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Geopolitical strategies in the Russian-Ukrainian war (2022 – first half of 2024)

The Russian factor poses a real threat to the national security not only of Ukraine, but also to the entire democratic West and the entire free world. However, none of these countries and international organisations has an effective strategy to neutralise it. In 2014, the Russian Federation (RF) launched a “hybrid war” against Ukraine, annexing Crimea and part of the Donbas. The Russian Federation was not punished for its aggression, which prompted it to launch a large-scale war against Ukraine in February 2024. The heroic resistance of the people of Ukraine, the professionalism of the Ukrainian army, and the help of the West made it possible to inflict heavy defeats on Russia in 2022. However, by rethinking strategic miscalculations and the reasons for the defeats of 2022–2023, the Russian Federation has put its economy on a military track and mobilised all its resources to wage war. After the failures of the Ukrainian counteroffensive in the summer of 2023, the Russian Federation launched an offensive that continues from the fall of 2023 and throughout 2024, as a result of which the Russian Federation again began to slowly seize new Ukrainian territories. Ukraine and Western countries did not take advantage of the opportunity to inflict a decisive defeat on the aggressor in 2022–2023 in order to successfully end the war and restore the international order destroyed by Russia back in 2014.

The failures in 2023–2024 indicate an ineffective state policy of Ukraine and Western countries to neutralise Russian neo-imperialism. It is obvious that they underestimated Russia, set false goals, and therefore, chose an ineffective strategy. This allowed the Russian Federation to recover, draw conclusions after the failure of the “Blitzkrieg” and start implementing a long-term strategy to deplete Ukraine and the West.

The Russian strategy was quite effective. This is evidenced by the fact that US military assistance to Ukraine in late 2023 – early 2024 actually stopped, and only from May 2024 began to recover, which allowed the Russian Federation to seize the strategic initiative. There was a

certain weakening of support for Ukraine in Central and Eastern Europe. In Poland, war fatigue was used by populists to incite cross-border hostility during the 2023 election campaign, which was accompanied by a trade war, blocking of Ukrainian borders, and speeches by Polish farmers and carriers with anti-Ukrainian slogans. Polish historian and political scientist R. Wgura & J. Kuisz (2023) expressed concern on this occasion that such events could turn Poland from the most loyal ally into the most ardent rival of Ukraine in the European Union. The prerequisites for this can be seen in the confrontation of historical memories, in which Poland interprets the Volyn tragedy of 1993–1994 in accordance with the resolution of its Sejm in 2016 as a genocide of Ukrainian nationalists against Poles, celebrating annually July 11 as the day of the victims of this “genocide” (Pavlyuk, 2024). These are the actions of Poland are described by the Ukrainian historian V. Vyatrovych (2016) as “grief not for the dead people, but for the lost territories”. This gives reason to believe that there are certain forces in Poland that hope for the return of Lviv and other Ukrainian lands in the event of Ukraine’s defeat in the Russian-Ukrainian war. Slovakia held parliamentary elections, which were won by pro-Russian forces, after which the country also joined the blockade of Ukrainian borders and actually stopped providing assistance to Ukraine. It should be noted that the restrictions on exports of four categories of Ukrainian agricultural products introduced in 2023 by Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria contradict: a) the EU Regulation on Temporary Liberalisation of Trade with Ukraine; b) the provisions of the EU-Ukraine Free Trade Area; and c) the decision of the European Commission to lift the embargo (Pashkov, 2024). Of particular concern is the policy of Hungary, which is trying to block aid to Ukraine and from the inside undermines the solidarity of NATO and the European Union, seeks to bargain for economic benefits from the Russian Federation in return for this, and some Hungarian politicians have far-reaching

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plans to seize the Ukrainian Transcarpathia in the event of Ukraine's defeat (In Hungary, at the..., 2024).

