



SERHII PLOKHY

THE FALL
OF THE
PAN-RUSSIAN
UTOPIA



КРАХ
ЗАГАЛЬНОРОСІЙСЬКОЇ
УТОПІЇ

За традицією навчальний рік у Національному університеті «Кієво-Могилянська академія» починається відкритою лекцією Почесного професора НАУКМА, відомого у світі вченого. Починаючи з 1992 року могилянці мали можливість почути:

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Київ
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Національного університету «Києво-Могилянська академія»
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Інавгураційна лекція Почесного професора НаУКМА Сергія Плохія, історика, професора кафедри української історії імені Михайла Грушевського, директора Українського наукового інституту Гарвардського університету, ґрунтується на його книжці «Російсько-українська війна: повернення історії» (The Russo-Ukrainian War: The Return of History), що вийшла у видавництвах W.W. Norton (США) та Penguin (Велика Британія) в травні 2023 року. У лекції поєднано та систематизовано ключові історичні й історіографічні віхи, погляди та аргументи, наведені в книжці. Автор робить висновок, що є чіткі ознаки того, що українська нація вийде з цієї війни більш згуртованою та впевненою у своїй ідентичності, ніж будь-коли раніше у своїй сучасній історії. Росія та її еліти тепер не мають іншого вибору, окрім як переосмислити ідентичність своєї країни, порвавши не лише з імперіалізмом царського минулого, а й з анахронічною моделлю російського народу як триєдиного утворення з росіян, українців та білорусів.

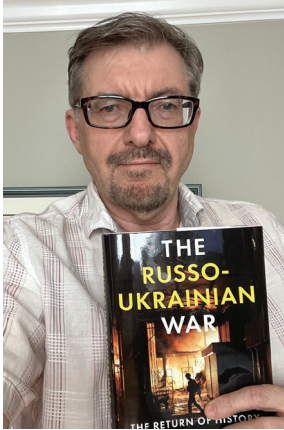
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Inaugural lecture
of the Honorary Professor
of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy
September 1, 2023



This inaugural lecture by historian Serhii Plokhy as Honorary Professor of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy is based on his book, *The Russo-Ukrainian War: The Return of History* (2023). It pulls together and presents in a systematic way key historical and historiographic threads and arguments presented in the book. The author concludes that there are clear indications that the Ukrainian nation will emerge from this war more united and certain of its identity than at any other point in its modern history. Russia and its elites now have little choice but to

reimagine their country's identity by parting ways not only with the imperialism of the tsarist past but also with the anachronistic model of the Russian nation consisting of Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians.

Serhii Plokhy (Plokhii) is the Mykhailo Hrushevsky Professor of Ukrainian History and the director of the Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard University. As a leading authority in history studies of Ukraine, Russia, and Eastern Europe, he has published extensively on the international history of World War II and the Cold War. His books have earned numerous awards, including the Lionel Gelber Prize for the best English-language book on international relations and the Baillie Gifford Prize for Non-Fiction (UK). His latest book, *The Russo-Ukrainian War: The Return of History* was released by W.W. Norton in the US and Penguin in the UK in May 2023.

The Fall of the Pan-Russian Utopia¹

In the fall of 2008, Vladimir Putin, who was then the prime minister of Russia and had just left the office of the president, asked Aleksei Venediktov, the editor-in-chief of the radio station Echo of Moscow, a liberal outlet that was still tolerated by the authorities, about the aspects of his two presidential terms that would be included in school history textbooks.

Venediktov, who had started his career as a history teacher, responded that one aspect for school history textbooks would be Putin's initiative leading to the reunification of the Moscow Patriarchate with the Russian Orthodox Church abroad—an émigré institution that had remained anti-Bolshevik and loyal to the Romanov dynasty after the Revolution of 1917. Surprised, Putin asked, "And is that all?" In 2015, seven years after their original conversation and one year after the annexation of the Crimea, Putin asked

¹ This inaugural lecture is based on my book, *The Russo-Ukrainian War: The Return of History* (New York, 2023). It pulls together and presents in a systematic way key historical and historiographic threads and arguments presented in the book.

Venediktov the same question. "Putin knows perfectly well," remarked Venediktov in an interview, "that history books for both Russian and Ukrainian schools will say that 'Khrushchev returned the Crimea, and Putin took it back.'"²

Putin compared himself not only to Soviet leaders like Khrushchev but also to Russian emperors Peter I, Catherine II, and Alexander II. Their busts and portraits found a place in Putin's antechamber in the Kremlin, and his press secretary, Dmitrii Peskov, confirmed his superior's interest in history. "Putin reads all the time," Peskov confided on one occasion, "mostly about the history of Russia. He reads memoirs, especially those of Russian historical state figures."³

In May 2009, less than a year after the invasion of Georgia, Putin publicly displayed his admiration for imperial Russian thinkers. Despite the rainy weather, he arrived at the cemetery of the Donskoi Monastery in Moscow in the company of numerous reporters. There, he laid flowers on the graves of General Denikin and his wife, as well as on the graves of Ivan Ilyin and Ivan Shmelev, both Russian émigré writers whose remains had been returned to Russia. Additionally, Putin paid his respects to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn,

² "Putin u menia sprashival, chto o nem napishut v uchebnikakh: glavred "Èkha" o lichnom razgovore s prezidentom RF," *Pervyi Russkii*, August 20, 2019, https://tsargrad.tv/news/putin-umenja-sprashival-chto-o-nem-napishut-v-uchebnikah-glavred-jeha-o-lichnom-razgovore-s-prezidentom-rf_213278.

³ Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin* (Washington, DC, 2015), 64-66.

who had passed away in Moscow the previous year, by laying flowers on his grave.⁴

Referring to General Denikin, whose grave he honored first, Putin encouraged one of the reporters accompanying him at the ceremony to read Denikin's memoirs. Putin remarked, "Denikin discusses Great and Little Russia, Ukraine. He writes that no one may meddle in relations between us; that has always been the business of Russia itself." Denikin was, in fact, following in the footsteps of Aleksandr Pushkin, who had criticized the West for interfering in Russia's actions during its assault on Poland after the 1830 rebellion. While Pushkin referred to Russo-Polish relations, Denikin referred to those between Russia and Ukraine. In Putin's perspective, it was Russia's prerogative to determine how it conducted its relations with its weaker neighbor. He used the Slavic roots shared by the two peoples as an excuse to condemn any Western support for Ukraine.⁵

Archimandrite Tikhon, who was rumored to be Putin's spiritual adviser at the time, revealed to the assembled reporters that Putin had personally funded the tombstones of the Denikins, Ilyin, and Shmelev. The archimandrite also shared Putin's deep admiration for Solzhenitsyn, whom he described as "an organic and committed statist." Solzhenitsyn not only believed in a robust Russian state but also advocated for Russia

⁴ "Putin vozlozhil tsvety k nadgrobiyam Denikina, Il'ina i Shmeleva," *Vesti.ru*, May 24, 2009, <https://www.vesti.ru/article/2180162>.

⁵ Plokhyy, *Lost Kingdom*, 326.

as an East Slavic state founded on the Pan-Russian, imperial model of the Russian nation, which included Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus.⁶

Solzhenitsyn was the key figure who linked the imperial thinking of the past with a plan for dealing with post-Soviet Russian challenges and realities. In his essay of 1990, *Rebuilding Russia: Reflections and Tentative Proposals*, Solzhenitsyn called for the separation of the Eastern Slavs from the non-Slavic republics of the Soviet Union and the formation of a "Russian Union" consisting of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and northern Kazakhstan. This was an awkward compromise between the Soviet and imperial visions of Russian national identity. In the Soviet tradition, Solzhenitsyn, who was half Ukrainian, referred to the Ukrainians as a distinct nation, but, according to imperial tradition, he considered them one and the same people as the Russians.

If one followed Ernest Gellner's definition of nationalism as the establishment of congruence between political and ethnonational borders, then Solzhenitsyn's "reconstructed" Russia was intended to be quadripartite. However, his plan never materialized, and several years later, Solzhenitsyn questioned the legitimacy of the Ukrainian borders. In his essay *Russia in Collapse* (1998), Solzhenitsyn argued for the annexation of eastern and southern Ukraine, denouncing its "inordinate expansion onto territory that was never Ukraine until Lenin: the two Donets

⁶ "Putin vozlozhil tsvety k nadgrobiiam Denikina, Il'ina i Shmeleva."

provinces, and the whole southern belt of New Russia (Melitopol – Kherson – Odesa) and the Crimea.”⁷

Putin shared Solzhenitsyn's belief that certain parts of eastern and southern Ukraine were not historically part of its territory but, as he told President George Bush in 2008, were rather a gift from the Russian Bolsheviks. As for Solzhenitsyn's compromise view, that was not a major issue for Putin as long as the political project of Russo-Ukrainian unity and the imperial model of a tripartite Russian nation were realized. Like Solzhenitsyn, Putin accepted the Soviet division of the Russian nation into Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians but continued to view them as representatives of essentially one people. Solzhenitsyn's vision of Russia served as a bridge between imperial notions of the Russian language, culture, and identity and the views that started gaining popularity in Russian political circles with Vladimir Putin's rise to power in the Kremlin.

