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The Russian-Ukrainian War of 2014–2022: A Historical Retrospective

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Abstract

The article analyzes the origins and development of the Russian-Ukrainian war through the prism of the study of the historical background of the conflict. The purpose of the article is a historical and retrospective analysis of the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2014-2022. The historical-comparative method was important for the research. Using the method of historical analogy, the methods of the war between Russia and Nazi Germany are compared. Structural-functional, retrospective, synchronic and diachronic research methods are also used in the work. The results show that the origins of the Russian-Ukrainian war have a certain civilizational basis. Only the conquest of Ukrainian lands by the Russian Empire and the domination of the USSR “silenced” the previous wars. In recent years, V. Putin initiated an aggressive revival of Russia’s influence in the post-Soviet space. In its policy, Russia has relied on easy-to-manage enclaves, which have become preparatory bases for further expansion of Russian influence in the region. The conclusions show that Russia is losing the war. Russia is gradually becoming a terrorist state, while Ukraine is receiving strong comprehensive international support.

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Keywords: Ukraine; conflicts in Eastern Europe; contemporary wars; political forecasting; historical retrospective.

La guerra ruso-ucraniana de 2014-2022: una retrospectiva histórica

Resumen

El artículo analiza los orígenes y el desarrollo de la guerra ruso-ucraniana a través del prisma del estudio de los antecedentes históricos del conflicto. El propósito del artículo es un análisis histórico y retrospectivo de la guerra ruso-ucraniana de 2014-2022. El método histórico-comparativo fue importante para la investigación. Utilizando el método de la analogía histórica se comparan los métodos de la guerra entre Rusia y la Alemania nazi. En el trabajo también se utilizan los métodos de investigación estructural-funcional, retrospectivo, sincrónico y diacrónico. Los resultados muestran que los orígenes de la guerra ruso-ucraniana tienen una cierta base civilizacional. Sólo la conquista de las tierras ucranianas por el Imperio ruso y la dominación de la URSS “silenciaron” las guerras anteriores. En los últimos años, V. Putin inició un agresivo resurgimiento de la influencia de Rusia en el espacio postsoviético. En su política, Rusia se ha apoyado en enclaves fáciles de gestionar, que se han convertido en bases preparatorias para una mayor expansión de la influencia rusa en la región. Las conclusiones muestran que Rusia está perdiendo la guerra. Rusia se está convirtiendo poco a poco en un Estado terrorista, mientras que Ucrania está recibiendo un fuerte apoyo internacional integral.

Palabras clave: Ucrania; conflictos en Europa del este; guerras contemporáneas; pronóstico político; retrospectiva histórica.

Introduction

From a historical point of view, wars have always acted as companions to the development of human civilization. Obviously, in the XXI century, despite all the features of globalization, digitalization will not be an exception to the rules, and periodic wars will accompany Europe in the coming years. Russia's military aggression against Ukraine is special. It is the first powerful engagement in the post-Soviet space where regular armies and auxiliary volunteer units on both sides are fully engaged.

The Russian federation's aggression defines the counter-arms, so it is of global significance, that is, the authoritarian aspirations of the former imperial center and the unproblematic democratic Ukrainian society have converged in Ukraine. Bypassing the military aspects of the confrontation, we will note its political overtones and direct comparisons with World War III. So, the events in Ukraine affect the development of the general world geopolitics.

Note that at this point events are still unfolding, so the consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2022 can only be predictions. However, to consider the development of the situation, which led to the deployment of the largest-scale European conflict in the new millennium, is quite realistic. The relevance of this issue is indisputable because we are talking about the resumption of a hidden conflict, which, in fact, has lasted for more than a century. Russian-Ukrainian relations are "overshadowed" by the imperial past of Russia, in which there is simply no place for free Ukraine, the richest "colony" of the Romanov Empire.

