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Russian preservation syndrome

Russia has been planning to annex Ukraine since the collapse of the USSR in 1991. For thirty years, proposals to Ukraine to join various Russian unification projects aimed at creating international organisations hastily “glued together” from the members of the former Soviet Union have been floated in the political space. Among these structures, Russia, with the active participation of Ukraine and Belarus, created the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) on 8 December 1991, the Customs Union in 1995, which grew into the Eurasian Economic Community in 2001, and the Common Economic Space in 2001. The security issue was under the special control of the Russian leadership, which already in 1992 announced the emergence of a military association of the armies of the former republics – the Tashkent Treaty, and later the Collective Security Treaty, which was eventually declared an organisation (CSTO). By 1992, all the strands of influence were in the hands of Russia, which had almost restored the Soviet network of deep dependence of the former Soviet republics on the outskirts of the country. These initiatives, although proclaiming equal participation of the participants, had a single goal – to bring Ukraine into these organisations as soon as possible in all security, economic and political terms. To achieve this goal, Russia used pressure and multi-pronged blackmail. Thus, without warning, prices for Russian raw materials and finished products increased, agreements were ignored, and pressure continued in all international organisations where Ukraine gained membership; bribes, fraud, fraud, and fake information about the alleged “insolvency of the Ukrainian partner” blocked already agreed large-scale industrial and agricultural contracts and projects of Ukraine with foreign countries.

Ukrainian leaders, hoping for the benefits of economic cooperation with Russia and the former Soviet republics, were unable to immediately cut off Soviet economic levers and ties that were replenishing the state budget, improving statistics and producing encouraging results in various industrial sectors. The then President of Ukraine Leonid

Kravchuk actively, yet cautiously, signed various agreements with his CIS colleagues but did not sign the organisation’s Charter, which contains Articles 11 and 12 on the right of the member states’ armies to intervene “if necessary” in each other’s internal affairs. He was also particularly cautious about the CSTO military association, whose first documents, among other signatures, bears “Does not meet the interests of Ukraine” or “Contradicts the Constitution of Ukraine” notes. The next president, who thwarted the European-Ukrainian scenario despite Ukraine’s European integration commitments, together with the prime minister signed dozens of pro-Russian cooperation documents, tying the Ukrainian economy more closely to the Russian one, including the extension of the Russian military fleet’s stay in Ukrainian Black Sea waters for decades.

The Russian invasion was planned in all directions: political (delaying the legal recognition of Ukraine and the signing of basic documents; pressure over nuclear weapons; eliminating Ukraine’s defence and offensive potential; undermining all administrative structures by appointing Russian officials to public office, interfering in internal affairs, “appointing” pro-Russian presidents, etc.); security (sending Russian military into Ukraine to create a fifth column, sending weapons, training traitors, gathering tactical information, etc.); economic (non-repayment of debts, seizure of all Soviet real estate and property, raising energy prices to unattainable heights, refusal to buy Ukrainian salt, metal, coal, transition to market prices for all components, etc.); diplomatic (refusal to distribute real estate of the USSR diplomatic missions, blocking Ukrainian international initiatives, obstructing Ukraine’s relations with other countries, etc.); information (seizure of the USSR information space, radio and TV frequency grid, satellite and space communications, printing potential, etc.).

The corresponding efforts were made in the information sphere to shape global opinion, distorting the history of both countries and the USSR, and banning Ukrainian

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textbooks on history, international relations and Ukraine's foreign policy. At the same time, large-scale anti-Ukrainian information campaigns were conducted, with fakes of dubious content aimed at all segments of the population, especially young people. Russia spares no expense in terms of billions of dollars for this.

The Ukrainian leadership managed to refuse to participate in Russian security structures, even creating the GU(U)AM despite the pressure but remained under Russian control in several economic issues. Russia continued to play the role of a peacekeeper and strategic partner of Ukraine, even introducing a specific "lure" for the Ukrainian ruling elite during the interim presidency of Medvedev, who assured everyone that Russia was allowing Ukraine to join the EU because it was an economic entity. At the same time, Ukraine was in no way allowed to even mention its intentions to approach NATO, let alone become a member.

Having failed to achieve the desired, in 2014 Russia moved to violent active actions: it "absorbed" Ukrainian territory in parts. The West is silent. Ukrainian society defends its dignity and right to independence, taking to the Maidans. The then Ukrainian leader, on the instructions of Moscow, shot their citizens for expressing their desire to be in civilised Europe.

