia and Ukraine have a common historical origin, but in history, Kyiv and Moscow separated their paths. Russia denies the legitimacy of Ukrainian identity and believes that Ukraine is part of Russia and Russian history. At the same time, Ukrainians emphasize their own historical development and separate cultural and political identity.

Both state and peoples have their origins in one of the largest countries of the Middle Ages – Kyivan Rus. For a time, Kyivan Rus was the largest state in Europe and during its zenith occupied territories that covered parts of the territory of modern Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia. The political centre of Kyivan Rus was the middle Dnipro region [4].

One of the peak periods of the development of Kyivan Rus was the reign of Yaroslav the Wise, the son of Volodymyr, the baptizer of Kyivan Rus. At that time, architectural monuments were built in Kyiv that are still standing today – the Golden Gate and St. Sophia Cathedral. During the time of Yaroslav, the code of laws «Ruska Pravda» was developed. Yaroslav the Wise developed the relations of Kyivan Rus with neighbouring and European countries. Ten of eleven Prince Yaroslav's children were married to representatives of the royal dynasties of

Germany, Poland, Byzantium, Norway, Hungary, France, and England [5].

Over time, Kyivan Rus was divided into smaller principalities and the confrontation between the southern and northern lands intensified. In 1169, Kyiv was captured and plundered by a coalition of 11 princes under the chairmanship of Prince Andrii Boholiubskiy of Volodymyr-Suzdal. As a result of this capture, Kyiv was devastated and looted. According to historical records, Boholiubskiy's army burned and looted churches, killed Kyivans, and took women and children into slavery. The houses of Kyiv residents, churches and monasteries were burned [6]. According to Lev Humilov, the burning of Kyiv by Boholiubskiy testifies to the loss of the sense of ethnic and state unity within Kyivan Rus among the northern and north-eastern princes [7]. Humilov justifies this opinion by the fact that Andrii Boholiubskiy gave permission to his warriors to pillage Kyiv for three days. Until that moment, Russian princes behaved this way only with foreign cities. That is, for Boholiubskiy, Kyiv was as outlandish as any foreign castle.

In fact, Kyivan Rus ceased to exist in 1241 after the capture of Kyiv by Mongol troops led by Bati Khan. After that, **the history of Kyiv and Moscow began to develop in completely different directions.**

After 80 years of being under Mongol rule, in 1321, Kyiv became dependent on the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and in 1361, Kyiv joined the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Thus, Kyiv became part of a European state that existed until the 18th century [8].

In 1147, the first mention of Moscow appears, which became the centre of Muscovy (Moscovia), initially a separate principedom within the Volodymyr-Suzdal principality. Until 1480 Muscovy was a principality under the direct rule of the Golden Horde [9, 10]. It should be noted that perhaps the long period under the power of the Mongols led to Russian administrative traditions formation in the style of strict centralization similar to the organization of Mongol state administration. In the future, the traditions of hyper-centralization can be seen in approaches to state power throughout the history of the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and even modern Russia. So, for example, during the reign of Grand Prince Ivan the Third, the centre of the Orthodox Church was moved to Moscow without the corresponding church traditions accepted at that time. After the capture of Novgorod by Ivan the Third, the Novgorod council (*veche*), was a collective decision-making body, was destroyed and those who disagreed were killed. Throughout the subsequent history of state entities with a centre in Moscow or St. Petersburg, the authorities tried to concentrate all powers in one centre, local self-government institutions were destroyed and hence the principle of dividing power into three independent branches, traditional for Western countries, was abolished. Thus, it was during the Mongol rule that the contradictions between the south-western and north-eastern Slavic states deepened. **At the same time,**

the foundations were laid for Ukraine's European orientation and Russia's eastern orientation.

Later, these contradictions were clearly manifested during the Great Northern War, when the Russians under the leadership of Peter the Great tried to advance to the west, and part of the Ukrainian elite wanted an alliance with Sweden and maintaining independence from Russia.

After it became known that Peter I was trying to eliminate the political autonomy of Ukraine, Hetman of Ukraine Ivan Mazepa entered into an alliance with the Swedish king Charles XII against Peter I. In response, muscovite troops captured and destroyed the capital of Hetman Mazepa – the city of Baturyn – and killed almost all its inhabitants. During the capture, Moscow troops slaughtered all city's residents, regardless of age and gender. In the history of Ukraine, these events went under the name «Massacre in Baturyn». The Baturyn massacre was widely publicized in the European press of that time. In their publications, Western newspapers highlighted the inhuman customs of Muscovites and **their cruelty, as well as the barbarism with which Muscovites treated Ukrainians** [11].