Although the fall of the Soviet Union (the Bolshevik empire) and the economic decline of the 1990s postponed the "solution of the Ukrainian question" for a while, the Kremlin elite, led by V. Putin used all possible financial, human and diplomatic resources to try to restore former Russian possessions. Thus, the purpose of the article is to conduct a historical and retrospective analysis of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

1. Materials and methods

In the paper are used logical research methods: analysis, synthesis, induction, and deduction. At the same time, the study is built on the use of special historical research methods. In particular, the historical and comparative method is important for the study. Based on the latter, it was possible to compare the historical origins of the policy of Russia and Ukraine. By means of the method of historical analogy comparative methods of war of Russia and Nazi Germany.

At the same time, the work also used other historical research methods, in particular, structural-functional, retrospective, synchronic, and diachronic methods of research, which serve as auxiliary methods of revealing significant temporal transformations in the historical reality. The study is built on the use of general scientific methods. Based on the axiological method, it was possible to move from general considerations to specific conclusions and recommendations.

Using the predictive method, an attempt has been made to establish approximate results of the Russian-Ukrainian war, which is currently

ongoing. It should be noted that these forecasts are used in the discussion because it is impossible to collect authentic information about the subsequent stages of the unfolding of the conflict.

2. Literature Review

The study of the peculiarities of the development of the Russo-Ukrainian war is a relevant topic for contemporary historical research. In particular, Kuzio (2021) investigated the peculiarities of the Russian-Ukrainian war through the prism of Ukrainian political discourse. The researcher paid special attention to the definition of the main prerequisites of this war. Kulyk (2019) analyzed the problem of the Russian-speaking population in post-Soviet countries. In his study, the author characterized the transformation of the identity of Russian speakers in independent Ukraine.

In particular, based on a survey and public discourse data, he analyzed the hierarchy of identities of those people who use predominantly Russian in their everyday life. In his article, he concludes that in independent Ukraine, Russian-speakers were completely “transformed” from Soviet people into Ukrainians (Kulyk, 2019). Bîñă and Dragomir (2020) investigated the development of the Russian-Ukrainian information war and analyzed the specifics of its conduct and ways of possible promotion.

These experts also highlighted the main propaganda mechanisms used by the media (Bîñă and Dragomir, 2020). Note that many foreign historians and political scientists have studied the peculiarities of hybrid warfare. At the same time, they focused on characterizing the concept of “hybrid warfare” and highlighting its main components. For example, Almäng (2019) in his article attempts to illuminate the hybrid concept in terms of analyzing philosophical debates regarding the uncertainty of the concept.

On the other hand, Manolea (2021) analyzed key aspects of the hybrid warfare that the Russian federation wages to retain and strengthen its zones of influence. Separate attention is given to the tools and means used by the Russians in the current hybrid warfare (Manolea, 2021). At the same time, Martz (2022) explored the crimes of the Russian Federation against Ukraine.

Consequently, the topic of the Russian-Ukrainian war is now quite popular. However, the problems of establishing detailed military strictures and intentions (of both the Russian and Ukrainian sides), the real consequences of the end of the war, which we believe, nominally, can be determined based on historical and retrospective analysis, remain little-studied.

3. Results

The traditions of modern Russian statehood are directly linked to the Ulus Dzhuchi (Golden Horde), from which the authoritarian method of government began. At that time, the only ruler was the khan. Later on, having outgrown the traditions of the Golden Horde, the Moscow prince, or the Moscow tsar, was regarded as the only source of power.

All other people in this state were powerless. Ukrainian historian V. Lipinski described this type of government as ochlocracy. It is about rule based on coercion over the crowd (ochlos). At the same time, the said ochlos is passive and incapable of making independent decisions. Consequently, it is dependent on the authorities, on which it is completely entrusted.

The political culture of Ukraine has its original origins. It was formed under the influence of the Kyiv-Russian tradition, later developed in the Galicia-Volhynia state. Consequently, during the Middle Ages and early modern times, it used a different model of government. Behind it, the main carriers of power were the military-powered strata of the population.

In Kievan Rus and Galicia-Volhynia, we are talking about military boyars (Parshyn and Mereniuk, 2022); in the early modern period, this role was played mainly by the nobility and the Cossacks. The Cossacks even managed to create their own statehood, which at one time was characterized by democratic principles. For this reason, it is obvious why Ukrainians have such traits as dignity, freedom, individualism, freedom-loving, and other values of a free person. Now, these European democratic signs are clearly represented in Ukraine, where in contrast to Russia, there is freedom of speech and tolerance.