Russia was ready to transcend the Soviet legacy concerning its self-perception and relations with neighboring countries, but the direction it took was backwards in history, with Putin emerging as its leader. He had at his disposal the ideas of the Eurasianists, who provided justification for Russian control over the former imperial territories; proponents of a larger Russian nation, seeking a common East Slavic state; and, lastly, the views of those who were willing to

⁷ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Kak nam obustroit' Rossiю?* (Paris, 1990); idem, “Russkii vopros v kontse XX veka” (1994); idem, *Rossiia v obvale* (Moscow, 1998), 79.

accept a Greater Russia, annexing historically or ethnically Russian enclaves, in case other integrationist projects failed.

* * *

Where Russia begins and ends, and which territories the historical "gathering of the Russian lands" should encompass, are age-old questions that have preoccupied Russian thinkers and statesmen for generations.

Most Russians believe today, as they have believed for centuries, that their state and nation originated in Kyiv (in the Russian version, "Kiev"), the center of the medieval polity that historians call Kyivan Rus'. Centered on today's Ukrainian capital, it encompassed a good part of what is now Ukraine, Belarus, and European Russia. Kyivan Rus', formed in the tenth century, fell under the blows of the Mongols in the thirteenth century, but not before giving birth to numerous semi-independent polities. The most powerful of them were Galicia-Volhynia in present-day Ukraine and southern Belarus; Great Novgorod or the Novgorodian Republic in the northwestern lands of the former Kyivan realm; and the principality of Vladimir – later Moscow in its northeastern part – the historical core of modern Russia.⁸

⁸ Simon Franklin and Jonathan Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus, 750-1200* (London, 2014); Mykhailo Hrushevsky, *History of Ukraine-Rus'*, ed. Frank Sysyn et al., vols 1, 2 (Edmonton and Toronto, 1997, 2021).

The Russians can indeed trace back to Kyiv the origins of their religion, written language, literature, arts, law code, and—the most important in the premodern era—their ruling dynasty. Their attempts to claim Kyiv as the source of their ethnicity, language, and popular culture turned out to be more problematic. Travelers from Moscow and St. Petersburg found that the locals in Kyiv and its surrounding areas spoke a language different from theirs, sang different songs, and had a distinct culture. However, that did not matter too much, as the myth of Russia's Kyivan origins had already embedded itself in the consciousness of the Russian elites by the late 15th century.⁹

The origins of that myth go back to the mid-fifteenth century, during the earliest years of the Grand Principality of Moscow, later known as Muscovy, as an independent state. Its founder was Ivan the Great, the ruler of Moscow and one of the many descendants of the Kyivan princes who established Moscow's rule over a vast realm extending from Nizhnii Novgorod in the east to Great Novgorod, or simply Novgorod, in the west. It was in the midst of Ivan's war against Novgorod, one of the heirs of Kyivan Rus', that the myth of Russia's Kyivan origins was born, originally as a dynastic claim. Ivan declared himself the heir of the Kyivan princes, asserting the right to rule Novgorod on that basis. He defeated the Novgorodians at the Battle of Shelon in 1471 and annexed the republic into his realm in 1478. The independent Russian state,

⁹ Aleksei Tolochko, *Kievskaiia Rus' i Malorossiia v XIX veke* (Kyiv, 2012).

arising from the struggle between Moscow and Novgorod, emerged as a result of the victory of authoritarianism over democracy.

No element of the reunification saga was considered more important by the imperial historians than the establishment of Muscovy's control over eastern Ukraine in the mid-seventeenth century. Their Soviet successors hailed it as the "reunification of Ukraine with Russia" – in effect, the culmination of Ukrainian history with its complete assimilation by Russia. Many Ukrainian historians, on the other hand, referred to the "reunification" as a military alliance, personal union, or even outright subjugation.

In the nineteenth century, Russian historians, including the most influential of them, Vasilii Kliuchevsky, claimed that the "gathering of the Russian lands," or the "reunification of Rus'" after the Mongol invasion, led by the Moscow princes and later the tsars, was the quintessential feature of the Russian historical process. This interpretation of history, rooted in the myth of Russia's Kyivan origins, was believed to culminate in the triumphant reunification of the Rus' lands into one Russian state, often referred to as "Russia, one and indivisible." According to Kliuchevsky, that process had been largely completed by the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁰

Ironically, it was exactly in the mid-nineteenth century that the imperial "gathering of the Russian lands" project the Russian Empire encountered an

¹⁰ Serhii Plokhyy, "Empire or Nation?" in idem, *Ukraine and Russia: Representations of the Past* (Toronto, 2008), 19-20.

enemy that it could not defeat. The name of the enemy was nationalism. It first manifested in two Polish uprisings that shook the foundations of the Russian Empire. In the long run, however, it was Ukrainian nationalism, awakened by the imperial campaigns to suppress Polish mobilization, that posed the main threat to imperial Russian statehood. While the Poles resisted imperial rule, the Ukrainians posed a challenge to the unity of the "reunified" Catherinian empire by asserting an identity distinct from the Russian.¹¹

The empire struck back by forging a model of Russian nationalism closely allied with its empire. In 1832, in the aftermath of the first Polish uprising, the newly appointed deputy minister of education, Count Sergei Uvarov, proposed a tripartite formula to Emperor Nicholas I that could serve as the keystone of a new Russian identity to be forged by the educational system. It consisted of three concepts to which a loyal subject of the tsar would have to subscribe: Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality. In the past, Russian subjects had been obliged to be loyal to God, the Sovereign, and the Fatherland. Nationality, which replaced the "fatherland," was as much a reaction to rising Polish nationalism as it was an attempt to emulate German nation-building. Uvarov was particularly influenced by the ideas of the German historian and philologist Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel, a follower of Johann Gottfried von Herder,

¹¹ Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multi-Ethnic History* (London, 2001), 213-46.

who envisioned a unified German state based on the German nation united by language and customs.¹²

For Uvarov, the envisioned nationality was to be indisputably Russian, but it would include the other East Slavic heirs of Kyivan Rus', the Ukrainians and Belarusians. The population of the two lesser branches was mainly Orthodox in religion, but a significant minority belonged to the Uniate Church, which had been established in the late sixteenth century. Its adherents, who lived in the eastern borderlands of partitioned Poland, followed Orthodox ritual but acknowledged the supremacy of the Roman Pope. In Uvarov's eyes, they were Russian but not Orthodox, and many believed them susceptible to Polish insurgent propaganda. The "problem" was solved before the end of the 1830s when the Uniates were forcibly "reunited" with the Russian Orthodox Church. The Russian nation, integrated by loyalty to the tsar, was now united by religion as well.

The history textbooks written under Uvarov's supervision legitimized the creation of one Russian nation, now united within imperial borders and subject to the scepter of the tsar. The imperial narrative envisioned the origins of the Russian nation in medieval Kyiv of the princely era. That nation had been divided by foreign invaders ranging from the Mongols to the

¹² Alexei Miller, "'Official Nationality'? A Reassessment of Count Sergei Uvarov's Triad in the Context of Nationalism Politics," in idem, *The Romanov Empire and Nationalism: Essays in the Methodology of Historical Research* (Budapest, 2008).

Poles but reunited by the Russian tsars to become once again consolidated and invincible.¹³

The model of a united Russian nation did not remain unchallenged for long. Taking a cue from the Poles, the Ukrainians soon raised the banner of their own national movement. The empire encountered a challenge from the ranks of the Russian nation that it was trying to build in opposition to Poland. In the 1840s, Kyivan intellectuals led by a professor of history at the local university, Mykola Kostomarov, and a drawing instructor at the same university, Taras Shevchenko, formed a clandestine organization that claimed the existence of a distinct Ukrainian nation. Drawing on traditions of Cossack history and historical chronicles, they were fascinated with the Ukrainian language and the lore and culture of the common people. According to Herder and his followers, that was the taproot of national identity.

The modern Ukrainian national project was born, and it was much more threatening to the Russian Empire than the Polish revolt. Kostomarov envisioned a Slavic federation to replace the Romanov and Habsburg monarchies and empires. The empire felt compelled to adjust the model of the unified Russian nation. It did so in the aftermath of the second Polish uprising (1863-64), which once again put the loyalty not only of the Poles but also of the Ukrainians and Belarusians into question. The new model of the unified Russian nation was tripartite, postulating the existence of separate "tribes"

¹³ Plokyh, *Lost Kingdom*, 81-91.

of Great Russians, Little Russians (Ukrainians), and White Russians (Belarusians). They spoke different "dialects" of Russian, went the argument, put forward by the conservative Russian journalist Mikhail Katkov, among others, but that was no reason to doubt the unity of the tripartite nation.¹⁴

To ensure that it would remain united, the authorities decided to arrest the development of distinct Ukrainian and Belarusian languages. The first ban on the publication in Ukrainian of anything other than folklore—including the Bible, religious texts, and language primers, along with school textbooks—was introduced in 1863 and remained in effect, with some modifications, until the first decade of the twentieth century. It was then abolished in the turmoil caused by the Revolution of 1905 in the Russian Empire. The ban on Ukrainian-language publications delayed the development of the modern Ukrainian national project but failed to suppress it. The Ukrainians of Galicia, a part of Ukraine taken over by Austria as a result of the partitions of Poland, continued to publish in Ukrainian not only their own works but also the writings of their counterparts from Russian-ruled Ukraine.¹⁵

The model of a tripartite Russian nation, which the Russian historian Alexei Miller calls a "big Russian nation," was adopted by the imperial elites in the second half of the nineteenth century and became part

¹⁴ Plokyh, *Lost Kingdom*, 105-36.