In the future, the Russian Empire did not change its attitude and methods towards Ukraine.

In the middle of the 17th century, a Cossack state, unrecognized in Europe at that time, was formed on the territory of Ukraine as a result of Cossack uprisings [12]. The Cossack state was headed by an elected Hetman. Hetman was elected for life at the Cossack council by general open voting. In fact, the Hetman headed all branches of government, but the top of it was the foreman general, who performed the role of the government. The source of power and the defender of sovereignty were exclusively representatives of the Cossacks. In this way, the Hetmanate combined features of both the republican and authoritarian systems. At the same time, the balance of power of the main elements of the political system of the Cossack state was constantly changing, and depending on the situation, the political regime took on the features of authoritarian rule, and in other situations oligarchic or clan-like. It is important to note that the Cossack state maintained a fairly independent local self-government, which, although formally dependent on the Hetman's power, nevertheless had a great deal of independence.

Historically, the Cossack state was located in a territory that was constantly a zone of conflict between three civilizations: Muslim, Catholic, and Orthodox. All of Ukraine's neighbours were militarily powerful states that were constantly in conflict with each other, including over control of the territory of Ukraine. Therefore, it was logical that the Cossack state was forced to manoeuvre in the field of foreign relations and seek for situational allies. On the other hand, Ukraine's neighbours were interested in attracting the Cossack army, which was one of the most powerful in Europe, to their own military companies. So, until the end of the 18th century, the Cossack state maintained a relative independence.

In the 18th century, the government of Tsarist Russia, intensified the expansion into the territory of the Cossacks, where the Russian protectorates of the Hetmanate and Sich Zaporizhska were located.

As a result of the Russo-Turkish war, in which the Cossacks took an active and extremely important part for the Russians, in 1775 the Russians captured the Crimean Peninsula. At the beginning of June 1775, Russian troops returning from Crimea surrounded the Sich, and the commander of the Russian troops announced a decree on the liquidation of Sich Zaporizhska. At that time, the Russian forces outnumbered the Cossacks many times, and the Cossack council decided to voluntarily lay down their arms. On 16 June 1775, Sich Zaporizhska was destroyed. The leadership of the Cossacks and Ataman Kalnyshevskiy were accused of treason [12].

Ukraine, as well as Crimea, fell into dependence on the Russians for many years.

Right after the liquidation of the Sich Zaporizhska, part of the Zaporizhsky Cossacks was enserfed. In 1783, according to the decree of Catherine II, serfdom was finally legalized in the territories of Ukraine. That is, in 8 years, all the freedoms that the Cossacks had were eliminated, and **the majority of the population of Ukraine became serfs of Russian or Russia-loyal landlords**. At the same time, we'd note that serfdom is recognized as one of the types of slavery.

Ukrainian culture was also severely oppressed by Russians. The well-known letters of the Moscow patriarch prohibiting printing any books in the Ukrainian language, the decree of Peter I prohibiting printing the books in Ukrainian, introduction of book censorship in Ukraine, aiming of making their content conform to the Russian language, as well as the well-known «Valuyev Circular», which forbade the publication of textbooks, literature, religious books in Ukrainian [13]. Even then, Valuev used the thesis that **«there were no Ukrainian language, there is not and there cannot be»** and that «this language used by peasants is a Russian language only biased by Polish influence.»

In 1784, the Moscow Holy Synod ordered all churches in Ukraine to hold religious services in Russian. Later, the Kyiv-Mohylya Academy was closed and the teaching of Ukrainian language in public schools was prohibited, and even the baptism of children with Ukrainian names was prohibited.

Here it is important to note that **the oppression of the Ukrainian language and culture continued in future** not only by different tsars but also by the Bolsheviks after the creation of Soviet Union as well as by Russians during their full-scale invasion.

Restoration of statehood

Ukraine regained its statehood in 1917, when it became an autonomous republic after the October coup in St. Petersburg. On 22 January 1918, after Soviet troops invaded, the independent Ukrainian People's Republic (UPR) was

proclaimed. By March 1918, the Ukrainian People's Republic had established diplomatic relations with more than 20 countries of the world. On 22 January 1919, the UPR joined with the West Ukrainian People's Republic (WUPR), which was proclaimed in October 1918.