Subsequently, in the XVIII and XIX centuries, the Moscow area became an empire. Moscow became an empire, which was called Russian, thus trying to appropriate the patrimony of Kievan Rus'. Revolutionary upheavals during World War I led to the collapse of this country. However, the Bolsheviks who seized power restored an empire called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Unfortunately, many Ukrainian scholarly figures influenced the development of this imperial project.

However, Ukraine played a key role in this structure. Ukraine was decisive for the functioning of the USSR and its collapse because this imperial project was simply impossible without Ukraine (Ishchuk, 2020). Consequently, by launching aggression against Ukraine, Acting Putin wants to restore the Russian empire of the 19th century, for which reason Ukraine is an important component.

At the same time, from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the present, Ukraine went through a difficult period of nation-building. This period had peak rises, in particular during the Ukrainian Revolution of

1917-1921, World War II, independence in 1991, and the Revolution of Dignity in 2013-2014. Consequently, Ukrainians gained weighty experience in the creation of the state.

Despite many trials, Ukrainians are becoming a consolidated nation. The Orange Revolution, the Revolution of Dignity, and the resistance to Russian aggression since 2014 showed a further strengthening of national categories (Ghilès, 2022). On the other hand, the beginning of Russia's large-scale war against Ukraine led to a great consolidation of Ukrainians to defend the homeland (Kuzio, 2021). From this time on, a truly nationwide war against the Russian occupiers began.

It should be noted that as early as February 27, 2022, on the third day after the beginning of direct Russian aggression against Ukraine, the website of the Russian state agency RIA Novosti published a scandalous article by the well-known pro-Kremlin columnist Pyotr Akopov entitled "The coming of Russia and the new world". The article was almost immediately removed by the editors, but it was copied and circulated on the Internet. The column was apparently written much earlier and posted on the site for automatic updating.

The material was jointly authored by anonymous political analysts, the name of P. Akopov was put there as a cover, with or without the knowledge of this "figure". This is indicated by the overall style and pathetic rhetoric of the text, certainty of speech turns, and conviction in their quick victory, inherent in the official Kremlin on the eve of the outbreak of hostilities.

In the column, the authors noted on behalf of Akopov about the "final solution" of the Ukrainian issue. They also pointed out that, for now, the brothers were still fighting among themselves, hinting at an obvious victory, the capture of Kyiv, and the Ukrainian capitulation. At the same time, on the third day of the invasion, the military situation for Russian troops was not as successful, and all attempts to encircle the Ukrainian capital and capture other strategic cities failed (Johnson, 2022).

An important element in the material on the authorship of P. Akopov had only one detail. According to the authors of the RIA Novosti piece, the "new Russia" began its journey after V. Putin's Munich speech. Putin's speech on February 10, 2007. During his speech, the then president of Russia pointed out the fallacy of the unipolar model of world politics and noted that Russia seeks to regain the leading position in world geopolitics (Martz, 2022). Many Western politicians expressed indignation at the openly hostile rhetoric of the Russian head of state but could not hinder the implementation of his plans.

The Russian authorities were afraid of "color revolutions", so the events in Georgia and primarily in Ukraine (the Orange Revolution) in 2003-2004 were perceived as extremely hostile. Official Moscow felt that "former

colonies” after 1991 took tangible steps towards independence from the Russian center and officially declared it. It was probably then that the first real decisions were made about future aggressive actions against these countries (Kos, 2022). Russian archives are classified, so it is impossible to officially confirm this version (Kuzio, 2021). However, the following harsh rhetoric and change of political vector on the part of Russia point to this conclusion.

The position of official Moscow in 2007 was based on strong fundamentals. Export prices for energy and other minerals, actively exported from Russia, allowed the accumulation of tangible material resources in domestic and foreign accounts. The heads of state corporations had grandiose plans for the further development of this sector of the economy. Connections with Western politicians were maintained by skillful lobbyists.