The Ukrainian authorities, when developing their strategy, made the main bet on Western assistance in the war with Russia, while failing to carry out long-overdue and necessary reforms, put the economy on a military track, start a decisive fight against corruption, and consolidate and mobilise the people to fight the aggressor. It is an important fact that the President and the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (VRU) failed to declare a state of war in the country, extending martial law every three months. In order to set its people up for a long and exhausting struggle against a powerful nuclear power, the Ukrainian leadership began to "lull" them with promises of a quick victory over the Russian aggressor with Western support (Khmelnytska, 2022). This led to the division of Ukraine into those who actively fight at the front and help in the rear, and those who, after the fright of winter and spring 2022, returned to their usual life as if war does not exist, or it does not particularly affect them. Ukrainians did not draw proper conclusions: oligarchic clans continue to dominate society, corruption is widespread, private and corporate interests dominate over national ones, the standard of living of the people is falling, social stratification is deepening, the "social base" of the Ukrainian state is narrowing, and the number of those who are ready to fight for Ukraine is decreasing. The number of Ukrainian citizens who try to evade service in the Armed Forces of Ukraine is growing, which indicates a drop in people's confidence in the leadership and the Ukrainian state as a whole (Dubynyansky, 2024). According to the people's deputy of the Verkhovna Rada Dmytro Natalukha, about 800 thousand men liable for military service "went into hiding", changed their address and got a job unofficially to avoid mobilisation into the Armed Forces of Ukraine (Factory or front line., 2024).

Since the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war, Ukraine has been adhering to the "victory strategy", which is formulated in the message of President V. Zelenskyy to the Verkhovna Rada and provides for victory over Russia, the terms of which are: liberation from Russian occupation of the entire territory; return of Ukrainian prisoners and forcibly deported persons; restoration of sovereignty within internationally recognised borders without any restrictions on the sovereign rights of Ukraine; independent choice in determining its future and joining international associations – the European Union and NATO (Ukraine of victory will be a country worthy of its heroes..., 2023). Among the Ukrainian presidents, V. Zelenskyy first spoke about the need to defeat Russia, but did not have a realistic vision of how to defeat a nuclear power that has more human, military, and economic potential. V. Zelenskyy's victory strategy could be implemented if the West provided all the necessary military and financial resources and if Ukraine mobilised all the domestic resources to achieve it.

However, the West does not seem to be interested in the defeat and collapse of Russia, so its interests are at odds with those of Ukraine on this issue. In the West, the strategy of deterrence prevails, the content of which is revealed by R. Haass & Ch. Kupchan (2023a) (R. Haass is the president of the Council on Foreign Relations – an informal body for strategic planning and development

of recommendations for the implementation of US foreign policy, which are usually subsequently implemented by the presidents of the United States). In April 2023, on the eve of the counteroffensive of Ukraine, R. Haass & Ch. Kupchan (2023a) noted that Ukraine requires military assistance to carry out a counteroffensive and create the best negotiating position. And as a result of this counteroffensive, encourage the parties to the conflict to sit down at the negotiating table and conclude peace (truce) on the actual front line and territory that is actually controlled by Ukrainian or Russian troops. After the failed Ukrainian counteroffensive in November 2023, R. Haass & Ch. Kupchan (2023b) noted that the strategic goals set by Ukraine for the liberation of its territories do not correspond to its capabilities and the war has reached an impasse. They stressed that Ukraine needs to move from offensive to defensive until Russia agrees to a truce; and then start rebuilding the country and building a successful, prosperous democracy. They called on Ukraine to return its occupied territories through diplomatic means, promising that the West will not lift the imposed sanctions on Russia until it withdraws its troops from Ukrainian territories. R. Haass & Ch. Kupchan (2023b) warned that Ukraine's attempts to implement its "victory strategy" could lead to the loss of its support from the United States.

