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HOW THE INFORMATION WARFARE TURNS INTO FULL-SCALE MILITARY AGRESSION: THE EXPERIENCE OF UKRAINE

A short two years ago, a full-scale war in modern Europe – with the bombing of cities, millions of refugees, and thousands of dead, injured, and kidnapped – seemed an impossible scenario for most people in the world. Yet, it is happening. In the early days of the Russian war in Ukraine, it seemed like a terrible whim of a dictator who had fallen out of reality. However, nothing has come of the world leaders’ efforts to force Vladimir Putin to abandon his crazy plans through negotiations and persuasions. There was hope that the Russian people would stop their leader and his entourage. But deep-seated imperial ambitions, chauvinistic attitudes, and more were successfully superimposed on propaganda and the prevailing narratives of “we can do it again” (a symbolic phrase common in Russian public discourse in the context of the Second World War), which has resulted in a lack of proper resistance and even increased support for the government’s actions.

How is such medieval barbarism possible, in the 21st century, in the geographical center of Europe? How did the world see through the flourishing of Russian fascism and Russia’s sick imperial ambitions, failing to react properly to its seizure of part of the territory of Georgia (2008), the territories of the eastern regions of Ukraine and the Crimean Peninsula (2014)? How was it possible that Russia “suddenly” became fascist?

In order to understand the reasons for the aggressive policy of the modern Russian Federation, it is necessary to study the peculiarities of the historical development of Russian statehood, the characteristic features of the social consciousness and mentality of Russians, and the ideological foundations of the “Russian world” project.

The purpose of the research: to analyze the main ideological components and tools of the Russia’s information, hybrid and, since 2022, full-scale war against Ukraine. We set the task to answer why Russia dared to move from information warfare to hybrid and even full-scale war against Ukraine.

The research methodology is based on the methods of analysis and synthesis, generalization, systemic and structural-functional analysis, which allowed to consider the formation and development of the basic features of Russian imperialism, to analyze the ideological components and tools of Russia's information, hybrid and full-scale war against Ukraine.

UKRAINE AS PART OF THE EMPIRE

The political history of Russia during the last five centuries can be considered as the history of the development of imperial statehood, which begins with the period of the reign of Ivan III (1462–1505), when the concept of “Moscow as the third Rome” appears, conceptualized during the time of Peter I (1682–1725) and his successors, acquires new horizons during Soviet times (the idea of world revolution). After the collapse of the USSR, it demonstrates extraordinary vitality in the neo-imperial ambitions of Boris Yeltsin, finally reaching its apogee in the politics of Vladimir Putin's regime. The ideology and politics of today's Russia appear as a worldview-ideological mixture of longing for the dead Russia of the tsarist era and the Soviet Union, revanchist attitudes of the post-Soviet security forces, Putin's pseudo-historical stories and claims to a special mission of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Based on the idea of its special civilizational mission, Russia is trying to regain power under an authoritarian government based on Russian nationalism and Orthodoxy. Considering the collapse of the USSR as the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century, the adherents of the “Russian world” cannot come to terms with the deconstruction of the cult of the imperial Russian people, as well as with the fact that the Ukrainian people “betrayed” the cause of opposition and hatred for the West (Kalakura, Rafalskyi, Yurii, 2017: 487). Therefore, Russia's pressure on the former republics of the USSR and the former states of the Warsaw Pact is a desire to re-colonize and to return these states to its sphere of influence.

Ukraine, which has chosen the Western vector of development, will continue to be perceived by the Russian authorities not as an independent subject of international law, but as part of the “Moscow – Orthodox civilizational project”. Ukraine today is the territory of civilizational confrontation, as Samuel Huntington warned about 30 years ago. However, this confrontation happened in a completely different way than Huntington had foreseen. He believed both that a Russian-Ukrainian war was unlikely due to the close cultural, personal and historical ties between Russians and Ukrainians, and that a civilizational split could pass through the territory of Ukraine, separating the Orthodox East from the Uniate West (Huntington, 1996: 37). But the opposite happened – the war became a reality, and the contradictions between the regions of Ukraine, if they even existed in the past, faded into the background in the face of the enemy. The configuration of the international political system in the coming decades largely depends on how the Russian-Ukrainian war ends.

Ukrainian lands became a colony of Russia in the second half of the 17th century, after the Pereiaslav Agreement (1654). Bohdan Khmelnytskyi was a popular leader and good military strategist, but as a statesman he made a tragic mistake – underesti-

mating the mental differences between Ukrainians and Muscovites. In part, this mistake was due to religious motives.

To many modern Europeans, fanaticism and religious intolerance are considered barbaric. However, it was not always like that. In the 17th century, Europe was divided by religious wars between Catholics and Protestants. As a result of the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), the population of the Holy Roman Empire alone decreased from 18–20 million in 1600, and to 11–13 million in 1650 (Parker, 2008: 1058). The number of direct and indirect victims of religious wars throughout Europe was even more significant.

At the time, Ukrainian lands were part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, where religious wars were avoided but some contradictions between Catholics and Orthodox existed. The Greek Catholic Church (1596), which was created as a supposed compromise between Catholics and Orthodox, was not accepted by a large number of Ukrainians who considered religion to be part of their identity. A significant part of the Orthodox clergy advocated union with Muscovy, hoping to take a proper place in the Orthodox state.