Thus, the last attempt to annex and absorb Ukraine peacefully failed. Russia was losing Ukraine, its core vassal, which had been saving the Russian Empire from collapse for centuries. And without Ukraine, according to leading international analysts, the empire will not survive.

The concept of empire comes from *Imperium* and means order, supreme power, and rule by one person – a monarch in a certain territory, one of the historical forms of state and political formation (Hutchinson, 2017). Until now, this term has been used to refer to the sole sovereignty over numerous and dispersed political societies (Stroschein, 2015). D. Lieven (2000) defined an empire as a state "with a demarcated territory exercising sovereignty over its subjects, who are at various levels under its direct administrative supervision". The term "empire" has caused much controversy and has been applied to many different political entities. Thus, an empire can encompass not only formal but also informal processes. Oxford University professor J. Darwin (2008) speaks of informal empire "as the highest form of imperialism". According to his definition, empires are "systems of influence or rule in which ethnic, cultural or ecological boundaries were overlapped or ignored". It should be noted that the term "empire" refers to the central state of such entities, which exercises political control over a large territory containing many diverse population groups.

Researchers identified several types of empires, tracing their path from birth to collapse. J. Hutchinson (2017) notes that the Mauryan Empire used a combination of political sabotage and religious conversion to expand its dominance, while the Achaemenid Persian Empire was built through the brutal conquest of foreign territories. At the same time, Rome, having seized territory, offered citizenship to the conquered in exchange for loyalty. Thus, the state of Alexander the Great is considered a classic example of an imperial formation. Alexander did not destroy the existing administrative systems but adapted them to strengthen his state formation. Analysing the Qin Dynasty

of China, the scholar emphasises that it was cemented by an extensive imperial bureaucracy and Confucianism, which were at its core. Thus, various means and forms were used to grow and strengthen empires.

Similar methods were used in the creation of the Russian Empire: appropriation, seizure, and brutal exploitation of natural resources and local people turned into slaves. Bribery, blackmail, extermination of dissatisfied people, complete assimilation of the conquered peoples, etc. contributed to the realisation of the goal. The Russian Empire grew rapidly in territory under the rule of Peter the Great, the Tsar of All Russia, who declared himself the All-Russian Emperor in 1721. The collapse of the empire in 1917 was facilitated by the First World War and the activation of the conquered peoples. The reasons for the collapse of empires lie in several objective and subjective factors. The former is related to the inability of the central government to rule, while the latter is caused by wars and military redistribution of territories. To this, we can add economic and political reasons, as well as humanitarian problems.

M.R. Sarkees *et al.* (2003) identified nationalism as the main cause of the collapse of empires. This statement may be controversial, as new states emerge primarily because of military conflicts. The results of two world wars prove this. In addition, with a strong government and strict domestic policy (as seen in the Soviet era), nationalism can be easily curbed. For example, because of the Second World War, three dozen new countries appeared on the world map. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, 15 more countries emerged from the former Soviet republics.

Over the past centuries, the Moscow state continued to expand. Its collapse in 1917 was saved by the creation of the Soviet Union. Thus, the Soviet Empire on the former territory of the Romanov Empire survived the revolution and the civil war. It lost Finland and the Baltic and Polish territories. Officially, it was a federation of equal national republics of the Russian, Belarusian, Ukrainian and Trans-Caucasian peoples, but it was a Russian fiefdom that openly and with impunity exploited the population of the renewed empire. Russia dominated the power structures and state institutions, and Russian history, culture and language dominated the cultural and educational space. Later, the Soviet Union was strengthened by the victory over Germany in 1945 and gained a ring of puppet states in Eastern and Central Europe (Rieber, 2014). T. Martin (2001) calls the Soviet empire an "empire of positive action", in contrast to the belief of US President Ronald Reagan, who perceived Russia as nothing less than an "evil empire".

The power of this empire spread to Eastern and Central Europe after the Second World War, and a socialist camp was formed from the satellite states. J.A. Hobson (1894) justified the motivation for foreign expansion as the need for advanced capitalist states to export their surplus capital. This theme was also the basis of the Soviet leader's work *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, published in 1917. Later, neo-Marxists argued that the military-industrial complex and other features of capitalist states create a need for capital and wage wars to build it up (Magdoff, 2003).