¹⁵ Alexei Miller, *The Ukrainian Question: Russian Empire and Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Budapest, 2003), 117-210.

of the ideological credo and personal belief, as well as identity, of many of the country's political, religious, and military leaders. The Russian Revolution put an end to the dominance of the tripartite nation in Russian political and ethnonational thought. Ukraine created its own statehood in 1917 and declared its independence in 1918. The same year, the Austria-Hungarian parts of Ukraine declared their independence and in 1919 formed a unified Ukrainian state. It lost the fight against the Poles, the White Russians, and the Bolsheviks, and disappeared from the map of Europe. But the idea of Ukrainian independence would live on.

By the time the Bolsheviks established their rule in Ukraine, in 1920, Vladimir Lenin concluded that Ukrainian aspirations to independence were so strong, not only among Ukrainians in general but even among the Ukrainian Bolsheviks themselves, as to require the granting of a degree of autonomy and a status equal to that of Russia. Not only were the Ukrainians recognized as a distinct nationality (as were the Belarusians), no longer a "tribe" of a tripartite Russian nation as in tsarist times, but pro-forma recognition of independence was given to a puppet Soviet Ukrainian state, and Ukrainian became its official language.

Realizing that the national movements brought to power by the effects of World War I and the Revolution of 1917 would have to be accommodated, the Bolsheviks strove to gain their cooperation. This accommodation eventually went beyond issues of language, culture, and the recruitment of local cadres into de facto

occupation administrations. It also included the creation of state institutions and recognition of the formal independence of the Bolshevik-controlled puppet states formed to delegitimize the new truly independent states and governments established by the national minorities in the borderlands of the former empire.¹⁶

In 1922, Lenin resisted Joseph Stalin's attempts to incorporate non-Russian republics into the Russian Federation and insisted on the creation of a Union state in which those republics would be distinct polities with rights equal to those of Russia. Vladimir Lenin's main contribution to the history of Russo-Ukrainian relations was the endowment of Russia, or the Russian Federation—the name under which it entered the Soviet Union—with a territory and institutions of its own, distinct for the first time in centuries from the territory and institutions of the empire that the Bolsheviks were seeking to preserve. If anything, Lenin laid the foundations for the formation of modern Russia, not Ukraine.¹⁷

The idea of a big Russian nation went into the Russian emigration along with the White Guard generals defeated by the Bolshevik Red Army and the

¹⁶ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca, NY, 2001), chaps. 1-3; Roman Szporluk, "Lenin, 'Great Russia,' and Ukraine," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 28 (1) (2006): 611-26.

¹⁷ Plokhyy, *Lost Kingdom*, 121-53; Alexei Miller, *The Ukrainian Question: Russian Empire and Nationalism in the 19th Century* (Budapest, 2003), 24-26.

intellectuals who supported their vision of Russia, one and indivisible. Among the émigrés was General Anton Denikin, whose memoirs would make a strong impression on Vladimir Putin, and the philosopher Ivan Ilyin, an admirer of fascism, whose article, "What the Dismemberment of Russia Promises the World," would become a frequently quoted source in the speeches and pronouncements of Putin and other Russian officials at the start of the new millennium. Ilyin argued that one day Russia would gather its lands back under its tutelage.¹⁸

* * *

The dissolution of the Soviet Union by the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus one week after the Ukrainian referendum for independence on December 1, 1991, put questions about the territorial boundaries of Russia and the nature of Russian national identity back on the political agenda with unprecedented urgency.

The new state borders of the former Soviet republics left approximately 30 million ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking members of other nationalities who associated themselves mainly with Russia beyond the borders of the Russian Federation. The leading Russian nationalist writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who returned to Russia from Cold War exile in the United States in 1992, decried the division of the "Russian people" by the post-Soviet borders, identifying it as the essence of the new Russian question. For the same reason, Putin

¹⁸ Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom*, 16-35.

called the Soviet collapse the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the twentieth century.¹⁹

Boris Yeltsin and his advisers faced a major challenge of transforming post-Soviet Russia into a European nation-state according to the model established over the previous two centuries by the French Revolution and its successors. It was based on the definition of nationalism by the Czech-British philosopher Ernest Gellner as the "political principle which holds that political and national units should be congruent." Given the millions of non-Russians and non-Slavs within the borders of the Russian Federation and the tens of millions of "Russians" and Soviets of different stripes beyond those borders, the task of Russian nation-building was all but impossible without a major war, which had been the main instrument used to create the European system of nation-states. In the 1990s, the latest example was the Greater Serbia project of Slobodan Milošević.²⁰

Yeltsin and his government could not afford such a war, nor did they want one. In fact, Moscow went to war with the non-Slavic and non-Christian Chechnya in defense of a different principle – the inviolability of the borders of the Russian Federation, challenged by

¹⁹ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "Russkii vopros v kontse XX veka," *Novyi mir*, no. 7 (1994); Vladimir Putin, "Message to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation," April 25, 2005, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22931>; Serhii Plokhy, *Lost Kingdom: The Quest for Empire and the Making of the Russian Nation from 1470 to the Present* (New York, 2017), 312-15.

²⁰ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY, 1983), 1.

Chechen separatism. The two ferocious Chechen wars brutalized Russian politics and society, strengthening the imperial model of Russian identity as transethnic and transcultural. They did so in part on the foundations but also at the expense of the Soviet identity developed in communist times. The new leaders in Moscow, who had come to power in opposition to communism and largely contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union, now faced communist opposition to their rule. They rejected Soviet identity as an instrument of Russian nation-building or a means of maintaining Russian control over the post-Soviet space. They looked instead for an alternative, and Yeltsin even called for a new model of the Russia idea.²¹

In the course of the 1990s, there emerged a number of political, cultural, and ideological concepts not based on the Soviet model. They competed with that model as possible means of uniting the political components of the Russian Federation and the post-Soviet republics no longer subject to Moscow's rule. One such concept was Eurasianism, which gave its name to a number of reintegrationist projects and institutions in the post-Soviet space. Rooted in the writings of Russian intellectuals, including Prince Nikolay Trubetzkoy and Petr Savitsky, who found themselves in exile after the

²¹ Julia Rubin, "Meditations on Russia: Yeltsin Calls for New National 'Idea,'" *AP*, August 2, 1996, <https://apnews.com/article/122cd732a8cf8b35989afeec4db69dcd>; Vera Tolz, "The Search for a National Identity in the Russia of Yeltsin and Putin," in Yitzhak Brudny, Jonathan Frankel and Stefani Hoffman, eds., *Restructuring Post-Communist Russia* (Cambridge, UK, 2004), 160-78.

Bolshevik Revolution, Eurasianism sought to recreate the former Russian imperial and now post-Soviet space on the basis of Russia's imperial heritage, Russian culture, and Orthodox Christianity. This integration aimed to bring together the non-Russian parts of the former empire into the present-day Russian Federation.

The old Eurasianism of the Russian émigrés captured the imagination of part of the intellectual elite that was dissatisfied with the liberal-democratic discourse embraced by Yeltsin's advisers, and some of its supporters and interpreters made their way into the Kremlin's orbit after Vladimir Putin's rise to power. Aleksandr Dugin, a neo-Eurasianist who advocated the creation of a Eurasian empire and has been considered an ideologue of Russian fascism, became an adviser to Sergei Naryshkin. He served at that time as chief of the presidential staff, would go on to serve as the speaker of the Duma, and then he headed the foreign intelligence service, Putin's old institutional home.²²

Putin adopted many elements of traditional and revived Eurasianism as parts of his world view. In his official pronouncements, he spoke repeatedly of Russia as a unique, multiethnic civilization not only different from the West but opposed to it in history, culture, and

²² Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America* (New York, 2019), 88-91; Marlene Laruelle, "Scared of Putin's Shadow: In Sanctioning Dugin, Washington Got the Wrong Man," *Foreign Affairs*, March 25, 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2015-03-25/scared-putins-shadow>; <http://newfascismsyllabus.com/contributions/into-the-irrational-core-of-pure-violence-on-the-convergence-of-neo-eurasianism-and-the-kremlins-war-in-ukraine/>.

values. But he also embraced with equal, if not greater, enthusiasm the ideas of a different group of Russian thinkers who juxtaposed Russia to the West predominantly as a Eurasian, Slavic, or Russian civilization. That trend of thought, represented by such figures as Aleksei Khomiakov, Ivan Kirievsky, and Konstantin Aksakov, pre-dated Eurasianism, going back to the first decades of the nineteenth century, which produced one of the most consequential schisms in Russian intellectual history, that between Westernizers and Slavophiles. The former insisted that Russia's destiny lay with the West, while the latter emphasized Russian uniqueness, rooted in history, language, culture, and nationality.