The Russian Orthodox Church was a department of religious control under the tsarist administration rather than an independent religious organization. The tsars appointed metropolitans (later – patriarchs) at their discretion, and if they wished, they dealt with those who did not live up to expectations and became too independent. Sometimes those individuals were removed from their posts and sent to remote monasteries (as happened to Patriarch Nikon and many other church hierarchs), and in other cases the measures of influence were more severe (the murder of Metropolitan Philip II Kolychev by Ivan the Terrible). Ukrainian Orthodox leaders could not imagine that their actual status in an Orthodox state could be incomparably lower than that which they had in a Catholic state.

The struggle for the Orthodox faith was rather an ideological justification for solving many social and economic problems faced by Ukrainians. Therefore, the war in 1648–1654 led by Bohdan Khmelnytskyi received widespread support. Ukrainians fought for their rights and privileges, and Bohdan Khmelnytskyi expected that the Tsar of Moscow would grant them to Orthodox Ukrainians. But Muscovy simply did not understand what “rights” and “privileges” were and the Muscovite tsar did not see any obligation to keep the promises he made to his subjects.

Bohdan Khmelnytskyi planned to transfer Ukrainian lands under the protectorate of the Muscovite Empire while preserving the basic rights and freedoms of the Zaporizhzhya Army (something like the self-government of German lands within the Holy Roman Empire). For the Tsar of Moscow, the Pereiaslav Agreement only meant the expansion of his rule to new lands. In the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth there was a complex (though not always effective) system of balance of interests between the royal power, aristocracy (magnates), petty nobility, clergy, and city self-government (Magdeburg rights), while in Muscovy everything was decided by the will of the king, and the Cossack hetman was not considered an equal partner. Bohdan Khmelnytskyi's original agreement with Muscovy was destroyed, and the promised rights were quickly canceled: the Hetmanship was transformed into a severely limited administrative autonomy without the right of foreign political relations, which effectively began Mos-

cow's occupation of Ukraine. The attempts of the hetmans Ivan Vyhovsky (1657–1659) and Ivan Mazepa (1687–1709) to get out of Moscow's power and return Ukraine to the European path of development failed.

The Moscow rulers understood that military force and police repression alone were unreliable tools of domination. Therefore, during more than three centuries of Ukraine was subjected to being a part of Russia (Moscow Princedom – Russian Empire – Soviet Union), a deep layer of forgeries and falsifications was accumulated and many ideological myths were created, which almost completely hid Ukrainian history, culture and spirituality (Bychko, 1997: 322). Muscovy even stole the term “Rus”, calling itself “Russia”, and Catherine II forbade the use of the name Muscovite (Kostomarov, 2012: 16). Since this point in history, the methods and principles of the Russian authorities have not changed significantly.

Russian historians, rewriting history on the order of the Moscow tsars, referred to Ukraine as “Russia's younger brother”. At the beginning of the 20th century, Ukrainian historian Mykhailo Hrushevsky substantiated the originality of Ukrainian history from the times of Kyivan Rus (IX–XIII centuries) and the Principality/Kingdom of Galicia-Volhynia (XII–XIV centuries). He wrote that there exists a huge historical and cultural gap between Ukrainians and Muscovites (Russians). Historically, the Ukrainian people gravitate towards Western values of individualism and freedom, while the tradition of disregard for human life prevails in the Russian people (Hrushevsky, 1991: 141–144).

Serhii Plokhii in his thorough study of the origins of Slavic nations and pre-modern identities in Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus, argued that a separate model of Moscow identity was formed in the 15th and 16th centuries, based on the ideas of loyalty to the tsar and Moscow Orthodoxy as the only true religion (Plokhii, 2015: 391). The centuries-old dependence on the Golden Horde, whose worldview patterns were copied by Moscow, also had a significant impact on the formation of this identity.

Attempts by Ukrainians to gain independence during the period of weakening of the ruling empires were brutally suppressed. In 1922, the Bolsheviks announced the accession of Ukrainian lands to the USSR, and in 1939, Soviet troops occupied Western Ukraine. However, victory for the empire was never achieved. The genetic code of freedom remained in Ukrainians, which neither ideological processing, nor repression, nor famine could destroy.

IDEOLOGICAL WAR

Ukraine gained its independence in 1991 thanks to the collapse of the USSR, and since then Russia has launched a powerful information war against Ukraine – an avalanche of propaganda and manipulation and distortion of facts. The main purpose of this has been to destabilize the socio-political situation in Ukraine, return Ukraine to the sphere of influence of Russia, and prevent Ukrainian integration into the European Union and NATO.

A few years after the collapse of the USSR, the doctrine of “*Russkiy mir*” (Russian world) became the foundation of Russia's expansionist policy. In its essence, the doctrine is a neo-Nazi ideology (Masiyenko et al., 2022; Doroshenko, 2022) which

has goals similar to the ideology of German National Socialism: the violent expansion of imperial space under the pretext of a special civilizational right and its own exclusivity. This ideology, which does not carry any humanistic or religious values, or any estimable spiritual core, was purposefully and consistently spread in scientific and religious circles: “‘Russian world’ is an ideology of war, which presents aggression as peacemaking, the aggressor as a victim, and the victim as the aggressor. This is an ideology that justifies any violence as the spiritual mission of Russia” (Volkova, 2016).