American scientist and former politician Henry Kissinger in an interview with *The Economist* magazine noted that before the Russian aggression in 2022, he opposed Ukraine's membership in NATO (A conversation with..., 2023). In his opinion, Ukraine's attempts to join NATO and its steps in this direction in 2021 prompted the Russian leadership to launch a large-scale aggression against Russia in 2022. He also expressed concern that unlimited military assistance could turn Ukraine into the most powerful military power in Europe with state-of-the-art weapons and the least experienced leadership. Therefore, after the war, it is advisable to accept Ukraine into NATO, so that it is controlled and does not seek revenge, and is also protected from Russia's repeated attempt to start a new war against Ukraine again. However, the main focus of H. Kissinger was devoted to the topic of preventing the third world war and the establishment of relations between China and the United States. The war between Russia and Ukraine was considered by him in the context of Sino-American relations. H. Kissinger does not see Russia itself as a real threat to the United States, given its economic and technological weakness. In his opinion, it is possible to prevent a third world war between the United States and China by considering the positions and interests of Beijing, including on the issue of the Russian-Ukrainian war. China is not interested in the defeat of the Russian Federation, stands for peace and ending the war by concluding a peace or truce between Ukraine and Russia along the contact line, using the Korean scenario. H. Kissinger warns against ignoring China's position, which could lead to a confrontation between the US and China.

It can be argued that the above-mentioned figures and US President Joe Biden are supporters of the strategy of deterring Russia, which provides military, economic and financial support to Ukraine to prevent its defeat in the war with Russia. However, according to the deterrence strategy, assistance to Ukraine should be dosed so that it

does not lead to an escalation of the conflict and involve the West in the war. This strategy is a continuation of the US deterrent strategy of the Cold War period. Therefore, the administration of J. Biden, from time to time, restricts or stops military assistance in order, perhaps in this way, to encourage and prepare Ukraine for signing a peace (or truce) with Russia through new territorial concessions.

A. Illarionov (2023) criticises the Democratic Party and the US presidential administration for their lack of military and financial support for Ukraine. He suggests that only the defeat of Russia and the removal from power of V. Putin can lead to real peace. The author was at one time an adviser to V. Putin, knows his plans and psychology, so he considers the course of the current US presidential administration to be erroneous.

Former commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine V. Zaluzhnyi (Ukraine's commander..., 2023) drew conclusions from the reasons for the failures of the 2023 counteroffensive, which consist in the fact that the war has acquired a positional and protracted character, which poses significant risks for the Ukrainian army and the state. To break out of the trap of positional warfare, Ukraine needs: air superiority, improved electronic and counter-battery warfare, new mine clearance technologies, and the ability to mobilise and train more reserves. The use of the latest military technologies is the key to breaking the trap of positional warfare, which requires increased military and technological assistance from the West.

Former NATO commander-in-chief in Europe General Wesley Clark (2024) in an interview criticises the strategy of deterrence and US support policy towards Ukraine. In particular, in his opinion, it was a mistake that the United States put pressure on Ukraine not to put up armed resistance to Russia in Crimea in March 2014. Although according to the Budapest Memorandum (Memorandum on Security Guarantees..., 1994), the United States should have been more determined to defend Ukraine. He also notes that the United States made mistakes when it did not provide Ukraine with sufficient assistance at the right time so that it could take advantage of Russian disorganisation, which caused Ukraine to fall into the trap of positional war.

The deterrence strategy was also criticised by a senior researcher at the Hudson Institute and the Director of the Centre for Europe and Eurasia at the Hudson Institute L. Coffey & P. Rough (2024). Since the Ukrainian military did not achieve all of its goals during the 2023 counteroffensive in the South and East because the West did not provide Ukraine with what its army needed to liberate its territory in a timely manner, and since American aid has been sharply reduced after the Ukrainian counteroffensive, American researchers have proposed a "courage strategy" that would provide Ukraine with assistance not "as much as needed", as President Biden has stated, but rather as much support as possible until Ukraine wins. The strategy includes three main objectives: rearming, staffing, and preparing the Ukrainian military for offensive operations between autumn 2024 and spring 2025; allowing Ukraine to implement the "Crimea first" strategy, which is a "crucial territory of war"; and inviting Ukraine to join NATO at the 2024 North Atlantic Treaty summit. They warn that Ukraine's defeat after America's disastrous retreat from Afghanistan will encourage Russia, China, Iran, North