Putin first publicly subscribed to the imperial idea of a big Russian nation and declared that Russians and Ukrainians were one and the same people in the course of his visit to Kyiv in the summer of 2013. He was there with Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church to mark the supposed 1025th anniversary of the baptism of Kyivan Rus'. "We understand today's realities," declared Putin, speaking to the friendly audience of conference participants in an address appropriately entitled "Orthodox Slavic Values: The Basis of Ukraine's Civilizational Choice." "We have the Ukrainian people and the Belarusian people and other peoples, and we are respectful of that whole legacy, but at the foundation there lie, unquestionably, our common spiritual values, which make us one people."²³

²³ Plokhyy, *Lost Kingdom*, 331-32; Paul D'Anieri, *Russia and Ukraine: From Civilized Divorce to Uncivil War* (Cambridge, UK, 2019), 193-94.

Next year, in late February 2014, Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine by annexing the Crimea and starting the hybrid warfare in Ukraine's Donbas. The Russo-Ukrainian war had begun.

* * *

On March 18, 2014, Vladimir Putin delivered one of the most consequential speeches of his career, trying to explain why he annexed the Crimea and what that was supposed to mean for Russia and Russian-Ukrainian relations.

Addressing a joint session of the lower and upper houses of the Russian parliament—the deputies of the State Duma and the members of the Federation Council, joined by regional leaders and representatives of Kremlin-controlled civic organizations—Putin asked the deputies to approve a law annexing the Ukrainian Crimea and the city of Sevastopol to the Russian Federation. Two days after the referendum, Putin was ending the Crimea's short-lived independence by annexing the peninsula—the first annexation of a sovereign nation's territory in Europe by a foreign state since World War II.²⁴

²⁴ Serhii Plokyh, "The Empire Strikes Back," in idem, *The Frontline: Essays on Ukraine's Past and Present* (Cambridge, MA, 2020), 231; Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order* (Cambridge, MA and London, 2015), 81-85; Serhy Yekelchuk, *The Conflict in Ukraine: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York, 2015), 128-31.

In his speech, Putin declared that the Crimean self-defense units had taken the initiative to bring about reunification, and the people of the Crimea had decided their fate, preventing Sevastopol from being turned into a NATO military base. He took advantage of the opportunity to remind NATO and the West of all the injustices allegedly committed against international law and Russia, from the bombing of Serbia to the recognition of Kosovo's independence, as putative justification for Russia's actions in the Crimea, and denounced the "color revolutions" as coups engineered by the West.

Putin made an unprecedented appeal to Russian nationalism. This was a marked departure from his earlier statements and pronouncements, in which his main addressee and point of reference was the multiethnic Russian political nation embodied by the citizens of the Russian Federation, referred to as *rossiyanie* rather than ethnic *russkie*. Now he claimed that Russia and the Russians were the greatest divided nation in the world. After the fall of the USSR, said Putin, when "Crimea ended up as part of a different country...Russia realized that it was not simply robbed, it was plundered." "All these years," he declared, "citizens and many public figures have come back to this issue, saying that Crimea is historically Russian land and Sevastopol is a Russian city."

There were also elements of the speech that appealed to Russo-Ukrainian unity, despite Putin's attack on Ukraine and annexation of part of its territory. "Orthodoxy," claimed Putin, "predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilization, and human

values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus." He even declared that Russia was taking the Crimea on behalf of both Russians and Ukrainians to prevent its loss to a third party. "Crimea is our common historical legacy and a very important factor in regional stability," Putin went on. "And this strategic territory should be part of a strong and stable sovereignty, which today can only be Russian. Otherwise, dear friends (I am addressing both Ukraine and Russia), you and we—Russians and Ukrainians—could lose Crimea completely, and that could happen in the near historical perspective."

Putin made a hybrid argument for the annexation: appealing to Russian history, territory, and identity, he invoked the legacy of empire to claim the Crimea under the banner of Russian ethnic nationalism, while also maintaining that Russians and Ukrainians were Slavic brethren. The latter was meant to exploit the sense of Russo-Ukrainian unity to which many citizens of Russia and Ukraine subscribed. Putin assured Ukrainians that Crimea was a unique case—a part of Ukraine historically, culturally, and ethnically belonging to Russia. The rest of Ukraine was safe. "Do not believe those who want you to fear Russia, shouting that other regions will follow Crimea," declared Putin. "We do not want to divide Ukraine; we do not need that."²⁵

²⁵ Vladimir Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation," March 18, 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>; Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin* (Washington, DC, 2015), 368-69.

In fact, the division of Ukraine was exactly what Putin undertook in the weeks and months following his Crimean speech. In the second half of March, soon after Russia's annexation of the Crimea, the governments of Poland, Romania, and Hungary received a proposal signed by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, the leader of the ultranationalist Liberal Democratic Party and head of its faction in the Russian parliament. Zhirinovskiy invited the governments of those countries, which had controlled or occupied parts of Ukraine during the interwar period and World War II, to conduct referendums on the "return" of such territories to themselves. He offered to reestablish European borders existing prior to the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between Nazi Germany and the USSR in 1939. "It is never too late to correct historical errors," read the letter. It was not clear whether Zhirinovskiy was writing on behalf of the Kremlin.²⁶

A Polish Foreign Ministry spokesperson dismissed Zhirinovskiy's letter as a "complete oddity," while his superior, Radosław Sikorski, revealed a few months later that he had heard the same proposal from Putin himself. The offer had been made during the visit of an official Polish delegation to Moscow in February 2008,

²⁶ Lidia Kelly, "Russian politician proposes new divisions of Ukraine," *Reuters*, March 24, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-partition-letter/russian-politician-proposes-new-divisions-of-ukraine-idUSL5N0ML1LO20140324>; "Former Polish FM Says Putin Offered to Divide Ukraine With Poland," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 21, 2014, <https://www.rferl.org/a/26647587.html>.

just as Ukraine was applying for a NATO Membership Action Plan. Neither Poland nor any other central European country showed interest in the Russian proposal. But what would have happened if they had been prepared to consider it? At about the same time as Putin made his offer to the Polish delegation, "some not entirely academic quarters in Moscow" – to quote the source of that report, the Russian political scientist Dmitri Trenin – had discussed the idea of creating a buffer state to be called "New Russia" out of parts of southern Ukraine and Moldova. Its name was borrowed from that of the imperial province established by Catherine II in the northern Black Sea region in the last decades of the eighteenth century.²⁷

During the Moscow discussions of 2008, it had been proposed that Transnistria, a separatist enclave of Moldova, become part of the new state, but by the spring of 2014 the geography of the imagined region had changed. In early April a British reporter heard anti-Kyiv protesters in the city of Donetsk, far away from Catherine II's historical province, chanting "New Russia." In mid-April Putin took it upon himself to define the geographic scope of the area that he called "New Russia." Answering questions during a televised marathon phone-in, Putin defined "New Russia" as the

²⁷ Kelly, "Russian politician proposes new divisions of Ukraine"; "President Vladimir Putin met with Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk," President of Russia, February 8, 2008, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/43774>; Marcel H. Van Herpen, *Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, and London, 2015), 4-5.

Ukrainian oblasts of Kharkiv, Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson, Mykolaiv, and Odesa – the entire east and south of Ukraine. “These are all the territories that were transferred to Ukraine in the [19]20s by the Soviet government. Why they did it, God knows. All this happened after the corresponding victories of Potemkin and Catherine II in the well-known wars centered in Novorossiysk. Hence [the Russian name] Novorossiia [“New Russia”]. Then, for various reasons, these territories left [Soviet Russia], but the people remained there.”²⁸

Putin's geographic definition of “New Russia” was ahistorical, as the eighteenth-century province had been limited to the Pontic steppes north of the Black Sea and did not extend to Kharkiv, Luhansk, or Donetsk. But that definition corresponded to Solzhenitsyn's list of historically and linguistically Russian lands that had been included in Ukraine but did not properly belong to it. Solzhenitsyn's historical excursus was as misguided as Putin's: after the Bolshevik Revolution, Russians constituted only 17 percent of the population of the lands that Catherine II had designated as a province and that Putin was now claiming, allegedly for historical

²⁸ Linda Kinstler, “In eastern Ukraine, protestors are chanting ‘New Russia’ – an old term that's back in fashion,” *New Statesman*, April 8, 2014, <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2014/04/eastern-ukraine-protestors-are-chanting-new-russia-old-term-s-back-fashion>; Veselova, “Plenki Glaz'eva: kto i kak koordiniroval iz Rossii sobytiia ‘krymskoi vesny’”; “Direct Line with Vladimir Putin,” President of Russia, April 17, 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20796>.

reasons, as the “New Russia” province of the Russian Federation. The Ukrainian majority in those regions was the reason why they had been allotted to the Ukrainian SSR in the 1920s. Putin, for his part, was now referring to imperial Russia’s annexation of the Crimea and southern Ukraine in the late nineteenth century to make not only a historical but also an ethnonational claim to a much larger region.²⁹

The “New Russia” of Putin and Russian nationalists now found its new geographic boundaries in the Ukrainian Donbas. Russian and separatist propaganda exploited the Odesa tragedy of early May to mobilize votes for the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. The referendums that took place in the same month were organized even more hastily than the one in the Crimea, and the organizers predictably declared victory for the pro-independence side. Those who showed up for the referendums voted for the independence not of Putin’s “New Russia” but of the two separate “people’s republics” of Donetsk and Luhansk. The idea of such republics harked back to early Soviet rather than imperial times, in particular to the short-lived Donets-Kryvyi Rih Bolshevik-controlled polity during the Russian Revolution. Soviet mythology resonated with the locals much more strongly than distant memories of the empire.