The main mechanisms of implementation of the imperial project of the Russian Federation’s “Russian world” are:

- developing and popularizing the idea of the messianism of the Russian people, mass producing appropriate content for the formation of the desired worldview matrix and zombifying the population of the Russian Federation;
- actively engaging the support of the Russian Orthodox Church;
- expanding the territory through covert and military occupation (part of the territory of Georgia, Eastern Ukraine, the Crimean Peninsula, now a full-scale war in Ukraine);
- implementing colonial policy in the occupied territories and in relation to the countries of the post-Soviet space – planting and cultivating stereotypes of inferiority, ethnic prejudices;
- influencing the consciousness of the own population, intensive propaganda information activity in the countries of the post-Soviet space and worldwide, which justifies the crimes of the Russian Federation and now the full-scale war in Ukraine;
- provoking conflicts and disputes that lead to the division of society, undermining the authority of the governments of independent countries, leveling their achievements, weakening state institutions;
- planting the Russian language and culture with simultaneous extermination of local ethnic components;
- fabricating and distorting history, filling historical memory with new content that benefits pro-Russian forces and does not correspond to reality.

The doctrine of “Russian world” poses a threat to humanity. It should be condemned by the world community and legally banned at the international level as neo-Nazism, totalitarianism and extremism. Moreover, this teaching is also heretical, because it violates the fundamental principles of world Orthodoxy. The Volos Academy of Theological Studies (Greece) also condemned the concept of the “Russian world” for this very reason. The corresponding declaration was signed by more than three hundred theologians (including Russian ones): “We reject the heresy of the ‘Russian world’ and the shameful actions of the Russian authorities regarding the war against Ukraine, which was caused by this despicable teaching, which has no justification – with the connivance of Russian Orthodox church as actions deeply non-Orthodox, non-Christian and against humanity” (*Deklaratsiia*, 2022).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2014, occupation of Ukraine’s Donbas, and annexation of Ukraine’s Crimea became the implementation of the “Russian world” doctrine. With this, the hybrid phase of the war began – a combination of military actions (without announcement, under the guise of local separatist movements sponsored by Moscow) and information warfare. Under such conditions, the Ukrainian

state could not fully develop. Unfortunately, the international community and Ukrainian diplomacy failed to stop the aggressor and settle the local armed conflict. US intelligence warned of Russia's preparations for a full-scale attack on Ukraine. But how many of us believed that a full-scale war in the twenty-first century could take place on European soil? Nevertheless, this is exactly what happened.

As already mentioned, Russian society not only fails to make appreciable resistance to the actions of its leadership, but also mostly supports the actions of the Kremlin. Its worldview is based on:

- belief in the supremacy of the Russian people and their right to decide the fate of others;
- appeals to the heroic past, the glory and greatness of which must be revived;
- emphasized anti-democracy, the cult of the leader, the cult of power, disregard for human rights and international law;
- accusing the Western world of an international conspiracy against Russia that must be countered.

On this occasion, the Ukrainian poetess and public figure Lina Kostenko aptly remarked: “Russia has its own ‘fairy tale’ version of history. It has ‘mythology for export’: in fact – decline, neediness, degradation, and a picture of greatness and imperial ambitions is presented, and this self-admiration feeds the ego of ideologically zombified citizens, is a mythical lifeline in the swamp of decline and immorality...” (Kostenko, 2022).

Russian propaganda uses all possible channels and means of influence to plant fabricated narratives, stereotypes, and myths that suggest Russians are the heirs of Kyivan Rus who allegedly have an exclusive historical mission – to unite all Slavs around themselves (Slavophilism), Europeans and Asians (Eurasianism), the whole world (Bolshevik “world revolution”) (Yurii, 1997: 181–182). The existence of the Russian people as an ethnic group can supposedly be ensured only by a strong state power in combination with the service of the “great” idea, which inspires and forces to endure difficult material conditions and a lack of democratic rights and freedoms, and justify the leadership's wars of aggression and crimes against its own population. Russia's modern war in Ukraine most eloquently shows the true face of the Russian Federation and the artificiality of the listed semantic structures that hide its bloody aggressive policy.

INFORMATION WAR

Information war is a component of ideological war, where there is no physical destruction, but rather deformations and distortions of the information space, changes in public consciousness through the alteration of facts and influence on world perception, decision-making processes, behavior, and life activities. In parallel, the information infrastructure of the enemy side and its individual components are being disabled. In the information war, information is both the target and weapon.

There are comprehensive fundamental researches, such as the one conducted by S. Vosoughi, D. Roy and S Aral, that practically proved: “falsehood diffused signifi-

cantly farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth in all categories of information, and the effects were more pronounced for false political news than for false news about terrorism, natural disasters, science, urban legends, or financial information” (Vosoughi et al., 2018: 1146).