Relations within colonial powers confirm pericentric theories, which focus on the forces that draw imperialists

into hierarchical relations with the world. At the same time, metrocentric theories focus on explaining the reasons for the desire of imperialist countries to expand. D. Gallagher and R. Robinson (1953) described this in their book "The Imperialism of Free Trade". According to the authors, the policy of imperialist countries towards colonies varied depending on the conditions on the periphery. Where peripheral entities had stable regimes and effective collaborators, imperialists could control them indirectly. Where peripheral societies were politically unstable or lacked elites willing to defend their interests, metropolises created official imperial authorities and ruled them directly.

In the Russian and later Soviet empires, republics such as Tatarstan, Ingushetia, and Bashkortostan had stable regimes that worked for the central government. They were governed indirectly by the centre through local leaders. In the grey zone regions that had no state tradition, such as the Yamalo-Nenets, Komi, Kalmykia, Yakutia, etc., the central government created a special system of institutions from central apparatus officials, appointing its people to leadership positions, and later through an officially appointed presidential representative who was given the broadest powers to govern the grey zone (Collins & Amabile, 1999). The struggle for survival and influence has created an ever-widening space of competition between the great powers, which has encouraged metropolises to seize new territories.

Thus, imperial stability is based on a combination of conquest, ideological legitimization, coercion and co-optation of minority national elites, as the invader gains full control over society through minority elites. This primarily concerns minority power structures, differentiation in the army, where certain ethnic groups of the central state are selected as "military races", and specific demographic policies, where the dominant ethnic group of the invader country is used to control the indigenous population. Thus, from the frontline reports, the differentiation in the Russian army, and the confrontation between ordinary soldiers of "marginal" origin and officers can be seen. The colonisation of the indigenous Ukrainian local population and its assimilation is observed.

According to R. Collins (2011), war is a central event for the legitimacy of states, and geopolitical principles govern the ethnic absorption or fragmentation of a country. States that have an advantage in size and resources over their competitors will tend to expand territorially, the analyst writes. However, this phenomenon also has negative consequences: with expansion, such states suffer from a lack of resources and further fragmentation, as they create many enemies on their borders. Moreover, the cumulative processes of imperial expansion provoke large-scale arms races and wars that generate the highest levels of hatred and rage. All these characteristics of an empire, as we can see, coincide with the modern Russia. Its ability to impose the culture of the dominant group through state institutions leads to either assimilation or counter-mobilisation of the ethnic minority to create a separate state (the example of Ukraine). The ability of a state to bind, in this case, the Ukrainian population to the dominant Russian group is linked to external success in war. When a state expands because of war, it is more able to absorb minority ethnic groups into its minority-

imposed culture. American researcher R. Collins (2011), having studied the Balkan crisis, identified three stages or a three-stage model of the activation of national groups in its development. The third stage consists of the mobilisation phase of people, who develop intense emotions and concepts of identity because of the crisis. In addition, W. Hiers and A. Wimmer (2013) argue that nationalist mobilisation is the driving force in all cases of empire collapse. The arguments of R. Collins's arguments are partly based on statistical data, which he combines with a detailed historical analysis. With some exceptions, nationalist organisations claiming to represent the population or a part of it were responsible for both the fall of the empire and the transition to national sovereignty.

Nationalist wars of liberation in other parts of the empire, as a "spreading effect of nationalism", increased the likelihood of nation-states. The more territories that succeed in seceding to form nation-states, the more likely it is that the remaining territories will follow suit. Other important factors may include the weak international position of the imperial centre, the creation of nation-states in the neighbourhood, and finally, wars within the state itself. For example, the two Chechen wars, the war against Georgia, as well as the Russian war against Ukraine. Internal wars, as recognised by W. Hiers and A. Wimmer (2013) recognise that internal wars are a particularly influential factor in the destruction of empires.

This is also confirmed by the history of the twentieth century: among the new states that emerged at the beginning of the last century, the Ukrainian People's Republic, Georgia, Azerbaijan and the Central Asian republics failed to defend their independence. At the same time, Poland, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Austria, and the Serbo-Croatian-Slovenian state emerged in Europe. The collapse of the twentieth-century empires led to the disintegration of the colonial possessions of the world's leading countries: The German Empire, as well as Japan, Italy, France and the United Kingdom. These countries lost their imperial ambitions. The dominant positions on the world stage were occupied by those that emerged from the war militarily and politically stronger: The United States, Great Britain, and the USSR.