The war in Donbas started the next month after Putin’s Crimea speech and would continue through

²⁹ Marlene Laruelle, *Russian Nationalism: Imaginaries, Doctrines, and Political Battlefields* (London and New York, 2019), 196.

more or less active phases for eight years, claiming 14,000 lives in Ukraine alone. "New Russia" disappeared from Putin's lexicon after the signing of the Minsk Agreements of 2013, but it became a badge of identity and a battle cry for the numerous groups of Russian Eurasianists, Russian nationalists, Orthodox monarchists, and neo-Nazis who flocked to the area in hopes of building the polity of their dreams. One of the major supporters of "New Russia," the leader of neo-Eurasianism, Aleksandr Dugin, even adjusted his theories to allow for the existence of a "Big Russia" as part of Eurasia, producing a curious *mélange* of Eurasian and Russian nationalist ideas. Backed by Russian money and instructed and directed by the Russian intelligence services, the Russian nationalists and Eurasianists soon took control of the newly proclaimed republics.³⁰

* * *

In July 2021, Putin had surprised Russia watchers throughout the world by releasing a long historical essay, which to all appearances he had written himself, with some assistance. Putin's reading of history clearly intensified during the COVID lockdown of 2020-2021. This time around he was not just reading but also writing.

³⁰ Laruelle, *Russian Nationalism*, 196-206; Marlene Laruelle, "Back from Utopia: How Donbas Fighters Reinvent Themselves in a Post-Novorossiia Russia," *Nationalities Papers* 47, no. 5 (2019): 719-33.

The essay, titled "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians," reflected his already well-known views, elaborated with a long excursus into history. After the failure of his Eurasian integration project in Kyiv and the implementation of his Greater Russia scenario by the annexation of the Crimea, Putin was returning to the imperial vision of a big Russian nation, a Pan-Russian project endorsed by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, among others. "I said that Russians and Ukrainians were one people—a single whole," wrote Putin in the opening statement of the lengthy essay. "These words were not driven by some short-term considerations or prompted by the current political context. It is what I have said on numerous occasions and what I firmly believe."³¹

What followed was an extended discussion of the history of Russia and Ukraine whose basic premises followed the line established in the nineteenth century by Count Sergei Uvarov and his favorite historian, whom he had commissioned to write school textbooks on Russian history, Nikolai Ustrialov. Like Ustrialov, Putin dwelled on what he regarded as the original unity of the big Russian nation, established in medieval times, when the Russian people were not only ruled by the same princes and belonged to the same Orthodox Church but also allegedly spoke the same language. Kyivan Rus' had in fact been a multiethnic polity whose territory spanned thousands of kilometers. But

³¹ Putin, "On the Historical Unity of the Russians and Ukrainians," President of Russia, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>.

Putin, like Ustrialov and many others who followed the historian's lead, attributed the loss of presumed Russian unity to bad rulers and foreign enemies.³²

"The wall that has emerged in recent years between Russia and Ukraine, between the parts of what is essentially the same historical and spiritual space, to my mind is our great common misfortune and tragedy," wrote Putin. "These are, first and foremost, the consequences of our own mistakes made at different periods of time. But these are also the result of deliberate efforts by those forces that have always sought to undermine our unity." When it came to "our own mistakes," Putin pointed first and foremost to those allegedly committed by the Bolsheviks, Vladimir Lenin in particular. The list of Russia's historical enemies was long, from the thirteenth-century Mongols to the Poles of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, then the Austro-Hungarians and again the Poles in the nineteenth century, as well as the Germans in the twentieth century.

The Poles played a special role as the nation responsible for the breakup of the united Russian people in all imperial Russian narratives, and Putin's version did not depart from that long-established tradition. "The idea of the Ukrainian people as a nation separate from the Russians started to form and gain ground among the Polish elite and part of the Malorussian [imperial term for Ukrainian]

³² Serhii Plokhyy, *Lost Kingdom: The Quest for Empire and the Making of the Russian Nation from 1470 to the Present* (New York, 2017), 89-91.

intelligentsia," wrote Putin, all but following the argument put forward by the imperial authorities in 1863 as grounds for prohibiting Ukrainian-language publications. He then tried to explain the Russian Empire's prosecution of leaders of the Ukrainian movement, and especially its prohibitions on Ukrainian-language publications, by blaming the Poles once again. "These decisions were taken against the backdrop of dramatic events in Poland and the desire of the leaders of the Polish national movement to exploit the 'Ukrainian issue' to their own advantage," wrote Putin.³³

Putin's contribution to his predecessors' historical schemas was the notion of Ukraine as an anti-Russia or, as he described it, "a barrier between Europe and Russia, a springboard against Russia." It was allegedly a concoction of evil Western forces. "Inevitably, there came a time when the concept of Ukraine is not Russia' was no longer an option," wrote Putin. "There was a need for an 'anti-Russia' concept, which we will never accept. The owners of this project took as a basis the old groundwork of the Polish-Austrian ideologists to create an 'anti-Moscow Russia.'" Putin pledged action: "we will never allow our historical territories and people close to us living there to be used against Russia."

Putin was clearly upset with the Ukrainian democracy that kept generating political leaders dedicated to the idea of independence of Ukraine. He complained that "presidents, members of parliament,

³³ Putin, "On the Historical Unity of the Russians and Ukrainians."

and ministers would change, but the attitude of separation from and enmity toward Russia would remain." That was allegedly the result of the political system established by the "Western authors of the anti-Russia project." Without naming the new Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky, Putin accused him of lying to his electorate. "Reaching peace was the main election slogan of the incumbent president," wrote Putin. "He came to power with this. The promises turned out to be lies. Nothing has changed. And in some ways the situation in Ukraine and around Donbas has even degenerated."³⁴

In late 2021, as rumors about Putin's failing health started to circulate with new intensity in Russia and abroad, observers began to notice changes in his appearance, including his puffy face—possibly an effect of medication. And it was impossible to ignore Putin's desire to protect himself from COVID-19 or other infections by seating foreign dignitaries who came to see him at the opposite end of a ridiculously long table. This led Russian political commentators to concern themselves with the question of Putin's legacy, in which the Crimea and Ukraine featured prominently. The political consultant and expert on Ukraine Sergei Markov, who was close to the Kremlin, suggested that "Putin cannot step down leaving Ukraine occupied, given that Russians there are being turned into anti-Russians by means of terror." He then explained his

³⁴ Putin, "On the Historical Unity of the Russians and Ukrainians," 1.

thought in terms of the Pan-Russian project: "Because Ukraine is in fact part of Rus'."³⁵

But there were also those in the Russian nationalist camp who did not believe that the war between the Russians and Ukrainians was a good idea. The head of the All-Russian Officer Assembly, Colonel General Leonid Ivashov, published an open letter to Putin opposing the war on the grounds of Russian national interest and Slavic unity. "The use of military force against Ukraine will, in the first place, put into question the existence of Russia itself as a state," wrote Ivashov. "Secondly, it will make Russians and Ukrainians mortal enemies forever. Thirdly, thousands (tens of thousands) of healthy young men will perish on both sides, and that will unquestionably affect the future demographic situation in our countries, which are dying out."³⁶

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Putin made the formal decision to go to war at the February 21 meeting of the Russian Security Council, which approved the de facto denunciation of the

³⁵ Sergei Markov, "Putin ne mozhet uiti ot vlasti, ostaviv Ukrainu okkupirovannoi," *Sovet po vneshnei i oboronnoi politike*, December 27, 2021, <http://svop.ru/main/40348/>; "Putin's worsening health set to be a determining factor in Russia's policy over the next four years," Robert Lansing Institute, September 29, 2021, <https://lansinginstitute.org/2021/09/29/putins-worsening-health-set-to-be-a-determining-factor-in-russias-policy-over-the-next-four-years/>.

³⁶ Edmonds, "Start with the Political: Explaining Russia's Bungled Invasion of Ukraine"; "Otkrytoe pis'mo generala Ivashova – Putinu," <https://proza.ru/2022/02/07/189>.