Korea, and Venezuela to further confront American influence around the world: the lack of US and NATO resolve to arm and equip Ukraine could encourage North Korea and China to intensify their aggression in East Asia; Kremlin-controlled Ukraine would mean even more Russian troops and equipment along NATO's borders and rising levels of threats in Eastern Europe; and Venezuela, inspired by Russia's actions in Ukraine, has put forward dubious claims to what the international community considers Guyana..

J. Rauch (2024) claims that the double invasion of Ukraine and Israel shows that the world is divided into two competing blocs: (1) an alliance of liberal-minded, west-oriented countries, which includes NATO and US allies in Asia and Oceania, with the cooperation of some illiberal countries such as Saudi Arabia and Vietnam, etc.; (2) an "Axis of resistance" that includes the authoritarian dyad of Russia and Iran, which extends to anti-American states such as North Korea, and armed groups such as Hezbollah, terrorist organisations such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. And although the "Axis countries" differ in many things and do not share a common ideology, they have a common enemy: the United States, the EU, NATO, and other countries of the free world. "Axis" member states act semi-independently but interdependently, share resources and responsibilities, and step in and out of action when opportunities arise and circumstances require. The "Axis powers" are dominated by China, which, together with Russia and Iran, has joined forces on the propaganda front, launching waves of disinformation to the West. China has declared an "unlimited partnership" with Russia, helping Russia to overcome economic sanctions, and providing industrial and technological support to Russia's military efforts. Although China is very integrated into the global economy, it is dependent on the West in this and therefore remains neutral for the time being. Ukraine and Israel need to be supported, because in existing conflicts they act not only on their own behalf, but are members of a broader liberal alliance. According to J. Rauch (2024), it is advisable to accept Ukraine into NATO and the European Union, which would put Ukraine beyond Putin's military and economic reach. However, the researcher recognises that NATO today does not want to provide Ukraine with standard security guarantees under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty (1949) while Ukraine is at war with Russia.

According to the Budapest Memorandum (1994), nuclear powers provided Ukraine with security guarantees in exchange for the withdrawal of nuclear weapons from Ukrainian territory and Ukraine's accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Failure to comply with the memorandum in 2014 paved the way for a third world war with the prospect of using nuclear weapons. Russia, as one of the signatories of the memorandum, violated the agreement and started a hybrid war, while other signatory states did not provide military assistance and did not protect Ukraine. Faced with the weak policies of the United States and NATO countries during 2014-2021, Russia launched a war against the West in 2022. Y. Felshtinsky aptly claims that February 24, 2022, can be considered the beginning of the Third World War, which was unleashed by the Russian Federation, since its brazen neo-imperial policy will force NATO to enter this war

sooner or later (Felshtinsky: The Third World War began on February 24..., 2022). This fact was not considered by R. Haass & Ch. Kupchan (2023), H. Kissinger (A conversation with..., 2023) and those Western politicians who advocate freezing the conflict, adhering to the conventional strategy of containing Russia. The United States, Germany, and other Western countries do not want to be drawn into the war by Russia, so their assistance to Ukraine is insufficient and untimely. However, this strategy is misguided. Russia seeks revenge, and therefore, it has already started a war against Western civilisation, although today this war is still being waged on the territory of Ukraine. Moscow is trying to reconsider the results of the Cold War, so it already interprets its current war against Ukraine as a conflict with the United States and NATO, which are allegedly fighting with Russia "with the hands of Ukraine". In fact, Russia's war against Ukraine and the West is caused by the socio-political nature and imperial nature of Russian statehood, which encourages it to pursue an aggressive foreign policy, which is justified by the need to protect the state and its interests or protect its compatriots, citizens, co-religionists, or simply the Russian-speaking population from imaginary threats in a hostile international environment (Parakhonsky & Yavorska, 2024).