Despite the fact that the Tsar was replaced by the Bolsheviks as a result of the October coup, the policy of the Russians towards Ukraine hasn't been changed. Initially, there was an attempt by the Bolsheviks to inspire an uprising against the central government in Kyiv, but Ukrainian units disarmed the Bolsheviks. After that, the Bolsheviks put forward an ultimatum demanding to hand over the power. When these measures did not achieve their goal, the Bolsheviks began open aggression against the Ukrainian People's Republic. By 17 December, the Bolsheviks occupied Ukrainian Kharkiv and proclaimed the Ukrainian People's Republic of Soviets as an autonomous entity within Soviet Russia. That is, the **Russians used the approach of creating a puppet quasi-state**, which is later often used for further expansion. The approach used by Putin in Donbas was the same.

On 9 February 1918, the Treaty of Brest was signed, in which Ukraine was recognized as an independent state, and the Soviet troops were to immediately withdraw from Ukraine and conclude a peace treaty. However, the Soviet authorities did not plan to fulfil the terms of the treaty, and the Soviet-Ukrainian war continued until March 1921.

In March 1921, the representatives of Russia together with the puppet socialistic Ukrainian government on one hand and Poland on the other (that is, without the participation of representatives of Ukrainian People's Republic, with whom Poland had previously concluded a support agreement) signed a peace treaty in Riga that formally ended the Polish-Soviet war and with it the existence of the Ukrainian People's Republic. This treaty divided Ukrainian lands between Poland and Soviet Russia. The border passed along the Zbruch River, and the Ukrainian People's Republic ceased to exist. **The fate of Ukraine and Ukrainians was decided without Ukrainians. Later, in the same way, the fate of Poland was decided without the Polish people 18 years later by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.**

From the first days of establishing control over Ukraine, the Bolsheviks pursued a repressive policy towards Ukrainian people and especially the peasants. Ukrainians were not ready to accept the totalitarian communist regime of Moscow, which constantly increased repression. The most barbaric act of genocide of Ukrainian people organized by the Bolshevik leadership was the artificially created mass famine in Ukraine in 1932–1933. Millions of people were starved to death in the land, which for centuries was considered the breadbasket or granary of Europe. The Holodomor was caused by deliberate and purposeful measures of the leadership of the Soviet Union. At the same time, the Soviet authorities exported grain and food abroad to carry out the so-called «industrialization» of the Soviet

economy. The entire grown crop was taken from the peasants. The Soviet authorities forbade and blocked the starving people from leaving a settlement where they lived. The communists refused to accept humanitarian aid for Ukrainians. The premeditated nature of the artificial famine is evidenced by the resolution of Soviet government dated 7 August 1932, known as the «Law on Five Ears of Corn.» According to this resolution, the theft of property (even a handful of grain) of collective farms, to which the rural population of Ukraine was forcibly driven, was punished by execution or, under extenuating circumstances, GULAG camps for a period of at least 10 years. The most terrible thing about this act of genocide is that no account was even kept of the people who died of hunger. **The number of people who died was analytically estimated at the level of three to three and a half million people.**

Compared to the policy of the Tsarist government regarding Ukrainian culture, the Soviet government pursued it much more ferociously. Under the conditions of complete ideologization of the entire society, repressions, persecution of dissidents and implementation of russification policy, the Soviet government began repression against the Ukrainian intelligentsia. Mass executions on the eve of the 20th anniversary of the October coup became the culmination of the repressions against Ukrainian cultural figures. On a single day, 3 November 1937, dozens of representatives of the Ukrainian elite were executed in the Sandarmokh tract of Karelia. To date, the exact number of repressed representatives of Ukrainian culture and science during Stalin's repressions is unknown. According to some estimates, their number reached 30,000 people. **The Moscow regime at that time did everything to erase Ukrainian identity, Ukrainian culture and history, replacing them with a caricatured image of a «maloross» (Little Russia) and creating an artificial narrative about the history of Ukrainians as «younger brothers» of Russians.**

Resistance after World War II

During the Second World War, Ukraine became the field of the fiercest battles in the history of mankind. The Soviet Union entered World War II as an ally of Germany. According to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Soviet Union and Germany divided Poland. Western Ukraine became a part of the Soviet Union. In 1939, the inhabitants of Western Ukraine were aware of the essence of Soviet policy towards Ukrainians and were not ready to accept Soviet power. This became the reason for the emergence of resistance forces to both German and Russian occupation. In fact, without external support, resistance forces operated in western Ukraine until 1954, and individual resistance cells operated even during the 1960s.