The Cold War ended with the redistribution of spheres of influence in favour of NATO, the emergence of new states, the deterioration of the foreign policy position of the centre of the Russian Empire - Russia, and the emergence of the United States as a hegemon of global economic and political development, which willingly helped the newly emerging states. However, it is noteworthy that new states, often with ethnically mixed populations, are not a positive phenomenon for either individual stable communities or the world at large. The emergence of new objects/subjects of international relations shifts stability and balance, causing destructive consequences of the large-scale entry of such states into the interstate system of stable space (Interview with Ambassador..., 2003). Given the above, as well as the signs of the formation of new, including totalitarian, alliances, we do not exclude the possibility of new empires emerging in a different capacity in the era of global interdependence.

The above raises the question of the role of the "fringe lands" of the imperial Russian space, including Ukraine.

It is worth recalling that the former Soviet republics, the countries of the Russian Empire, played an almost decisive role in those events. They helped to preserve the Russian empire since 1917, without putting up any resistance to the invader, splitting on two sides of the barricade (in Ukraine) when General Muravyov's troops sacked Kyiv and drowned the territory of Ukraine in blood. The leadership of the Ukrainian Republic also managed to save Russia after the Second World War. The Ukrainian SSR was blessed with Stalin's gift of a seat for the Ukrainian SSR at the United Nations (1945), because of which the Ukrainian delegation actively voted for all decisions of the centre-Moscow from the "high" rostrum of the UN.

The years of 1990-1991 should also be mentioned – the collapse of the Soviet Union, when all of Russian "friends" – the "brotherly republics" – were frightened by the events of the SCSE coup. The empire was saved from collapse by the Ukrainian president, who, together with his colleagues, created a new union – the Commonwealth of Independent States. Thus, Ukraine saved a new satrapy, a renewed empire from destruction, an empire that was well prepared for a war aimed at destroying Ukraine itself. As can be seen, the revival of the "Moscow Empire" is repeatedly carried out by its "vassals" – conquered peoples, including Ukrainians. This phenomenon is reminiscent of the Scandinavian syndrome when victims begin to defend and save their tormentor, who has done them irreparable harm and caused severe injuries.

Russia, while still being Russian and Soviet, has never abandoned the idea of seizing Ukrainian lands. At times when it was weak, it did not dare to take such a step, as Ukraine was in some respects even stronger than its neighbour. Already during the years of independence, the Russian power and military machine tried to implement territorial encroachments in Crimea (1992), Sevastopol (1993), Kos Tuzla (2003), etc.

In some academic circles, there is an opinion that Russia was unprepared for the war, which is categorically contrary to historical documents. Russia had been

preparing for the march from the Kyiv Sea, Vyshgorod district, to the capital of Ukraine, which was unexpected for Ukrainian society, carefully. It should be noted that all Russian analytical centres had developed a war strategy in advance, as soon as Ukraine declared its irreversible course towards European integration and NATO. Since independence, the aggressor has identified the weakest points in Ukrainian defence, studied the terrain and locations of the Ukrainian armed forces, and then struck on the night of 23-24 February 2022, the day of the Soviet army and navy. The attack was similar to the World War II attack launched by Nazi Germany on 22 June 1941, with the same blitzkrieg approach and calculations to capture Ukraine in a couple of weeks.

After analysing the factors that influenced the development and preservation of the Russian Empire, the author of the article concludes that for centuries the Russian Empire was saved from collapse by its vassals – conquered and exploited peoples, including Ukrainians. Thus, in 1917, Bolshevik Russia was saved by the Ukrainian Bolshevik government and army. In 1922, Bolshevik Russia (RSFSR) created the USSR with the support of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic (USSR), the Belarusian Socialist Soviet Republic (BSSR), and the Transcaucasian Socialist Soviet Republic (TSR). In 1945, the victory in World War II cemented the USSR. In 1991, Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus formed a new union called the Commonwealth of Independent States on the Soviet ruins, with Russia as its chair. The former Soviet republics effectively restored a renewed Soviet Union led by Russia.

The Ukrainian position was mostly consistent: the state refused all organisations and options offered by Russia to tighten relations, except for the military ones (Chekalenko, 2021). Having exhausted various arguments and options for involving Ukraine in uniting with Russia, observing the successful development of Ukraine's politics and economy, and deepening relations with the European Union and NATO, Russian leaders decided to return Ukraine to the Russian empire through a brutal war.

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