Minsk Agreements and supported the proposal to recognize the "independence" of the two puppet statelets in the Ukrainian Donbas. As Putin suggested in front of cameras, he had not discussed his decision to denounce the agreements and recognize the independence of the Donbas "republics" with the members of the council beforehand. What he wanted was to hear their opinion. Heavily edited television footage of the meeting left little doubt that they had no opinions of their own. They did their best to provide arguments in favor of a decision that had already been made, and the head of foreign intelligence, Sergei Naryshkin, even incurred reprimands from Putin, first for vacillating about recognition of the two "people's republics" and then for overshooting the target by proposing to annex them to Russia.³⁷

The footage strongly suggested that the decision to go to war was Putin's own. The rest were there merely to voice support. Among those present was the Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov, whom Putin, according to the investigative journalist Christo Grozev, allegedly never consulted on the issue of going to war with Ukraine. According to the anecdote shared by the Western Russia watchers, when asked who Putin's advisers were, Lavrov

³⁷ "Bol'shoe zasedanie Soveta bezopasnosti Rossii. Priamaia transliatsiia," February 21, 2022, <https://www.1tv.ru/shows/vystupleniya-prezidenta-rossii/vneocherednoe-zasedanie-soveta-bezopasnosti-rossii/bolshoe-zasedanie-soveta-bezopasnosti-rossii-pryamaya-translyaciya>.

allegedly answered: Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, and Alexander II—Russian emperors of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, whose busts decorated Putin's quarters in the Kremlin.³⁸

After Russian television showed the footage of the Security Council meeting, it broadcast a lengthy speech by Putin explaining his decision to denounce the Minsk Agreements of 2015. The speech indicated that Putin was not about to limit himself to the Donbas, whether the statelets were to be declared formally independent or annexed outright, as Naryshkin had suggested. Putin was after Ukraine as a whole. He returned to the main themes of his historical essays of July 2021 in an attempt to delegitimize the existence of Ukraine as both state and nation.

"Modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russia or, to be more precise, by Bolshevik, Communist Russia," declared the Russian president. "This process started practically right after the 1917 revolution, and Lenin and his associates did it in a way that was extremely harsh on Russia—by separating, severing what is historically Russian land." That theme was deeply rooted in the writings of Russian White Guard émigrés, such as General Anton Denikin and was a prominent thread in Solzhenitsyn's thinking and writing. Putin decided to add weight to his argument

³⁸ Aleksandr Iuzovskii, "Khristo Grozev: dazhe Lavrov byl shokirovan nachalom voiny v Ukraine," MINEWSS, May 6, 2022, <https://mignews.com/news/politic/hristo-grozev-dazhe-lavrov-by-l-shokirovan-nachalom-vojn-y-v-ukraine.html>.

by pointing out that he had studied the topic on the basis of archival documents.³⁹

In Ukrainian social media, the reaction to Putin's statement was ridiculed. Within a few hours, Facebook was flooded with images of Vladimir Lenin surprised to learn that he had created Ukraine. Another montage inserted Lenin into the monument to the legendary founders of Kyiv, the brothers Kyi, Shchek, and Khoryv, and their sister, Lybid. Lenin replaced Lybid at the prow of the boat carrying the founders of the Ukrainian capital. The monument expresses popular Ukrainian belief that their country's roots go back to the Middle Ages. However, Putin had scant interest in the Ukrainian reaction – his decision had already been made.⁴⁰

On February 21, the day of the Security Council meeting, Putin recorded another address, this one to be released on the morning of the Russian attack. In it, he justified the coming aggression as a response to what he called "genocide" committed by "the forces that staged the coup in Ukraine in 2014 against the millions of inhabitants of the Donbas." He argued that the actions of the Kyiv authorities left Russia no choice but to act. "In these circumstances," declared Putin, "we have to take bold and immediate action. The people's republics

³⁹ Address by the President of the Russian Federation. February 21, 2022. 22:35. The Kremlin, Moscow. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

⁴⁰ Serhii Plokhyy, "Casus Belli: Did Lenin Create Modern Ukraine?" Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, February 27, 2022, <https://huri.harvard.edu/news/serhii-plokhii-casus-belli-did-lenin-create-modern-ukraine>.

of the Donbas have asked Russia for help." The reference was to a request made by the leaders of the puppet states in the Russian-occupied part of the Donbas, recently recognized by Moscow as independent. Their request gave Putin a formal *casus belli*, set the minimum goal of Russian aggression—the takeover of the entire Donbas—and misled the Ukrainian side into thinking that the war might be limited to the Donbas alone.

Other parts of the address suggested that the Donbas was a mere pretext. Although Putin called his aggression a "special military operation," he characterized it as a global struggle, in the tradition of Stalin's Great Patriotic War, against the hostile West and the Ukrainian fascism that it supported. "Focused on their own goals, the leading NATO countries are supporting the far-right nationalists and neo-Nazis in Ukraine, those who will never forgive the people of the Crimea and Sevastopol for freely making a choice to reunite with Russia," claimed Putin. "They will undoubtedly try to bring war to the Crimea just as they have done in the Donbas, to kill innocent people just as members of the punitive units of Ukrainian nationalists and Hitler's accomplices did during the Great Patriotic War. They have also openly laid claim to several other Russian regions."⁴¹

Putin formulated the goal of his "special military operation" as follows: "demilitarize and denazify Ukraine, as well as bring to trial those who perpetrated numerous bloody crimes against civilians, including

⁴¹ "Address by the President of the Russian Federation," President of Russia, February 24, 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>.

against citizens of the Russian Federation." The meaning of demilitarization was quite clear: Ukraine was to be left defenseless, at the mercy of Moscow. But what did "denazification" mean? Putin's propaganda had spent years portraying some of the Ukrainian volunteer military formations of 2014 as Nazi. But more was at stake than those battalions. A few days earlier, the United States had warned the United Nations that Russian intelligence services were compiling lists of people "to be killed or sent to camps." They included "Russian and Belarusian dissidents in exile in Ukraine, journalists, and anti-corruption activists, as well as vulnerable populations such as religious and ethnic minorities and LGBTQI+ persons." There was also little doubt that anyone resisting the invasion would be killed or put on trial. Putin called on the Ukrainian military "immediately to lay down arms and go home."⁴²

Russian spies, especially the special directorate of the Federal Security Service (Russian acronym FSB), which was charged with clandestine operations in Ukraine, were feeding Putin descriptions of the attitude of the Ukrainian population toward its own government and Russia that conformed to his historical fantasies. The FSB reported that Ukrainians would greet their Russian liberators. A vast network of agents was

⁴² Dan Sabbagh, "Russia is creating lists of Ukrainians 'to be killed or sent to camps,' US claims," *Guardian*, February 21, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/21/us-claims-russia-creating-lists-of-ukrainians-to-be-killed-or-sent-to-camps-report>.

recruited in Ukraine not only to spy on the Ukrainian government, military, and people but also to organize mass demonstrations in support of liberating Russian troops and take over key government installations as they approached, replicating the takeover of the Ukrainian Crimea and Donbas in the spring of 2014.⁴³

* * *

Putin expected Ukrainians to welcome with flowers the Russian forces sent to liberate them from Nazism and nationalism. Instead, they met the Russians with Javelins, Stingers, and Ukraine's own Skif (Scythian) or Stuhna anti-tank guided missiles. Faced with stiff resistance, the "liberation army" was frightened, confused, and disoriented. If Putin was the victim of his own delusions, historical and otherwise, his troops became victims of his propaganda efforts.

By claiming that Russians and Ukrainians were one and the same people, Putin left his soldiers unprepared for a war in which the entire population would oppose the invading army and support its own armed forces. In Ukraine, the Russian invasion destroyed the last vestiges of the belief that Ukrainians and Russians were fraternal peoples, to say nothing about their being one and the same people. That was true even of those features of common heritage to which Putin had

⁴³ Jeffrey Edmonds, "Start with the Political: Explaining Russia's Bungled Invasion of Ukraine," *War on the Rocks*, April 28, 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/04/start-with-the-political-explaining-russias-bungled-invasion-of-ukraine/>.

sought to appeal in his articles and speeches, including historical roots, religious tradition, and joint resistance to the Nazi occupation.

In the city of Pereiaslav in the Kyiv region, where Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky had sworn allegiance to the Russian tsar in 1654, the city authorities removed the monument to the "reunification of Russia and Ukraine," the centerpiece of propaganda about Russo-Ukrainian unity. The Kyiv monument to the "Motherland" defending the city against Nazi aggression, a sword raised in one hand and a shield in the other, built by the Soviets in the 1980s and known as a symbol of Kyiv, remained intact but changed its meaning. It was now considered a symbol of resistance to the Russian invasion. There was also a new attitude toward the lyrics of one of the most popular Soviet songs, which began with lines known to every schoolchild in the USSR: "On June the twenty-second / Precisely at four in the morning / Kyiv was bombed / And we were told that the war had begun." The lines referred to the German bombardment of Kyiv in June 1941, but now the invaders bombing the city were Russians.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Iurii Bratiuk, "U Pereiaslavi demontuvaly pam'iatnyk 'vozz'iednanniu' z Rosiieiu," *Zaxid.net*, July 7, 2022, https://zaxid.net/u_pereyaslavi_demontuvali_pamyatnik_vozzyednannya_z_rosiyeyu_n1545835; Serhii Plokhyy, "Vladimir Putin's war is banishing for good the outdated myth that Ukrainians and Russians are the same," *Telegraph*, March 3, 2022, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/authors/s/sa-se/serhii-plokhyy/>.