Even nowadays, the attitude towards these Ukrainian rebels is ambiguous. Today, there is still no objectively developed history of Ukrainian Insurgent Movement (UPA), since «history is written by the victors» and the

activity of Ukrainian insurgents is often evaluated by propagandist stamps that were beneficial to one or another side. From the point of view of the Ukrainian perception of the history of relations between Ukrainian and Russian state entities, it is important to note that the insurgent movement is evidence of Ukrainians' rejection of Russian dominance.

Today's Russian government clearly declares that Moscow promotes the idea of restoring the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. To implement this policy, Putin needs to establish control over Ukraine. Without this, it is impossible to restore the geopolitical role of Russia, which would be identical or similar to the role that the Soviet Union played on the world stage after the Second World War, and the Russian Empire before the beginning of the First World War.

Summing up, it can be noted that the history of relations between state entities with centres in Kyiv and Moscow is a history of constant confrontation. Every «reunification» with the Russians brings enormous suffering for Ukrainians, regardless of the form of government in Moscow. Struggling with Ukrainian independence, Moscow governments throughout history have taken repressive, barbaric measures. Bucha, Irpin, Mariupol and other destroyed settlements were a shock for Western societies but a predictable consequence of the Russian invasion for Ukrainians. Ukrainians and Russians really have different mentality, historical trajectory and values. Ukrainian values have a European direction, while Russians are more inclined to the Eastern style of statehood.

The main source of Ukrainian Resistance is the protection of the values of a free people and complete rejection of Russia's imperial ambitions and fundamental foundations of the Russian state and society.

II. Russia's policy towards Ukraine

Considering Russia as a modern neo-empire consisting of a titular nation and forcibly assimilated national minorities, it is easy to come to the conclusion that Ukraine is a key element in the further promotion of Russian imperial narrative. Considering the fact that the modern Russian political elite declares its inheritance from the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, it is obvious that the Ukrainians were one of the largest national minorities controlled by Moscow. In addition, Ukraine has always been a key element of economic development and supply of labour resources for Russia regimes. In turn, the state of today's Russia – the level of income per capita, the state of economic and social development of its regions, shows the weakness and inability of Russian government to achieve or at least approach the level of economic, technological and cultural development, which was already achieved by democracies. It is obvious that the further preservation of Putin's regime depends entirely on the replacement of internal political priorities with external ones, i.e. changing the focus of resourcing from the improvements of

Russia's quality of life to messianism and further territorial expansion – restoration of Russia in the borders close to the borders of the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire. Therefore, establishing control over Ukraine is key to the continued existence of the current Russian regime.

Russia's policy towards Ukraine has a certain parallel with the change in the main goals of Russian policy and their reorientation from Yeltsin's efforts to integrate Russia into the world community, to Putin's declared transition to position Russia as a world's centre of power and competition with West.

If in the early 2000s the main direction of Russia's foreign policy was cooperation with the world community, then Ukraine did not occupy a leading place in the foreign policy of Russian Federation. This reversal began after former KGB officer Putin came to power.

The first serious confrontation between Russia and Ukraine took place around the small Ukrainian island of Kosa Tuzla, where up to 30 families of fishermen lived [14]. At the end of September 2003, the Russian Federation began the unannounced and uncoordinated construction of a dam across the Kerch-Tuzla Strait. The Russians planned to connect Russian coast in the area of Taman with Tuzla and, using the provisions of international law, to annex a part of the Ukrainian territory. On the other hand, the goal of Russians could be to study the reaction of Ukraine and of the world to an attempt to change the territorial integrity of another state. The active phase of Russo-Ukrainian conflict around Tuzla lasted from the end of September to the end of October 2003. The construction of the dam was stopped on 23 October, 102 m away from the land state border of Ukraine.

More active attempts to gain control over Ukraine became evident during the 2004 presidential elections. In these elections, Putin officially and publicly supported Viktor Yanukovich. In order to support him, Putin personally came to Kyiv and took part in a live television program answering questions from Ukrainians. An interesting fact is that Yanukovich's presidential campaign was led by Dmytro Medvediev from the Russian side and Viktor Medvedchuk from the Ukrainian side. Even then, the administrations of the presidents of Ukraine and Russia cooperated very closely and even had a special contact office. However, political technologies did not work, and as a result of mass protests that turned into the «Orange Revolution.» During renewed voting in 2004, Viktor Yushchenko was elected president of Ukraine. This was a significant personal defeat for Putin, who at that time was gaining political and economic weight within Russia. Putin implemented strict measures to centralize power and establish direct or indirect control over the country's resources. In this sense, the case of Yukos, which in 2003 was the fourth largest oil producing company in the world, is illustrative. In 2003, the company was artificially bankrupted, and its property and assets were appropriated by the Russian government and oligarchs close to Putin. The founder of the company,

Mykhailo Khodorkovskyi, was engaged in opposition political activity, accused and went for eight years in prison.