In the Russian Federation’s policy, media freedom and political pluralism are considered as a weakness of the West. Many communities which have different benefits are sensitive to the Kremlin’s propaganda (Pierzchała, 2019). For example, the 2016 Presidential elections have shed light on Russia’s involvement in democratic processes in the United States, and in other countries too. To protect democracy, many initiatives have been launched – both legislative (e.g. the Honest Ads Act and the Secure America from Russian Interference Act of 2018 passed in the US, the Network Enforcement Act in Germany, and the Law on the fight against information disorder in France) and self-regulatory (e.g., initiated by the European Commission’s Code of Practice on Disinformation) (*The changing face*, 2022).

Russia began its information war against Ukraine in the early 1990s, immediately after the collapse of the USSR. The main goal was to return Ukraine to the zone of its geopolitical influence. The following key imperatives of this information war can be singled out:

- creation and constant maintenance in Ukraine of a state of controlled chaos, social disputes and confrontations, weakening state institutions and provoking the creation of separatist movements;
- opposition to the economic, political and spiritual development of Ukraine, its rapprochement with the countries of the European Union, and its membership in NATO and the EU;
- influencing public opinion in Russia, Ukraine, EU countries and the whole world in order to create a false impression of events in Ukraine that is beneficial to pro-Russian forces;
- eradication of everything Ukrainian within and outside of Russia.

In order to manipulate the public consciousness, Russian propaganda mass-produces specific content, preventing alternative content through the physical destruction of the opposition. Quite often, appeals to “painful” topics of concern in society are found in the content of the messages, such as those related to ethnic stereotypes or myths – simplified, schematized, prejudiced, axiomatic and emotionally colored ideas about peoples as ethnic communities.

Russian information forces and their bot farms massively spread twisted, distorted, absurdly false information. As O. Dovzhenko emphasizes, Russian lies are ones that take your breath away because of their audacity. The possibility of the existence of something so vile, inhuman and immoral cannot be grasped by the mind (Dovzhenko, 2022).

On a global scale, Russia produces the waves of fake news and manipulation often accompany elections, referenda, plebiscites, parliamentary votes for important laws (More: Kornieiev, Ryabichev, Glushkova, 2022: 205). Today, the Russian media and their controlled information agents are using more sophisticated ways to spread disinformation: instead of creating and spreading the narratives from their false accounts (how they used to do it before), they are searching for narratives that are put out by real

people who are not Russian, not bots, and they are trying to amplify those narratives and spread these narratives in cascades (*The changing face*, 2023).

The level of political support for Ukraine, amount of aid, and the extent of sanctions against Russia significantly depends on how it is perceived abroad.

We must admit that Ukraine's policy in the humanitarian, ethno-national and information spheres has been short-sighted and unsystematic for a long time. This led to Russian and pro-Russian chauvinistic ideas taking root in the mass consciousness of part of the population in Ukraine's southern and eastern regions. However, under the conditions of armed confrontation, these ideas almost completely lost their appeal for the local population, which directly experienced the impacts of war (Hai-Nyzhnyk, 2017: 47).

To weaken Ukrainian society, increase tension and dissatisfaction in European countries, Russian propagandists widely use the following scheme of actions: find a painful topic, form opposing positions in society, find people who share them, and incite them against each other (Shpet, 2022). For example, since February 2022, several synchronized information campaigns against Ukrainian refugees have been conducted one after the other, each of which is directed at a different audience:

- Russian audience (further demonization of Ukrainians, strengthening of the chauvinist feeling of own superiority – the campaign fits into the general anti-Ukrainian, anti-Western narrative of Kremlin propaganda);
- Ukrainian audience (trying to convince Ukrainians that “nobody needs them” either in their own country or abroad; provoking conflicts between Ukrainians: opposing those who left the country and those who stayed);
- the population of the countries receiving Ukrainian refugees (fantasy of traditional anti-migrant messages about social parasitism, increasing crime rate, cheap labor, “irresistible” cultural differences between Ukrainians and citizens of EU countries and related conflicts).

Due to the fact that these messages do not correlate with reality, propaganda actively uses outright fakes (*Vid brekhni...*, 2023).

Russia's political elites are obsessed with Ukraine, and relations between these two countries have never been a truly strategic partnership (More: Brusylovska, Koval, 2019). A powerful, prosperous European Ukraine is viewed by the Russian authorities as a direct threat to existence of the Russian Federation in its current form, mainly because Ukrainian demonstrates a different successful political path. Moreover, for centuries, Russia has been appropriating Ukrainian cultural heritage (Doroshko, Tsyryfa, 2021), building on it the myth of its “great” history and identity.

The impact and consequences of information warfare are very significant. They are well understood by experts and often underestimated by ordinary citizens. Russia spreads its propaganda not only in Ukraine and against Ukraine. By justifying its aggressive policy and war crimes in the eyes of its own society, Russia is imposing its narratives on the whole world and destabilizing the world order.

After decades of very active and diverse methods of brainwashing and manipulation of public consciousness, rooting narratives favorable to the Russian authorities in the context of public opinion in the post-Soviet space and globally, Russia counted on the rapid capture of Ukraine, support of the Russian-speaking population, passivity

and little resistance from Ukrainian society, only “concern” of the international community.

The analysis of the methods and scale of information warfare suggests that it was preparing the ground for the next phases of Russia’s war and is gaining even greater scale in the hybrid and full-scale war.