It was a sad irony that Russian bombardment was killing Russian speakers and destroying landmarks and locations claimed by Russian imperial and then Soviet culture. Andrei Krasniashchikh, a professor at Kharkiv University and an author who had been writing and publishing in Russian, decried the demolition of Kharkiv by Russian bombardment as destruction of pre-Soviet and Soviet Russian culture in Ukraine by those who had allegedly come to protect it.⁴⁵

"I don't know what has become of the homes of Shulzhenko, Bunin, and Khlebnikov," continued Krasniashchikh, listing the names of other famous residents of Kharkiv, the Soviet singer Klavdiia Shulzhenko and the Russian writers Ivan Bunin and Velimir Khlebnikov. "His house," wrote Krasniashchikh about Khlebnikov's old place, "is next to the oblast police department, which was bombed on March 2, and a bomb fell on the art museum with works by Aivazovsky, Repin, and Levitan." All three painters mentioned by Krasniashchikh were considered the pride of Russian culture.

"The home of [Isaak] Dunaevsky," he continued, referring to the famous Soviet composer and conductor, "on Yaroslav the Wise Street, there was bombing there as well." They are bombing everywhere. 2,055 buildings.

⁴⁵ Margaret Besheer, "Ukraine's Cultural Heritage Under Attack, Official Says," *Voice of America*, July 15, 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/ukraine-s-cultural-heritage-under-attack-official-says/6661269.html>; Andrei Krasniashchikh, "Kak gorit pod bombami russskaia kul'tura," *Ukrayins'ka pravda*, May 3, 2022, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/columns/2022/05/3/7343653/>.

The fine university campus has shattered windows. Our department is on the sixth floor opposite." Krasniashchikh then reported on the news from Bucha: "In the rucksack of a Russian soldier killed in Ukraine they found a book by Bulgakov, a little gold cross, a child's earrings with ladybird ornaments, and gold teeth." He titled his article "How Russian Culture Is Burning under Bombardment."⁴⁶

In the first week of May a Russian missile destroyed the museum of Hryhorii Skovoroda, a famous eighteenth-century philosopher who has been considered the founder not only of Ukrainian but also of Russian religious philosophy—a major influence on Vladimir Soloviev and Nikolai Berdiaev. The museum was located fifty kilometers northeast of Kharkiv in the village of Ivanivka, renamed Skovorodynivka after the philosopher, who had died there. The Ukrainian minister of culture, Oleksandr Tkachenko, believed that the destruction of the museum had been deliberate. "Skovorodynivka is distant from other villages and infrastructure; in fact, there are only fields in the vicinity," said the minister. "I have no doubt that they were aiming at Skovoroda in particular. I think that he himself once said, 'Don't fraternize with those hiding evil intentions.'"⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Krasniashchikh, "Kak gorit pod bombami russkaia kul'tura."

⁴⁷ "Udar Rosii po muzeiu Skovorody ie splanovanoi aktsiieiu –Tkachenko," *Ukrinform*, May 7, 2022, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-culture/3477358-udar-rosii-po-muzeu-skovorodi-e-splanovanou-akcieu-tkacenko.html>.

Also under attack were monuments of Kyiv's princely era—a heritage that Putin and Russian nationalists of all stripes considered their own. That was the case in the city of Chernihiv, one of the princely capitals of Kyivan Rus' claimed by Russian writers, thinkers, and politicians of every persuasion as the cradle of their civilization. First mentioned in the Kyivan Chronicle under the year 907, Chernihiv was the site of a number of architectural monuments of the medieval era, including the eleventh-century Holy Savior Cathedral and the Dormition Cathedral, the Yelets Monastery and the Church of St. Elijah, all dating from the twelfth century. There were also buildings of the early modern era, built in what has been known in Ukraine as the Cossack baroque style.⁴⁸

On March 6, the bombardment was particularly intense. Forty-seven people were killed, and bombs hit the building of the literary and art museums. The twelfth-century Yelets Monastery was damaged on the following day. The bombardment of the

⁴⁸ Olenka Pevny, "Recreating a Monumental Past: Self-Identity and Ukraine's Medieval Monuments," J. B. Rudnyckyj Memorial Lecture, University of Manitoba, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337623350_Olenka_Pevny_RECREATING_A_MONUMENTAL_PAST_SELF-IDENTITY_AND_UKRAINE'S_MEDIEVAL_MONUMENTS; "Ukrainian cultural heritage is also under Russian bombing — Olenka Z Pevny," *Breaking Latest News*, March 19, 2022; "Building of Chernihiv Collegium Cossack Baroque Architectural Style Historical Heritage of Ukraine," YouTube, November 17, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kewDM45N8t4>.

surrounded city continued through the rest of March, claiming hundreds of additional civilian victims and destroying more of the city's museums, libraries, and university buildings. The siege came to an end on March 31, when the Ukrainian army recaptured the strategic highway connecting Kyiv and Chernihiv. The city, partly ruined, with half its population turned into refugees, began to return to some semblance of normality and count its losses—human, physical, and emotional.⁴⁹

Russian bombs cracked open not only church buildings but also the edifice of the Moscow Patriarchate. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the jurisdiction of Moscow rebelled against Patriarch Kirill, who had issued a statement at the beginning of the war calling on “all parties to the conflict to do everything possible to avoid civilian casualties” and invoked the tenth-century baptism of Kyivan Rus', a state from which both Ukrainians and Russians trace their origins, as part of a tradition that should help to overcome “the divisions and contradictions that have arisen and have led to the current conflict.”⁵⁰

Kirill's formal subordinate and ally in Ukraine, Metropolitan Onuphry, the head of the Ukrainian

⁴⁹ David Axe, “Ukraine's Best Tank Brigade Has Won the Battle For Chernihiv,” *Forbes*, March 31, 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidaxe/2022/03/31/ukraines-best-tank-brigade-has-won-the-battle-for-chernihiv/?sh=554db4c7db9a>.

⁵⁰ Plokhyy, “Vladimir Putin's war is banishing for good the outdated myth that Ukrainians and Russians are the same.”

Orthodox Church subject to the Moscow Patriarchate, had little tolerance for his superior's refusal to name and condemn the aggressor. "Russia has launched military actions against Ukraine, and at this fateful time, I urge you not to panic, to be courageous, and to show love for your homeland and for one another," stated the metropolitan, who had been considered a staunch supporter of Ukraine's ties with Moscow, in an address to his flock. He then appealed to the Russian president, all but accusing him of the "sin of Cain" by offering a very different interpretation of the common baptism of Rus' in 988 by Prince Volodymyr of Kyiv, to which Patriarch Kirill had alluded.

"Defending the sovereignty and integrity of Ukraine," continued Onuphry, "we appeal to the President of Russia and ask him immediately to stop the fratricidal war. The Ukrainian and Russian peoples came out of the Dnieper baptismal font, and the war between these peoples is a repetition of the sin of Cain, who killed his own brother out of envy. Such a war has no justification either from God or from people." Metropolitan Onuphry's statement was one of many similar pronouncements, public and private, issued in Kyiv and other cities of Ukraine after the Russian attack. In June Bishop Lonhyn, who was close to Onuphry, challenged Kirill by "thanking" him during a church service for the bloodshed that he had *endorsed*. "Your Holiness, we thank you for your blessing. For the fact that people are dying, and blood is being shed. For

having bombed our monasteries, our churches. For continuing to kill our monks, our priests. We thank you, Your Holiness, for your great blessing of bloodshed."⁵¹

The council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate, convened in late May 2022, registered its "disagreement" with Patriarch Kirill and took a step toward independence from Moscow. It allowed its eparchies not to pray for the patriarch, and its churches were now permitted to use consecrated oil supplied by Kyiv rather than Moscow. This move was considered a major step toward full autocephaly according to Orthodox practice. In response, the Moscow Patriarchate reacted when one of its eparchies in the "Donetsk People's Republic" refused to pray for Metropolitan Onuphry. Despite the ongoing war, Kyiv still maintained formal control over parts of its former eparchies on the territory of the Donetsk and Luhansk "republics." However, with those statelets now recognized by Moscow as independent, and Kyivan bishops rebelling against Patriarch Kirill's endorsement of the war, all bets were off. The parishes of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine were also splitting, while the Ukrainian government moved to evict the Moscow Patriarchate

⁵¹ Lena Rudenko, "Mitropolit UPTs MP 'poblagodaril' patriarkha Kirilla za prolituii v Ukraine krov': vy otvetite pered Bogom," *Apostrof*, June 6, 2022, <https://apostrophe.ua/news/society/2022-06-06/mitropolit-upts-mp-poblagodaril-patriarha-kirilla-za-prolituyi-v-ukraine-krov-vyi-otvetite-pered-bogom/271059>.

from the premises of Ukraine's oldest and most revered Kyiv Caves monastery.⁵²

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In June 2022, Russia celebrated the 350th anniversary of Peter I, the first Russian tsar also to be called an emperor. The anniversary was marked with academic conferences, meetings, and public events, not only in Moscow and St. Petersburg but also in regional centers. In Moscow, on the premises of the VDNKh—the Russian Exhibition of Achievements of the National Economy—the authorities organized a multimedia exhibition dedicated to Peter and his legacy. Titled “Peter I. The Birth of the Empire,” the exhibition covered his role in state-building, diplomacy, the creation of a “civic society,” as well as reforms in education and the development of culture.⁵³

⁵² “Postanova Soboru Ukrayins'koyi Pravoslavnoyi Tserkvy vid 27 travnia 2022 roku,” Ukrayins'ka Pravoslavna Tserkva, <https://news.church.ua/2022/05/27/postanova-soboru-ukrajinskoji-pravoslavnoji-cerkvi-vid-27-travnja-2022-roku/>; “Eparhiiia UPTs MP v okupirovannykh Roven'kakh reshila ne upominat' Onufriia kak predstoiatelia tserkvi,” *Gordonua.com*, May 31, 2022, <https://gordonua.com/news/society/eparhiya-upc-mp-v-okkupirovannykh-rovenkah-reshila-ne-upominat-onufriya-kak-predstoyatelya-cerkvi-1611113.html>.