At the same time, Putin's rhetoric regarding foreign policy is beginning to change. In February 2007, Putin gave a speech at the Munich Security Conference that should have alarmed the Western community [15]. In this speech, Putin essentially updated the well-known Prymakov doctrine and presented it as the basis of Russia's new foreign policy. The main theses of the speech can be defined as follows: Russia should resist the expansion of NATO; Russia should be a key player in the international arena; the world must transform from unipolar to multipolar; the post-Soviet space is the Russian sphere of influence. Perhaps the world did not pay much attention to this speech because the real economic condition of Russia at that time did not correspond to Putin's ambitions. At the same time, Russia remained a nuclear power, and Putin gained more and more control over all of Russia's resources and became more and more of an authoritarian leader who controls the nuclear button.

After the 2004 presidential elections in Ukraine, Russia strengthened its «hybrid» policy towards Ukraine and provided active support to pro-Russian politicians. Due to the activity of pro-Russian or Russian-controlled political forces and mass media, by 2010, President Viktor Yushchenko, who was oriented towards the West, lost most of his electoral support.

The 2010 election was won by the pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovich, a man with two convictions. He understood by whose efforts he became president, and from his first days in office, began to implement Russian goals. This period can be called the time of Putin's soft power, because Yanukovich, the elected president, completely returned Ukraine into Russian control. In particular, Yanukovich said that Ukraine will not join NATO and that the Holodomor is not a genocide of the Ukrainian people. He initiated the law on the status of the Russian language as a regional language, refused to sign the association agreement with the European Union and was ready to join the customs union with Russia. Yanukovich signed the unconstitutional «Kharkiv Agreements», which extended the stay of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Ukraine for another 25 years. Dmytro Salamatin, a citizen of Russia, became a Minister of Defence of Ukraine. The head of the security service became Oleksandr Yakymenko, who was clearly affiliated with Russians. Ukraine followed the path that Belarus is now taking, but Ukrainian citizens did not perceive Yanukovich's Russian policy. After the refusal to sign the association agreement with the EU, the «Revolution of Dignity» began, which led to the flight of Yanukovich to Russia.

The «Revolution of Dignity» began with students who were extremely brutally beaten by law enforcement forces at the behest of the Russian-controlled leadership. After that, with the help of the pro-Russian majority, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted «dictatorial laws» that

abolished basic democratic freedoms. All this led to mass demonstrations and protests on the Maidan. As a result, in February 2014, Yanukovich fled to the Russian Federation. The «Revolution of Dignity» was essentially a citizen's uprising against a corrupt anti-people regime. In turn, Putin up to this day calls these events an anti-constitutional rebellion that led to the removal of the legitimate president from power. After the escape and removal of Yanukovich, presidential and parliamentary elections were announced in the country, and the vast majority of Putin's supporters did not enter the newly formed authorities. Undoubtedly, the «Revolution of Dignity» was perceived in Moscow as a defeat and launched new mechanisms of transition from soft to hard power. The first attempt was the organization of a congress of deputies in Kharkiv, where a decision on the secession of the eastern part of Ukraine was planned. The entire leadership of Kharkiv called for peace and promised to keep Ukraine united. This Russian operation failed and Putin's next step was the annexation of Crimea. Special units of Russians who did not have identification marks and did not act as representatives of the armed forces of the Russian Federation were surged into Crimea. Putin also denied the participation of armed forces units in the events in Crimea. «Little green men» blocked Ukrainian military units, anti-Ukrainian demonstrations were organized in Crimean cities, and on 16 March 2014 on the territory of Crimea and Sevastopol, which was actually under the control of Russian troops and paramilitary formations, a referendum was held on the status of the peninsula. The result was proclamation of Crimea as part of Russia. Even today, the pseudo-referendum is not recognized by the Ukrainian state, UN General Assembly, PACE, OSCE, and also contradicts the decision of the Venice Commission.