Perceiving the compliance and willingness of the West to compromise as a weakness, Russia issued an ultimatum in December 2021, demanding to sign Treaty between the Russian Federation and the United States of America on Security Assurances (2021) and Agreement on Security Measures for the Russian Federation and the Member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (2021). However, it is Russia, not NATO, that is pursuing an aggressive policy in Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, the Caucasus and the Baltic States, and as of 2024, no one really threatens Russia, which possesses nuclear weapons, which is the best guarantor of security.

The terms of the Russian ultimatum were: to withdraw the alliance's troops from Russia's western borders; to stop military cooperation between NATO and post-Soviet countries, and above all to stop providing military assistance to Ukraine; to stop NATO's expansion to the East, to exclude the possibility of post-Soviet countries joining NATO; to withdraw US nuclear weapons from Europe; to withdraw NATO's armed forces to the borders of 1997, etc. (Treaty between..., 2021). In fact, Russia demanded that the United States and NATO leave Central and Eastern Europe. That would turn North-Eastern Europe into a target of Russian neo-imperial policy and a potential victim of Russian military aggression. Moscow has sought to destroy the existing system of collective security in the Euro-Atlantic space, weaken NATO to establish its military and political dominance in Europe, and subjugate the EU with the help of a "gas noose" in the form of Nord Stream 2, supply of oil and other natural resources (Parakhonsky & Yavorska, 2024).

Only if its ultimatum was fulfilled was Russia ready to commit itself not to endanger American security. Moscow has warned that if the United States and NATO countries reject the Russian ultimatum, the West will have to face a "military-technical alternative". According to the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs A. Hrushko: "Europeans should also consider whether they want to avoid their continent

becoming the scene of a military confrontation. They have a choice: Either they are serious about what is on the table, or they are faced with a military-technical alternative" (Ladogin, 2021).

Russia is implementing a strategy of revenge, which was theoretically justified in its neo-Eurasian political doctrine by A. Dugin, according to which: there is an irreconcilable struggle in the world between Atlanticism (the United States, the United Kingdom) and Eurasianism (Russia); the antagonistic contradictions between these worlds cannot be reconciled and only one side can win this struggle (Clover, 2017). Referring to the primary sources, then in his work "Fundamentals of geopolitics", A. Dugin (1999) emphasises not only the need to oust the United States from Europe and the Eurasian continent, as Western researchers usually write about it, but also the destruction of the United States as a separate geopolitical centre and country: "Carthage (the current United States) must be destroyed... and Moscow must reign over Eurasia and the whole world as the New Rome". Since Ukraine is considered as a dangerous agent of Atlanticism only in the fact of its existence as an independent state, and Poland is the closest and most reliable ally of the United States in Central Europe, therefore, the Ukrainian and Polish states, according to the Russian "geopolitician" and political philosopher, should be radically neutralised.

Russia was waiting for the right moment to speak out against the United States and NATO countries, and decided to do so at the end of 2021, exploiting the vulnerability of the United States after the global economic crisis, the coronavirus pandemic, and the humiliating withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. On this occasion, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation S. Ryabkov cynically stated: "The world has changed a lot, and it is high time for the West to abandon the old patterns of behaviour, because the weak star-spangled empire, weakened by LGBT, BLM (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender; Black Lives Matter movement) etc., will clearly not survive a two-front war" (Ladogin, 2021).

The West rejected the Russian ultimatum, so in February 2022, the Russian Federation launched a large-scale war against Ukraine. Russia planned, according to the Russian opposition leader Professor V. Solovei (2022), to occupy Ukraine in three days, break through the corridor to Transdnistria and establish control over Moldova. This opinion is also shared by Yu. Felshtynskiy & S. Stanchev (2022), who note that Russia sought to break through to Transdnistria and incite a similar war in Moldova. Further, the Russian Federation intended to occupy the Baltic States and break up NATO, as Moscow hoped that NATO countries would not dare to go to war with Russia after the shock of a successful Russian blitzkrieg and fear of the threat of using nuclear weapons. In this case, NATO would demonstrate its uselessness, since it did not fulfill its main function of ensuring the collective security of its members.