⁵³ Dmitrii Akimov, “Rossiia otmechaet 350 let so dnia rozhdenniia Petra Velikogo,” *Smotrim*, June 9, 2022, <https://smotrim.ru/article/2789489>; “Putin posetil vystavku o Petre I na VDNKh,” *Vesti.ru*, June 9, 2022, <https://www.vesti.ru/article/2790684>.

On June 9, Peter's official birthday, Vladimir Putin arrived at the VDNKh to open the exhibition in person. He also met with young Russian entrepreneurs, engineers, and scientists. Peter did a great deal for the development of Russian entrepreneurship and science, founding the Russian Academy of Sciences, and a meeting of that kind in conjunction with the exhibition seemed appropriate. However, when Putin addressed the young entrepreneurs and scholars, his emphasis was not so much on Peter's contribution to Russian science and technology—Putin mentioned in passing his "borrowing" of Western knowledge when the tsar traveled to Europe—but rather on Peter's wars and territorial acquisitions, a subject much closer to Putin's heart at that moment.

"Peter the Great waged the Great Northern War for 21 years," said Putin, apparently suggesting that his own "special military operation," though dragging on much longer than expected, was still a reasonable undertaking. He then proceeded to the question of Peter's territorial acquisitions. "On the face of it, he was at war with Sweden, taking something away from it," suggested Putin. But he then proposed a very different interpretation of Peter's conquests: "He was not taking anything away; he was returning." Putin then addressed the issue of the legitimacy of such actions. "When he founded the new capital, none of the European countries recognized this territory as part of Russia," stated Putin. "Everyone recognized it as part of Sweden."

In Putin's mind, the conquest was justified because "from time immemorial, the Slavs had lived there along

with the Finno-Ugric peoples, and this territory was under Russia's control." That was a stretch at best when it came to describing the population, and the claims of the medieval Novgorodian Republic to that territory belonged to the distant past by the time Peter's forces moved into the area. But Putin continued in the same vein: "He was returning and reinforcing; that is what he was doing." He then added, with a smirk: "Clearly, it fell to our lot to return and reinforce as well." Putin's remarks stood in clear contrast to his "declaration of war" speech of February 24, when he proclaimed that Russia did not "plan to occupy Ukrainian territory."⁵⁴

The Ukrainian response to Putin's remarks was swift. Mykhailo Podoliak, a senior adviser to President Zelensky, saw the Russian president's comments as evidence that imperialism was the true motive behind Russia's aggression against Ukraine. "Putin's confession of land seizures and comparing himself with Peter the Great proved there was no 'conflict,' only the country's bloody seizure under contrived pretexts of people's genocide," tweeted Podoliak. Reports from independent Russian journalists supported Podoliak's interpretation. A few days earlier,

⁵⁴ "Meeting with young entrepreneurs, engineers and scientists," President of Russia, June 9, 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/68606>; "Putin compares himself to Peter the Great in Russian territorial push," YouTube, June 9, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2sfJjl7_Zk; "Address by the President of the Russian Federation," President of Russia, February 24, 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>.

Meduza, a website run by oppositional journalists who had left Russia and sought refuge in Latvia, reported that "the Kremlin was planning to combine all the lands into a new federal district that could be annexed by Russia as soon as this autumn."⁵⁵

"This is a different war from the one Putin began on 24 February 2022," wrote Lawrence Freedman, emeritus professor of war studies at King's College, London, soon after Putin made his remarks about Peter's legacy. "He has now presented himself as a reincarnation of Peter the Great and admitted that this is a war of conquest rather than liberation. It is territory that he is after now, having largely given up on the people of the Donbas, whose supposed vulnerability to a Ukrainian attack provided the pretext for the war. The separatist armies from Donetsk and Luhansk have been used as cannon-fodder, sent into battle unprepared and ill-equipped, to spare regular units."⁵⁶

In September 2022, military commissions drafted Russian men into the army and sent them to the front lines of Ukraine with no training whatsoever. During this time, Putin's sham referenda were conducted in four partly occupied oblasts of Ukraine, where armed

⁵⁵ Andrew Roth, "Putin compares himself to Peter the Great in quest to take back Russian lands," *Guardian*, June 10, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/10/putin-compares-himself-to-peter-the-great-in-quest-to-take-back-russian-lands>.

⁵⁶ Lawrence Freedman, "Spirits of the Past. The Role of History in the Russo-Ukraine War," *Comment is Freed*, June 12, 2022, https://samf.substack.com/p/spirits-of-the-past?s=w&utm_medium=web.

soldiers visited the apartments of Ukrainian citizens and forced them to vote in favor of Russian annexation of their regions. On September 30, 2022, Putin cited the "will of millions" as he signed decrees formally annexing four oblasts of Ukraine, some of them under Ukrainian control, including the city of Zaporizhia with a population of approximately 750,000. Ironically, as Putin delivered his speech, Ukrainian forces were concluding the encirclement of approximately 5,500 Russian troops near the city of Lyman in the newly "annexed" Donetsk oblast of Ukraine. It would fall into the hands of the Ukrainians the next day, becoming the first territory formally annexed by Russia to be liberated from its armed forces.⁵⁷

In his "annexation" speech, Putin quoted his favorite Russian émigré philosopher, Ivan Ilyin, and reiterated many themes from his earlier pronouncements.

⁵⁷ Andrew E. Kramer, "Russia-Ukraine War: Armed Russian Soldiers Oversee Referendum Voting," *New York Times*, September 24, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/09/24/world/russia-ukraine-putin-news>; Anthony Blinken, Secretary of State, "Russia's Sham Referenda in Ukraine," Press Statement, U.S. Department of State, September 29, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/russias-sham-referenda-in-ukraine/>; Joshua Berlinger, Anna Chernova and Tim Lister, "Putin announces annexation of Ukrainian regions in defiance of international law," *CNN*, September 30, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/09/30/europe/putin-russia-ukraine-annexation-intl>; Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "Russia's withdrawal from Lyman comes a day after Putin said he was annexing the region," *The New York Times*, October 1, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/10/01/world/russia-ukraine-war-news#ukraine-moves-to-encircle-lyman-a-strategic-eastern-rail-hub>.

He recalled the imperial history of New Russia – the term he now used to denote the Kherson and Zaporizhia oblasts. Putin decried the destruction of that “great country,” the USSR, and emphasized the allegedly free choice of “millions of people who, by their culture, religion, traditions, and language, consider themselves part of Russia.” However, the overriding subject of the address was Putin’s animosity towards “the West,” which he mentioned thirty-three times.

The West, as Putin insisted, was to blame for “the plunder of India and Africa” and “the wars of England and France against China.” He accused the West of causing the economic hardships in the post-Soviet era and labeled its leaders as neocolonialists – a peculiar accusation coming from the leader of a former empire now engaged in a colonial war against its former subject. Putin further claimed that the West was constantly seeking opportunities to harm Russia, weaken and disintegrate it – an aspiration they supposedly always harbored – to divide the state and incite conflict among its peoples, ultimately condemning them to poverty and demise. Putin’s attacks on the West, its historical colonial policies, and alleged neocolonialism in the present were, at best, pitiful. The leader who was waging an imperial war and justifying it through imperial rhetoric was attempting to portray himself as the champion of anti-imperialism.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ “Signing of treaties on accession of Donetsk and Lugansk people’s republics and Zaporozhye and Kherson regions to Russia,” President of Russia, September 30, 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69465>.

The formal annexation by Russia, in addition to the Crimea, of four regions in eastern and southern Ukraine left little doubt that it was on the path of territorial aggrandizement, but it also suggested that the Kremlin had scaled down its war aims. The capture of Kyiv and control of the rest of Ukraine by a puppet government, an apparent goal in February, was unachievable and had to be abandoned. The war initially meant to gain complete control of Ukraine was redesigned to extend Russia's borders. Once again, as in the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the "Greater Russia" project filled the gap between Russia's aspirations and its capacity to satisfy Putin's imperial ambitions.

There are clear indications that the Ukrainian nation will emerge from this war more united and certain of its identity than at any other point in its modern history. Moreover, Ukraine's successful resistance to Russian aggression is destined to promote Russia's own nation-building project. Russia and its elites now have little choice but to reimagine their country's identity by parting ways not only with the imperialism of the tsarist past but also with the anachronistic model of a Russian nation consisting of Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians.

Науково-популярне видання

Serhii PLOKHU

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КРАХ ЗАГАЛЬНОРОСІЙСЬКОЇ УТОПІЇ**

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Для студентства та широкого кола читачів.

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