In March – April 2014, a number of actions inspired by Russian special services took place in the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine. The participants of the actions advocated the separation of the south and east and the joining of these regions to Russia. It was obvious that the Russians were trying to repeat the «Crimean scenario». Starting from mid-April, the planned seizure of the buildings of local authorities, the Security Service of Ukraine and the offices of the Ministry of Internal Affairs began. On 13 April 2014, the Ukrainian authorities introduced an anti-terrorist operation regime. At the same time, there were incursions by Russian intelligence and sabotage units. Russian troops tried to occupy a number of state institutions in Sloviansk and Krasnyi Lyman of Donetsk region, and also distributed weapons and supported separatists. From this time hostilities began, which Ukrainian defence forces carried out in the format of an anti-terrorist operation, while the Russians did not recognize the participation of their own servicemen and in every possible way denied their participation in hostilities.

Given the unexpectedness and unpredictable nature of such events, neither Ukraine nor Russia could achieve a decisive outcome, and political consultations were held

until 2015. In the consultations, the parties had different goals – Ukraine tried to restore the constitutional order on its sovereign territory, while Russia's goal remained to gain control over Ukraine. In February 2015, the presidents of Ukraine, France, Russia, and the Chancellor of Germany arrived in Minsk, where they held negotiations for 16 hours to settle the situation in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. As a result of the negotiations, a declaration was adopted, which provided a ceasefire, the removal of heavy weapons and creation of a security zone.

A situation has arisen in Ukraine that is very reminiscent of the situation after the First World War, when quasi-state entities exist in the east of the country, which are controlled from Moscow, and the conflict is frozen. At the same time, the Russian propaganda machine remained focused on Ukraine.

In 2019, Volodymyr Zelenskyi won the presidential elections. Both before the elections and immediately after, the statements of the President of Ukraine demonstrated that he really wanted to find a political way out of the conflict and tried to establish a different level of relations with Russia, which in some places was perceived with suspicion by the population of Ukraine. In December 2019, a meeting of the leaders of Ukraine, Germany, France and Russia was organized in an effort to find a political way out of the situation. It should be noted that no agreements were reached during the meeting and President Zelenskyi did not accept Putin's proposals regarding the order of implementation of Minsk agreements.

After the Paris meeting, Russia is betting on pro-Russian politicians. At that time, powerful pro-Russian political forces and media holdings were active in Ukraine, which began to actively promote pro-Russian politics. Having the experience of President V. Yushchenko, it was clear how the situation develops and what consequences it can lead to if measures are not taken to combat Russian agents of influence. In February 2021, pro-Russian TV channels were banned and sanctions were imposed on companies owned by Putin's partner Medvedchuk and other pro-Russian politicians. In Moscow, this was perceived as the actual liquidation of soft power instruments, and perhaps it was then that the decision was made in Kremlin to switch to «hard» power.

Evidence of such a transition is the publication of Putin's article «On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians.» The main theses of this article were an attempt to present Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians as a single demos; Ukrainian nationalism was created from abroad; Ukraine today occupies territories that are historically Russian lands; the Kyiv government is under the control of the West and Ukrainian nationalists; Ukraine – is an «anti-Russian» project created by external forces. This article provides a rhetorical rationale for the need to defeat the Kyiv regime, which allegedly does not reflect the interests of Ukrainians. The article has become mandatory for study by the personnel of the armed forces of the Russian federation. That is, in

fact, where the direct preparation of Russia for invasion of Ukraine, in the beginning of 2021, started from.

Lessons

Concluding the lessons that can be learned whilst planning strategies in relation to Russia:

1. Russia both practically and symbolically demonstrates that it inherits the geopolitical ambitions of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. During the development of strategies, the basic assumption should be the expansionist goal of foreign and military policy;

2. Russia builds its statehood and society on values that are opposed to the democratic values of Western societies, and its state mechanisms operate on completely different bases than the state mechanisms of democratic countries. When developing strategies, it is necessary to take into account the different relative value of resources, especially concerning human resources;

3. Russia is and gravitates towards authoritarian regimes. In the processes of strategic analysis, it is necessary to take into account the subjective views and beliefs of key persons, who do not always make decisions based solely on common sense;

4. Russia is a multinational state in which the titular nation occupies a privileged position in relation to national minorities. For a long time, Ukrainians were one, if not the largest, national minority in the Russian Empire and felt firsthand the typical policy of the Moscow regimes in relation to national minorities. Other national minorities have their own historical experience of relations with Russians and have their own contradictions with them, which can become more acute under the relevant conditions.

In general, Russia is not as monolithic state as it tries to position itself, and taking into account these lessons can contribute to building an effective strategy in relation to Russia and reducing the level of the «Russian threat» in the long term.

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