The occupation and refusal to protect the Baltic States could thus lead to the collapse of NATO. When NATO came to the defence of the Baltic States and went to war with Russia, Moscow would demonstrate its readiness to use nuclear weapons. Modern Russia, unlike the former USSR, considers nuclear weapons not only as a deterrent, but

also as a tool for building a new empire and implementing neo-imperial policies (Bell, 2022). In particular, V. Putin before the start of a large-scale war against Ukraine hinted (Putin on nuclear war..., 2018), and during this war publicly stated (Putin has warned the West..., 2024) his readiness to use nuclear weapons. Therefore, there is a real threat that the Baltic States, primarily Poland, could also be the target of a Russian attack and nuclear strike (Solovei, 2022; Felshtynskyi & Stanchev, 2022). The latter directly borders the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation, Belarus, and the Suwalki corridor, which connects the territory of the Baltic States with the rest of NATO countries. Under such conditions, Gdansk, which is located close to the Kaliningrad Oblast of Russia, could become a frontline city as early as 2022.

According to journalist W. Arkin (2023), planning aggression against Ukraine and the West, the Russian Federation simultaneously consulted with the United States through the director of the Central Intelligence Agency V. Burns, as a result of which behind-the-scenes agreements were reached on the rules of Russia's attack on Ukraine, defining "proven and correct traffic rules": the US will not respond to the Russian invasion of Ukraine with direct military action against Russia; the United States (and Kyiv) will not take any action that could threaten Russia itself or the survival of the Russian state unless Putin escalates the conflict and engulfs all of Europe with a new World War; in exchange, the Kremlin will not escalate the war beyond Ukraine or use its nuclear weapons during the war. The United States did not believe in Ukraine's ability to resist the Russian Federation, assuming that Russia would seize Ukraine in a few days, and was primarily concerned that the war would not spread to other European countries. US President J. Biden did not dare to take decisive action to prevent Russia's invasion of Ukraine and a new war in Europe. This allowed V. Putin to start implementing a revenge strategy and unleash a war simultaneously against Ukraine and the West.

Russia's aggressive plans were thwarted by Ukraine, which unexpectedly inflicted heavy defeats on Russia near Kyiv, Chernihiv, Kharkiv, and Kherson, liberating significant of its territories from Russian troops. However, Ukraine failed to completely defeat Russia in 2022-2023 and liberate all its territories, mainly because the West did not provide adequate military assistance in a timely manner. Russia managed to maintain control over the occupied Ukrainian territories: some areas of Donbas, parts of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson oblasts. The war became protracted.

In the face of Russian aggression, the United States provided the main military and financial assistance to Ukraine and played the role of an integrating centre of the international coalition against the expansionist policy of the Russian Federation (Pashkov, 2024). However, the United States and NATO countries still did not provide timely and sufficient military assistance to Ukraine due to fears of escalation and expansion of the military conflict, direct involvement of Western countries in it, and the threat of its escalation into a nuclear war. The West fears a strengthening of China at the expense of excessive weakening or even the collapse of Russia in the context of the redistribution of global economic and political power

from the West to the East, which could shift the world's geopolitical centre from the North Atlantic to the Pacific region. Western politicians have not given up hope of dragging Russia to their side in a possible future confrontation between the United States and China, which has challenged American hegemony in the world.

Prolonging the war between Ukraine and Russia was also beneficial for the West to buy time to prepare for a possible confrontation with China, Russia, and other authoritarian countries, for which it was not ready. Even the US armed forces have limited resources, the US defence industrial base has too limited production capacity, the United States is in a difficult position of supporting two partners engaged in hot wars, the national defence strategy has proved insolvent, and developments are forcing attention and resources to address strategic challenges in the Indo-Pacific region (Haass & Kupchan, 2023b).