HYBRID WAR

At the beginning of the 21st century, the concept of hybrid wars appears in military science, which describes modern warfare as a combination of conventional, irregular and asymmetric means, which include the constant manipulation of political and ideological conflict, as well as the involvement of special operations forces and conventional armed forces, intelligence agents, political provocateurs, and media representatives. Economic blackmail, cyber-attacks, proxy servers and surrogates, paramilitary, and terrorist and criminal elements are also used in such wars (Dodonov, 2017: 2). Hybrid warfare has been successfully executed on the battlefield since the Second Lebanon War in 2006. It serves to achieve strategic influence to undermine the national interests and will of the enemy (Brown C. L. F., Brown C. T. D., 2011: 20).

The essence of hybrid war is informational expansion (aimed at the destruction of the spiritual world of the nations and peoples against which it is waged, and the deformation of world perception and world attitudes) in addition to a military invasion (*Hybrid Warfare*, 2021). One of the basic components of hybrid warfare is to instill fear and create an atmosphere of uncertainty. Cognitive attacks are a new type of intervention, especially in the case of working with mass consciousness, to produce chaos in the minds, as its result is an increase in polarization among the population, opposition between people, and uncertainty about the future (Trebin, 2014: 115–120).

The peculiarity of a hybrid war is the uncertainty of the subject, because the state conducting it makes a secret agreement with non-state actors – militants, groups of the local population, and organizations with which it formally denies any connection. These actors can do things that the state itself cannot, since any state is obliged to adhere to the Geneva and Hague Conventions on the Laws of Land War, agreements with other countries. In this way, the “dirty work” is transferred to non-state formations. This is how Russia acted in Crimea and Donbas.

Russia’s invasion of the eastern territories of Ukraine in 2014 is considered the beginning of its “hybrid war” against Ukraine, which was followed by the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, the occupation of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, and their transformation into the quasi-state entities “Donetsk People’s Republic” and “Luhansk People’s Republic” with further robbery, torture and physical destruction of the patriotic population, and destabilization of socio-economic and cultural life.

Therefore, military aggression carried out by Russia under the cover of local separatist movements was added to the information war. Since 2014, the Ukrainian army has been fighting Russian mercenaries and separatists in its eastern territories. And although people – both military and civilian – were dying, infrastructure was being

destroyed, and settlements were being destroyed, the civilized world unfortunately did not properly react. For the Ukrainian people, military operations have become a real challenge and upheaval, especially for the residents of the territories where brutal battles took place and are still ongoing.

FULL-SCALE WAR AS A TRAGEDY AND SHOCK THERAPY

Russia's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine was preceded by the ideological, informational, and hybrid wars. They prepared the ground for the takeover by significantly weakening Ukrainian society and ensuring support for the Russian annexation of Ukrainian territories by its local population.

Many people in and outside Ukraine did not believe Russia would dare to attack a peaceful country in the 21st century because of the senselessness of this war and its unjustified barbaric cruelty in the time of the latest technologies and progress. But on February 24, 2022, Russia launched a full-scale war with massive bombings, seizure and occupation of Ukrainian territories, and numerous casualties among both the military and civilian population. The atrocities committed by the Russian army in the occupied territories shock the world and show the true face of the "Russian world."

Russian propaganda claimed that Ukraine would be occupied in 72 hours – but this did not happen. The Armed Forces of Ukraine proved their ability to resist the "second army of the world," thousands of people of various professions went to the front as volunteers, and the volunteer movement was massively developed. It was possible to preserve the stability of the state administration, financial and banking system, and logistical routes for the supply of food products, medicines and other necessary goods. Workers in the energy and utility sectors ensured the operation and rapid recovery of critical infrastructure, which especially suffered during Russian terrorist attacks in the fall of 2022 and the winter of 2022–2023.

Russian aggression against Ukraine violates the norms of international law, but as Ukrainian human rights defender Oleksandra Matviichuk noted in her speech at the time of receiving the Nobel Peace Prize (2022), the international legal order currently does not protect itself. She rightly states: "The values of modern civilization need protection. Peace, progress and human rights are inextricably linked. States that kill journalists, imprison activists, or disperse peaceful demonstrations pose a threat not only to their citizens, but also to the entire region and peace in the world as a whole... The world did not react properly even to the act of aggression and the annexation of Crimea (2014), which became the first precedent in post-war Europe" (*Promova Oleksandry Matviichuk*, 2022).

Russia's war against the Ukrainian people is genocidal and colonial in its characteristics (Snyder, 2022; Smolii, Yas, 2022). It is fundamentally important that it is not only about territories and resources. This war is for the appropriation of Ukrainian cultural heritage, the extermination of Ukrainian civil society (More: Hordiichuk, 2023). For Ukrainians, military resistance is not only a struggle for survival, but also for their civilizational choice. The basis of any civilization is a set of certain ideas which are the basis of civilizational identity. Such ideas include legal myths (Halapsis, 2021a),

which are necessary for the functioning of society. After deeply rethinking Christian anthropology (Halapsis, 2021b), Europe came to the idea of “natural rights” as human rights and the rights of nations, but for Russians this is an empty sound. The suffering and death of millions of people (Nikitin, Nikitina, 2023) is worth nothing to Russian rulers when it comes to fictional “imperial greatness” – and in this respect, Putin is no different from his predecessors.