In general, the image and. Putin was viewed positively by European politicians and society, despite the gradual curtailment of democratic freedoms (Kulyk, 2017). Russia’s managed democracy still left a semblance of respect for basic human rights. Thanks to the sale of gas and oil, it was possible to maintain contact with leading industrial producers for a long time, which allowed Russia to be filled with quality goods.

The population of the country, which received its smaller share of the “oil and gas pie,” was exposed to the first sprouts of total propaganda about the greatness of their country and felt an increase in living standards (Kulyk, 2017). All these factors allowed Kremlin politicians to feel confident in the post-Soviet space.

Georgia was the first to be hit by the “new Russia”. The war of 08.08.2008 shook the country and brought down the pro-European course of Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili. The powerful Russian invasion supported and consolidated the positions of several enclaves on the territory of the small mountainous country - Abkhazia and South Ossetia. They were not recognized in the world at the time; even official Moscow was in no hurry to recognize their independence. However, they became convenient tools for stopping all attempts by Georgia to join NATO. In addition, a kind of mechanism was specified in the case of “protests” in another post-Soviet country.

Perhaps the confident victory in Georgia and the joyful perception of this act by the public has given Russian politicians confidence in the correctness of their chosen tactics: the creation of convenient puppet enclaves, military pressure, and non-interference by Western democracies. This set of techniques was complemented by the deployment of insane propaganda and hybrid informational influence - through a network of Kremlin-controlled analysts, print media, TV channels, and other media (Kuzio, 2021).

Their goal is to increase patriotic fervor among the Russian population, sow discord among potential enemies, and form a certain picture of events for European and American audiences. In 2008, this strategy was successful, although the military forces of Georgia and Russia were not comparable.

A similar plan of action apparently took shape with regard to Ukraine as well, but Russia's military advantage did not seem convincing. For this reason, during the presidency of Viktor Yanukovich, who held a pro-Kremlin political course, the military department was headed by ethnic Russians (Kuzio, 2021). As a result, Ukraine's Armed Forces were stranded by constant funding cuts and restructuring of army units (formation of smaller and better equipped military units).

Also, Ukrainian Prime Minister Mykola Azarov, as the following investigation revealed, was one of the main initiators of the so-called Kharkiv agreements (Martz, 2022). According to the provisions of this document, adopted in April 2010, the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation was allowed to stay at the ports of the Crimean Peninsula until 2042 and increase its presence uncontrollably.

The events of February and March 2014 demonstrated that the Kremlin's strategies had some success. Ukrainian society and especially the authorities were disorganized after the bloody confrontation in Kyiv, V. Yanukovich's flight to Russia's Rostov-on-Don, and the murder of the Heavenly Hundred. Thanks to this, the military advantage gained and the active propaganda of the "Russian world" and the "Russian Spring" spread by Moscow-controlled resources, the Russians fairly quickly seized power in Crimea. Because of the pre-planned "referendum," the annexation of the peninsula was formalized. At the same time, the main objectives in eastern Ukraine were not achieved (Ghilès, 2022).

The Ukrainian military, volunteers, society, and government, through an established consensus of action, were able to stop pro-Russian fighters and cadres within parts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Large cities (Donetsk, Luhansk, Makiivka, etc.) were informally occupied, but Ukraine's industrial potential was not broken, and many settlements remained under the control of the AFU (Elliott, 2022).

The armed forces of the fighters and the Russians who fought on their side suffered casualties. The reaction of the international community was important: although the mechanism of sanctions was repeatedly criticized by experts, it began to work against Russia and became a signal that the democratic world will not allow the restoration of imperial projects in Eastern Europe.