The United States pursued a policy guided by its own interests, which consisted in trying to weaken Russia as much as possible by the hands of Ukraine, prevent the union between Russia and Germany from taking place, strengthen the US position in Europe, and consolidate allied European countries around the United States. The interests of the United States also did not include the excessive strengthening of Ukraine in Eastern Europe and the emergence of a new independent geopolitical player in the international arena, as noted by H. Kissinger (A conversation with Henry Kissinger, 2023).

Corruption scandals that led to the resignation of Ukrainian Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov and other politicians negatively affect support for Ukraine. The far-left in the Democratic Party and the far-right in the US Republican Party have consistently opposed military aid to Ukraine, pointing to the corruption found there (Why America's far right..., 2022). Support for Ukraine was also influenced by the course of the presidential election campaign, when American politicians were guided by the logic of the election campaign rather than the long-term interests of their country and their allies.

This US strategy was erroneous and its implementation yielded the opposite results. Russia was able to bypass Western sanctions: in 2022, revenues from exports of goods and services from the Russian Federation even increased compared to the previous year, and amounted to a record USD 592 billion, of which USD 384 billion was revenues from oil exports (Zhgalkin, 2023). The sanctions helped Russia bypass primarily the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), primarily China and India. However, the increase in the currency in Russia was also facilitated by the inconsistent policy of the West, which, by restricting the import of its goods to Russia, did not restrict Russian energy exports. Western countries did not dare to impose an energy blockade on Russia, which allowed the Russian Federation to receive additional billions of dollars to finance its wars against Ukraine. Thus, the countries of the BRICS and the Global South actually ignored the fact that the Russian Federation by armed means seized part of the territory of a neighbouring state and defiantly violated international law, its agreements and international obligations. This will later come back like a boomerang and hit these states in the future, and then short-term benefits will have

disastrous consequences for these countries (Parakhonsky & Yavorska, 2024).

The inconsistent rehabilitation policy of the West and the policy of economic assistance to the aggressor from China, India, and other countries of the Global South allowed Russia to receive huge financial resources that were directed to transfer the economy to military rails, the country's military-industrial complex began to work continuously in three shifts. The Russian authorities used the money received from the sale of energy resources to hire contract soldiers for large one-time payments and high salaries for the Russian Federation, which increased the motivation of the Russian army. The army has become an important pillar of the Putin regime. The poor regions of Russia, which suffered from deindustrialisation after the collapse of the USSR, received financial resources to restore its military-industrial complex. This has led to lower unemployment, higher wages, and a real consumer boom in Russia itself (Weaver & Stogne, 2024). Therefore, broad segments of the population became interested in continuing the war and waging other wars of conquest. Potential opponents of the regime, after the announcement of partial mobilisation, who could become the driving force for the overthrow of the Putin regime in the future, began to leave Russia en masse. The mutiny by Y. Prigozhin failed, which was followed by purges that led to the strengthening of the regime, contributed to the modernisation of Russia on the principles of neo-imperialism and increased trends in the transformation of Russia into a totalitarian state focused on external expansion. It should be expected that the totalitarian tendencies and aggressive policy of the Russian Federation will only increase over time to stabilise Russian society and stop the degradation of the Russian economy using administrative levers. In Russia, inflation is expected to rise rapidly and the market economy to degrade, as the consumer boom will lead to an increase in demand (people will have much more money) and a decrease in supply (due to reduced imports and the degradation of the civilian economy in the war). Even the fall of Putin's regime and a truce will not solve the existing problems, as there will be a simple rotation of Russian elites, the final establishment of totalitarianism and a further escalation of the conflict between Ukraine and the West. Russia is caught in a vicious circle, it cannot stop until it is defeated in the war, as a result of which the dismantling of the Russian imperial system will take place.