It is widely believed that Putin is trying to rebuild a lost empire. Instead, the current war in Ukraine can be seen not as the rebirth but rather as the dramatic end of Russian imperialism (Rojek, 2022: 447–448).

To the great regret and disappointment of the entire civilised world, the majority of the Russian people support their rulers, and even more so, are themselves prone to violence, authoritarianism and chauvinism. This is sad and tragic at the same time. And it is no accident. Such attitudes are largely the result of long-term propaganda, manipulation of public consciousness, pressure and repression by the authorities, especially on the liberal-minded part of Russian society that was forced to emigrate en masse abroad (Dudek, 2022). Hopes for a consolidated resistance of Russian elites did not materialise either. In February 2022, only a rather small number of Russia’s elite publicly condemned the war or signaled that they disagree with Putin’s decision to launch it. Some elite members confessed their shock and horror to the media on condition of anonymity: “No one is rejoicing. Many understand that this is a mistake;” “It’s paranoia that has reached the point of absurdity.” Yet, three weeks later, interviews with the same interlocutors yielded different messages: “Now that they (the West) imposed sanctions on us ... we’re going to f*ck them all.” Others, like most members of the State Duma and Federation Council, demonstrated their full support for Putin’s “special military operation.” But the majority appeared to remain silent (Khvostunova, 2022).

Today’s Russia is perhaps the most representative example of dictatorship’s threat to humanity and global civilization. But it is a dictatorship obsessed with maintaining a grip on power, fueled by imperial ambitions and the idea of national exceptionalism that made the current war inevitable (Bykova, 2022).

Imperial values are deeply rooted in the Russian consciousness, and most Europeans are genuinely surprised how Russians, who can seem completely sane and rational, are suddenly behaving absurdly and inappropriately when it comes to Russia’s “mission” or its relations with other nations. Instead, those European nations that have experienced Russian domination and, with great efforts, escaped from its imperial “arms” – Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia – deeply understand the essence of the “Russian world.” Therefore, it is unsurprising that during Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, these countries became the important influential lobbyists of the Ukrainians.

Why shock therapy? Unexpectedly for Russia, the full-scale war consolidated the Ukrainian nation. For centuries, separated by contradictions (often created artificially), the western and eastern regions of Ukraine have united in the face of the common enemy and danger of losing statehood. The war became a powerful impetus to the awakening of national self-awareness and national pride, and Ukrainians became increasingly proud of their Ukrainian identities.

The history of the Ukrainian people is replete with uprisings against invaders, wars of liberation, and the experience of direct and clandestine resistance. In recent decades, three Ukrainian revolutions have taken place – and all of them for freedom: the Granite Revolution for freedom from Soviet power (1990), the Orange Revolution for freedom of choice (2004), the Revolution of Dignity for freedom from tyranny and to choose the foreign policy vector of development of own state (2013–2014). Moreover, the war that Russia started in 2014 in the East of Ukraine, which includes the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and since 2022 the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, is a war for freedom. As Yu. Hudymenko emphasized: “Nothing characterizes a Ukrainian of any time like this word – freedom” (Hudymenko, 2021).

Ukrainians, like Europeans, consider violence unacceptable and humiliating. The Russian-Belarusian narrative about the state’s right to use force against its own citizens has not worked in Ukraine. During national revolutions and in the conditions of war, Ukrainians put up a brave resistance and defend their freedom even at the cost of their lives, which earns the admiration of the whole world. This is portrayed by an already legendary symbol of Ukrainian military resistance, during which a Ukrainian border guard from Snake Island (water area of the Black Sea) responds to a Russian warship after being asked to surrender (the ship was sent in a known direction (Romanenko, 2022), where it was eventually sent a few months later – Ukrainian forces hit the Russian warship Moskva with two Neptune missiles).

Upon carrying out a full-scale military invasion, the Russian authorities underestimated the Ukrainian people’s love for freedom, and failed to realize that the mentality of Ukrainians is based on the archetypes of Freedom and a special sacred attitude to their own Soil (Hordiichuk, 2018: 18). Since the declaration of independence of Ukraine, ideological transformations of the socio-political consciousness of the Ukrainian people have also taken place – a massive reinterpretation of the Soviet heritage as colonial, its rejection by the majority of the population, and growing support for the European vector of development (Hordiichuk, 2021: 311). Ukrainians are fighting for the preservation and development of civilization subjectivity of Ukraine, and for the victory of humanism over neo-totalitarianism.

Thus, the Russian war in Ukraine is an existential and ideological war – a war for values and identity, not only for resources and new territories (although this component is also important). This war is a tragic consequence of the combination of imperial ambitions, the colonial syndrome of the Russian authorities, the passivity of the majority of the Russian population, and the lack of a powerful civil society that can resist authoritarianism and return the state’s course to democratic values and liberal ideas. It is also important to consider M. Bykova’s hypothesis that one of the main reasons behind Russia’s senseless and brutal attack on Ukraine, and the sharp deterioration of the situation within Russia itself, is Putin’s desire to grab, maintain and advance his own power (Bykova, 2022: 442).