The shaky truce established in 2015 lasted until 2022, which reduced the number of civilian casualties compared to the active phase of hostilities. Thus, based on a brief summary, we can draw certain conclusions regarding the political and military retrospective:

1. We believe that the announcement of intentions to restore Russia's political influence after the fall of the Soviet Union was the so-called Munich speech of V. Putin in the 2007 Munich Speech.
2. In its politics Russia has staked on enclaves, which are easy to manage. These formations, which are not recognized in the world, are becoming preparatory bases for further expansion of Russian influence in the region. For example, the situation unfolded in Georgia (in Abkhazia and South Ossetia) in 2008. "Zones of influence" were created in Crimea as a result of the Kharkiv Agreements of 2010 (Kulyk, 2017). Note that potential crisis territories are the territory of the unrecognized Transnistrian Republic, where the Operative Group of Russian Forces (former 14th Guards Combined Arms Army) is located. In the future, this territory and Russian military bases in other countries could become new sources for conflict zones.
3. Russian agents in Ukrainian politics have also joined the situation as of 2022. Yanukovich's pro-Russian activities in the military sphere have degenerated into complete capitulation. For this reason, in the spring of 2014, there was not enough strength among the Ukrainian military to oppose the annexation of Crimea. There was also disarray among Ukrainian political elites, some of whom did not even allow for the possibility of Russian aggression against Ukraine.
4. The passive reaction of Western politicians to the crisis situation in Georgia in 2008 led to the fact that the actions of the Russian Federation were not properly condemned and punished. Consequently, this confirmed among Kremlin elites the belief that the collective West was not set up to contain it and recognized the territory of the former Soviet Union as a zone of its influence. The certainty of impunity provoked aggressive actions against Ukraine (Manolea, 2021).

In the discussion we try to analyze the prospects for the development of the Russian-Ukrainian war and determine its specifics, using the prognostic method.

4. Discussion

Why was Russia doomed to lose?

The English historian Dominic Lieven wrote a book about the collapse of the Russian Empire during World War I (Ling, 2022). He noted that more than anything else in the world, the fate of World War I depended on what was being done in and around Ukraine. Such a statement may seem

somewhat exaggerated, but in fact, such a conclusion is valid. Historians are now proving that Ukraine was not secondary in World War I: it was the primary territory where the fate of the world was determined (Kuzio, 2021). So, it was in World War II, so it is now. Consequently, the Russian-Ukrainian war is not a local conflict but a geopolitical one.

On the other hand, historical retrospect justifiably proves the view that Russia is losing this war (although it started it insidiously against Ukraine). To confirm this view, let us provide several arguments based on the principles of historical development.

As noted above, Russia's state traditions date back to the Golden Horde. Later, its political culture developed in the prism of autocracy, where ochlocracy reigned: the people were completely dependent on the ruler. Similar parallels can be drawn with today's Russia, where the people depend on the ruler and believe that their fate depends on the will of the government.

We believe that the war against Ukraine may end in the defeat of the Russian federation. It is quite obvious that the president of Russia and Putin uses the algorithms of dictators of previous times. For example, he has often expressed sympathy for Stalin. However, it is likely that he is coping Hitler more than anything else. This opinion is confirmed by the fact that the current Russian regime, which has moved from kleptocracy and authoritarianism to all-out dictatorship, is copying the Nazi regime in many areas. This is clearly visible in the direction of ideology. Note that researchers are now debating the definition of this ideology. In particular, they propose such varieties as "Putinism," "Rashism," "Russian Nazism," etc.

The features of this ideology emerged:

1. Militarism.
2. Isolationism from the European world.
3. Autocracy.
4. Xenophobia.
5. Ethnophilia.
6. Expansionism.
7. Chauvinism.

Despite this, we emphasize that a significant part of the aggressor's ideology is the so-called "Russian World" concept. At the same time, if previously the Nazis chose the Jews as their main negative target, then the Putin regime chose the Ukrainians. It should be noted that the Russian

authorities began to deliberately emphasize their anti-Ukrainian policy in 1991, that is, since the proclamation of Ukraine's independence.

However, since 2014, this policy has become mainstream Russian propaganda. Clear evidence of this is the destruction of the civilian population, repeated non-compliance with standards of warfare, and the destruction of civilian infrastructure and housing in many Ukrainian cities (Johnson, 2022).

In addition, Russia is actively introducing new totalitarian military symbols into social appeals. In particular, the Latin letter Z, which denotes most of the occupant's equipment, is actively popularized in Russia along with the St. George's ribbon. Western European media call these signs "Putin's swastika". At the same time, and. Putin is trying to copy some of A. Hitler's actions. For example, a direct analogy can be traced between the *anschluss* of Austria and the *anschluss* of Belarus.