The prolongation of the war also prevented the West from taking full advantage of its technological advantages over the technologically backward Russia to inflict a swift and decisive defeat on it. The prolonged war gave the Russian Federation the opportunity to buy time to learn how to defeat Western high-tech weapons. For example, GPS-guided Excalibur artillery shells hit Russian tanks and artillery with surgical precision in the summer of 2022 (Trofimov, 2024). However, over time, the Russian army began to use powerful electronic warfare tools to create obstacles to GPS guidance, and therefore, these shells lost their way or did not explode. The war in Ukraine revealed gaps in the Western military doctrine that favoured precision rather than mass, where well-aimed strikes could damage a larger enemy, reducing the need for huge costs

for troops, tanks, and artillery (Trofimov, 2024). It also allowed minimising own losses in manpower during combat, but the use of expensive Western high-tech weapons in the war in Ukraine showed that what worked against Saddam Hussein's Army, the Taliban, or ISIS fighters could not necessarily work against the modern armed forces of Russia or China. Russia's success in the field of electronic countermeasures, a bet on the production of cheap weapons in large quantities and continuous "meat grinder assaults" – all this can create many problems for the United States and its allies when the Axis countries decide to start fighting against the West. The democratic West was not ready for such a war, which would require heavy losses in manpower.

The problems identified above and the ongoing war only contributed to the consolidation of anti-Western authoritarian regimes in the international arena, which began to help Russia with weapons and economically, and an anti-Western coalition began to form consisting of Russia, Iran, North Korea, and in the future, possibly China (Coffey & Rough, 2024). Russia has enlisted the support of the Global South, exploiting the theme of the struggle against Western neo-colonialism, even though Russia itself is pursuing a tough colonial policy against subjugated peoples.

Trying to distract attention from Ukraine, Russia is undermining the situation in different regions of the world. In particular, the Russian trace can be seen in the preparation of an attack by Palestinian militants, after which the topic of the Russian-Ukrainian war disappeared from the front pages of the media. The threat of starting a "hybrid war" between Russia and Estonia and Latvia has increased to provoke chaos there, using the local pro-Russian population, and send its armed forces there to protect it. The Russian trace is also likely to be found in mass anti-government protests against farmers in late 2023 and early 2024 in Poland (and other European countries), in order to split and weaken Polish society on the eve of the start of a "hybrid war" in Baltic states, and also to undermine the Polish-Ukrainian partnership.

Poland, according to A. Dugin (1999), should become a low-impact entity on the Eurasian continent, dependent on other entities – primarily Russia and Germany, lose their northern and western lands and be cut off from the Baltic Sea. Another important aspect of Russia's geopolitical strategy is the undermining of the national unity of the Polish people and the establishment of a fifth column among them. It is also important for Russia to raise tensions and split the alliance between Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine, which it does by using the complicated pages of history in Ukrainian-Polish relations and its fifth column in Poland and Ukraine.

Polish researcher A. Novak (2021) rightly called Russia an "empire of evil". Therefore, peace and security in Europe and the world can only come as a result of the complete and unconditional dismantling of the Russian imperial system, as a result of which the "Russian empire of evil" will cease to exist. On this basis, a new "neutralisation strategy" is proposed. J. Pilsudski's strategy of neutralising Russian imperialism can be used to develop it. J. Pilsudski supported S. Petliura's UPR when Bolshevik Russia attacked Ukraine, and also supported the Russian opposition, in particular B. Savinkov, intending to

overthrow Bolshevism in Russia from within (Novak, 2021). For various reasons, the plans of J. Pilsudski were not embodied. The war ended unsuccessfully, Ukrainian lands were divided between Poland and Soviet Russia, and the independent Ukrainian state ceased to exist.

Today, Poles and Ukrainians need to draw the right conclusions from the lessons of history, use positive

experience, and avoid making mistakes of the past. Ukraine, Poland, and other countries of the free world need to join forces to implement the “neutralisation strategy”, which provides for the complete and unconditional dismantling of the Russian imperial system. Only the dismantling of the Russian imperial system can lead to the establishment of a true and just peace in Europe.

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