Ukraine’s victory is important for the entire Western world. It is necessary for establishing justice and restoring world order, and for the triumph of democracy over authoritarianism and totalitarianism. The global support for Ukraine in rebuffing the aggressor and rebuilding is essential for the future of humanity.

CONCLUSIONS

The Russian war in Ukraine is an existential and ideological war – a war for values and identity, not only for resources and new territories (although this component is also important). This war is a tragic consequence of the combination of imperial ambitions and the colonial syndrome of the Russian authorities, the passivity of the majority of the Russian population, and the lack of a powerful civil society that can resist authoritarianism and return the state's course to democratic values and liberal ideas.

The existence of Russia and the formation of its cult of “mighty empire” for centuries took place through aggressive expansion, rewriting of its own and appropriation of other people's history, information sabotage, physical extermination of internal opposition and genocide of conquered peoples. Modern racism is a continuation of the centuries-old history of Russian imperialism and is determined by the specifics of Russian cultural life, the mentality traits of Russians, and the nature of social processes in Russia. Racism has received such massive support from Russians because it plays on their imperial feelings, attitudes and appeals to Russia's past greatness, which restoration it calls for. Proponents of racism shift the responsibility for their failures onto others (“a conspiracy of the collective West”), justify the use of violence against other peoples: the invasion of Afghanistan, Georgia, Syria, the brutal suppression of the aspirations of the peoples of the Caucasus and other republics of Russia, and the full-scale war in Ukraine. The ideology of the “Russian world” is destructive by its nature – it poses a threat not only to the countries of Europe, but also to the entire civilized world.

Russia's war against Ukraine has been going on for four centuries in various forms: seizure of territories, russification, repression, extermination of a layer of intellectuals (executions, imprisonment, deportations to Siberia and Central Asia, etc.), suppression of peasant resistance and dispossession (Russian authorities killed more than 10 million Ukrainian peasants through man-made famines), ideological propaganda, rewriting history, etc.

Russia began its intensive information war against Ukraine in the early 1990s, immediately after the collapse of the USSR. The main goals were to return Ukraine to the zone of its geopolitical influence, to prevent its European integration and success. An analysis of the methods and scale of information warfare suggests that it was preparing the ground for the gradual absorption/annexation of Ukrainian territories, justifying and facilitating these processes. The impact of Russian propaganda on Ukrainian statehood, national unity and reputation in the world has always been destructive, but it has failed to derail Ukraine from its European course.

During the Revolution of Dignity (2013–2014) Ukrainians removed a corrupt pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich. Russia took advantage of Ukraine's temporary political weakness to launch a hybrid phase of the war – its military (at that time without insignia, so-called “green men”) annexed the Crimea peninsula and with help of Russian-financed local separatists occupied Donetsk and Luhansk regions. So, since 2014 Ukrainian army has been fighting Russian mercenaries and separatists in its eastern territories. And although people – both military and civilian – were dying,

settlements were being destroyed, the civilized world unfortunately did not properly react. This gave Putin hope that the world's response to further aggression would also be weak, and therefore on February 24, 2022, he ordered the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The Russian war in Ukraine has caused irreversible changes in world order and stability. It shows and significantly deepens not only a geopolitical, but also a civilizational, conflict between different value systems and development models – democratic and totalitarian.

The survival of Ukraine as a state and Ukrainians as a nation of freedom-loving people who in the twenty-first century are being brutally killed by Russia and whom it attempts to make slaves again – depends on both internal and external factors: national unity, endurance and professionalism of military resistance, enhancement of information security, telling the world the truth about the war, and international support in the struggle against and pressure on Russia.

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the main ideological components and tools of Russia’s information, hybrid and full-scale war against Ukraine. Since the time of Ivan III, Russia has implemented the model of eastern despotism, which claims a special historical mission (“Moscow as the third Rome”). This model involves imperialism, absolutism, anti-democracy, disregard for human rights and the rights of nations. Throughout its history (Moscow Princedom – Russian Empire – Soviet Union – Russian Federation), the external forms of this model changed, but its essence remained unaltered, which is why it was always hostile to European values.

From the middle of the 17th century, when Ukrainian lands came under Russian control, it did everything to spread this model to them. To this end, it has taken such actions as rewriting history, banning the Ukrainian language and culture, destroying ethnic self-awareness, as well as repression and genocide against the Ukrainian people. Nevertheless, the oppressor failed to completely destroy the code of freedom, which is fundamental to the Ukrainian mentality. Nevertheless, the oppressor failed to completely destroy the code of freedom, which is fundamental to the Ukrainian mentality.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991), Ukraine got the opportunity to build its statehood on the values of freedom and democracy, and realized itself as a full-fledged member of the European family. Russia perceived Ukraine’s independence as a threat to its mission and moved to an ideological war against Ukraine. All methods of propaganda were employed, including distortion of facts, creation and mass distribution of pseudo-historical narratives, fakes, manipulations and outright lies. During the rule of Vladimir Putin, the doctrine of “Russkiy mir” (“Russian world”) was developed as a neo-imperial myth, and the Ukrainian state was viewed as a historical mistake that had to be corrected through new colonization. When during the Revolution of Dignity (2014) Ukrainians removed a corrupt pro-Russian politician Viktor Yanukovich from power, Russia resorted to the hybrid war during which it annexed Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Although the civilized world did not recognize the Russian an-