In addition, the Nazis used slogans about the protection of the German population outside of Germany, while the Russians are now "protecting" Russian-speakers outside of Russia. Obviously, such protection serves as a pretext for open aggression. Based on a continuation of the associative series of comparisons between Hitler's Germany and Putin's Russia, the latter appears to be only an imperfect copy of the former.

Another argument for Ukraine's victory is that Russia is turning into a terrorist state. Having received a strong Ukrainian response, the Russian military has shifted to a strategy of terror, deliberately implementing war crimes prohibited by all world conventions. However, we note that in scientific literature, the phenomenon of terrorism is always considered a strategy of the weaker.

In addition, the support of other major countries was of great importance for the victory of Ukraine. Ukrainian historians have quite often investigated the reasons for the defeat of the first liberation struggle during the Ukrainian revolution of 1917 -1921 and analyzed the defeat during the second liberation struggle (1938-1950). Many have noted that a decisive role in these failures was played by a low level of national consciousness, weak Ukrainian elite, lack of unity in the actions of Ukrainian forces, and the like.

Historians increasingly go back to the fact that these were not the main reasons. For example, the Lithuanian movement, which was also active in the Russian Empire, was much weaker than the Ukrainian. However, the Lithuanians were able to get their own state, while the Ukrainians were not. Ukraine was geopolitically more important than Lithuania. Its existence depended primarily on the consent of major political players.

Consequently, neither World War I nor World War II agreed to create Ukraine as an independent state, so the Ukrainian movement was in a geopolitical vacuum. For this reason, the key difference between these two wars and the modern war is that Ukraine has emerged from this state of geopolitical isolation. We are now seeing Ukraine receiving substantial support, both militarily and diplomatically.

On the other hand, Russia is isolated, which is subject to condemnation from many countries around the world. This means that the chances of Ukraine winning are very high. Consequently, we believe that the geopolitical factor is important for future victory: Russia does not have such significant support, so Ukraine has a great chance of winning.

Conclusion

Thus, the origins of the Russian-Ukrainian war have a definite civilizational basis. Ukraine is a product of the development of the Kyiv-Russian civilization matrix, while modern Russia appeared on the ruins of the Mongol Empire. For centuries there have been conflicts between the two peoples, and only the conquest of Ukrainian lands by the Russian Empire and the domination of the Romanovs “muted” these wars. The USSR succeeded the Romanov dynasty and suppressed the attempts of the Ukrainians in 1918-1921 to establish their own state, so the policy of denazification of the Ukrainians continued.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine was allowed to develop independently. However, economic and political defeat briefly stopped Russia. As a result of the policies of V. Putin’s policies began an aggressive revival of its influence in the post-Soviet space. We define this process as finally starting with Putin’s Munich speech on October 10, 2007.

In its policy, Russia has staked on enclaves that are easy to manage. These formations, which are not recognized in the world, are becoming preparatory bases for further expansion of Russian influence in the region. For example, the situation unfolded in Georgia (in Abkhazia and South Ossetia) in 2008. “Zones of influence” were created in Crimea as a result of the Kharkiv Agreements of 2010. Russian agents in Ukrainian politics also joined the situation as of 2022.

Yanukovych’s pro-Russian activities in the military sphere were capitulative. Part of the Ukrainian political elites did not even allow for the possibility of Russian aggressive actions against Ukraine. The passive reaction of Western politicians to the crisis situation in Georgia in 2008 led to the fact that the actions of the Russian Federation were not properly condemned and punished. Accordingly, confidence in impunity provoked aggressive actions against Ukraine.

We note that Russia is losing in this war family. It is quite obvious that the president of Russia and. Putin uses the algorithms of the dictators of previous times. In particular, based on the formation of associative rows comparing the activities of Hitler's Germany and Putin's Russia, the latter appears to be only an imperfect copy of the former. Russia is also turning into a terrorist state.

We also see Ukraine receiving substantial support, both militarily and diplomatically, from other countries. On the other hand, Russia is isolated and subject to condemnation from many countries around the world. This means that the chances of Ukraine winning are very high.

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