nexation, its reaction was too restrained. This gave Putin hope that the world's response to further aggression would also be weak, and therefore on February 24, 2022, he ordered the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The Russian ruler underestimated the will of Ukrainians to fight for their freedom, lives, and European ideals. Putin and his henchmen also underestimated the harsh reaction of the civilized world to Russian barbarism. An unpleasant surprise for them was the unprecedented military and financial aid that the West provides to Ukraine. Russian propaganda cannot hide from the world the terrible war crimes and offences against humanity committed by the Russian military. This war is not just a war between two states – it is a war between medieval barbarism and civilization. Ukraine's victory determines not only the fate of Ukraine, but also the entire world order.

Keywords: Russian war in Ukraine, ideological war, information war, hybrid war, full-scale war, Russkiy mir (Russian world), post-colonialism, propaganda, mentality, identity

JAK WOJNA INFORMACYJNA PRZECHODZI W PEŁNOSKALOWĄ AGRESJĘ MILITARNĄ: DOŚWIADCZENIE UKRAINY

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł analizuje główne ideologiczne komponenty i narzędzia wojny informacyjnej, hybrydowej i w końcu pełnoskalowej toczonej przez Rosję przeciwko Ukrainie. Poczynając od czasów Iwana III Rosja wdraża model wschodniego despotyzmu, w ramach którego przypisuje sobie wyjątkową misję historyczną („Moskwa – Trzeci Rzym”). Model ten obejmuje imperiaлизм, absolutyzm, antydemokrację, lekceważenie praw człowieka oraz praw narodów. W jego historii (Wielkie Księstwo Moskiewskie – Imperium Rosyjskie – Związek Radziecki – Federacja Rosyjska) zmieniały się zewnętrzne formy, ale jego istota pozostała niezmienną, zaś w jej skład zawsze wchodziło wrogie nastawienie do wartości europejskich.

Od połowy XVII wieku, kiedy ziemie ukraińskie znalazły się pod kontrolą Rosji, robiła ona wszystko, aby rozpowszechnić na nich ten model. W tym celu prowadziła działania takie, jak: przepisywanie historii, zakazywanie języka i kultury ukraińskiej, niszczenie samoświadomości etnicznej, a także represje i ludobójstwo wobec narodu ukraińskiego. Nie udało jej się jednak całkowicie zniszczyć kodu wolności, który jest fundamentalny dla ukraińskiej tożsamości.

Wraz z upadkiem Związku Radzieckiego, Ukraina otrzymała możliwość zbudowania swojej państwowości na wartościach wolności oraz demokracji, dążąc do realizacji swojego statusu jako pełnoprawnego członka europejskiej rodziny. Niepodległość Ukrainy była postrzegana przez Rosję jako zagrożenie dla jej „misji”, dlatego rozpoczęła ona wojnę ideologiczną przeciwko Ukrainie. Zastosowano wszystkie metody propagandy, w tym fałszowanie faktów, tworzenie i masowe rozpowszechnianie pseudohistorycznych narracji, kłamstw i manipulacji.

W okresie rządów Władimira Putina doktryna „Russkiego mira” („rosyjskiego świata”) została rozwinięta w neoimperialny mit, w ramach którego państwo ukraińskie było postrzegane jako historyczny błąd, który musiał zostać naprawiony za pośrednictwem nowej kolonizacji. Kiedy podczas Rewolucji Godności (2014) Ukraińcy pozbawili władzy skorumpowanego pro-rosyjskiego prezydenta, Wiktora Janukowycza, Rosja zaczęła wojnę hybrydową, w której zaanektowała Krym oraz obwody Doniecki i Ługański. Cywilizowany świat nie uznał rosyjskiej aneksji, a jego reakcja była zbyt powściągliwa. Dało to Putinowi nadzieję, że reakcja świata na bezpośrednią agresję również będzie słaba, dlatego 24 lutego 2022 rozpoczął pełnoskalową inwazję na Ukrainę.

Rosyjski rząd nie docenił woli Ukraińców do walki o wolność, życie i europejskie ideały. Putin i jego poplecznicy nie przewidzieli również ostrej reakcji cywilizowanego świata na rosyjskie barbarzyństwo. Zaskoczeniem była dla nich bezprecedensowa pomoc wojskowa i finansowa, jakiej Zachód udziela Ukrainie. Rosyjska propaganda nie może ukryć przed światem straszliwych zbrodni wojennych i przestępstw przeciwko ludzkości popełnionych przez rosyjskie wojsko. Ta wojna to nie tylko wojna między dwoma państwami, to wojna między średniowiecznym barbarzyństwem a cywilizacją. Zwycięstwo Ukrainy determinuje nie tylko jej los, ale także cały światowy porządek.

Słowa kluczowe: Rosyjska wojna w Ukrainie, wojna ideologiczna, wojna informacyjna, wojna hybrydowa, wojna na pełną skalę, Russkij mir (rosyjski świat), postkolonializm, propaganda, mentalność, tożsamość