

WESTERN POLITICAL THOUGHT ON THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CRISIS AND RUSSIAN AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE

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Western scholars and experts write about the Ukraine-Russia crisis Russia's military aggression against Ukraine from five different angles. These can be divided into Russia apologists, geopolitics, Russian empire building, nature of Vladimir Putin's regime and national identity. Of these five, the first should be prioritised in counter-information campaigns. The second, third and fourth are important tools of analysis and Ukraine can cooperate with scholars and experts in these fields. Surprisingly, the smallest attention has been upon national identity which in my view is the best explanation of the crisis and war. The second, third and fourth explanations can be viewed as an outgrowth of national identity. The war would end if Putin and other Russian leaders decided they henceforth accepted Ukrainians were not a branch of the "Russian people" (that is, a separate nation) and Ukraine was a sovereign country with the right to decide its own geopolitical destiny.

Keywords: Western political thought, Ukraine, Russia, conflict, war, national identity.

Western writing about the Ukraine-Russia crisis and Russia's military aggression against Ukraine can be divided into five different groups. These are Putin's apologists, authors who explain Russian actions by the reasons of geopolitics, scholars who study Russian empire building case, political scientists who are focused on the nature of Vladimir Putin's regime and a group of academicians who use tools of the national identity concepts. Only the second, third and fourth groups can be considered as important contributors to analysis of the current crisis and Ukraine can cooperate with such scholars and experts. The national identity issue is paid the least attention, although the second, third and fourth explanations of the Russian policy toward Ukraine can be viewed as an offset of national identity.

Putin Apologists

Putin apologists exist on the extreme left and right of Western politics with on the whole the former tending to be prominent in Europe and the latter in the US. A prominent exception to this rule is well-known

US academic Stephen F. Cohen who is an outspoken Putin apologist. His equivalents in the UK would be Richard Sakwa and in Germany Alexander Rahr. Canada is not immune to this trend as its identity has been long built on anti-Americanism. Based at Carlton University in Ottawa, Piotr Dutkiewicz would be Canada's equivalent of Cohen and Sakwa but there are many more Putin apologists at the University of Ottawa [1].

Left-wing critics of American foreign policy view Putin as their ally against US hegemony. An example of such a view is the leader of the British Labour Party Jeremy Corbyn who has a record of supporting nuclear disarmament, excusing Russian aggression, anti-Americanism and hostility to NATO.

The alliance of left-wing critics of the US and realists who tend to be US nationalists is truly the most bizarre aspect of the Russia-Ukraine crisis. They both blame the West (EU, NATO, democracy promotion) for allegedly provoking Russia into reacting because of the EU's enlargement into Moscow's sphere of influence. Both groups apologise for Putin by claiming he had no choice but to launch his interventions in response to irresponsible Western policies.

Left-wing critics and realists see a solution to the crisis through the “Finlandisation” of Ukraine which they naively believe Russia would accept. Because they fail to take into account the national identity causes of the crisis they ignore Putin’s strategic goal of forcing Ukrainians to accept Russia as heir suzerain: Putin’s model for Ukraine is not Finland or Austria in the Cold War but Belarus under Alyaksandr Lukashenka. Left-wing critics and realists naively (or consciously) claim that Russia would not be opposed to a democratic Ukraine built on European values when in fact a key driving force of Putin’s policies since the Rose and Orange Revolutions has been to prevent contagion by “colour revolutions” into Russia. Putin, like many Eurasian leaders such as Viktor Yanukovych understand democratic revolutions not as genuine popular uprisings but as Western conspiracies that are anti-Russian by their very nature.

There are three major pitfalls to the arguments made by left-wing critics and realists.

The first is they view the crisis through Russian eyes making their analysis weak and faulty. Left wing critics (Sakwa, Cohen) and realists (John Mearsheimer, Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer) do not treat Ukraine as a serious international actor. Many critical articles have been published on realism and the crisis, some by realists who say it is in the strategic interests of the West to support Ukraine. Realists have supported [2] and opposed the US sending military equipment to Ukraine [3].

The second is that they ignore domestic drivers of the conflict in Ukraine and Russia and in turn exaggerate the influence of external actors. Putin claimed he intervened in the Crimea because Ukraine was about to join NATO and because Russians and Russian speakers were being oppressed. Both are factually and analytically untrue. Ukraine had no offer of NATO membership and a report issued after a Council of Europe visit to the Crimea in March 2014 found no evidence of suppression of infringement of the rights of Russians and Russian speakers – but they did find repression of Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians.

A third point is the proposal for the “Ukrainian problem” to be dealt with through a grand bargain. This was always an impossible dream and their support for such a policy reflected the willingness of left-wing critics and realists to place their ideology ahead of their analytical skills. There have been three failed US–Russia resets under Presidents George W. Bush (2001–2002), Barack Obama (2009–2010) and Donald Trump (2016–2017) for the same reasons. No re-set can work if one side

(in this case Russia) believes it is an innocent and aggrieved party and argues that only the US should reset. Putin has been angry with the West for a long time and believes the West is the aggressor party, not Russia [4].

When Trump was elected, Putin and his kleptocratic were wrong as a Putin-Trump reset and grand bargain were highly unlikely [5]. Instead, Putin’s hacking of the US elections has produced the opposite effect and created the greatest anti-Russian consensus among Republicans and Democrats and both houses of the US Congress for the last four decades that was evident in new sanctions against Russia.

Russian policies backfiring are nothing new: let us recall President Leonid Kuchma who was elected in 1994 on a moderate pro-Russian platform being turned away from Russia and towards NATO by President Boris Yeltsin’s refusal to travel to Kyiv to sign the inter-state treaty. V. Yanukovych was Ukraine’s most pro-Russian president who fulfilled all of the demands made by President Dmitri Medvedev in his August 2009 open letter to President Viktor Yushchenko. Nevertheless, Russia charged Ukraine under Yanukovych the highest gas price in Europe. This experience of dealing with Putin tells us that “Finlandisation” would be impossible as Russia would continue to make demands against Ukraine.

Geopolitics, Russian Imperialism and Putin’s Regime

Since 2014, the greatest number of articles that have been published on the crisis and war have been from the vantage point of geopolitical rivalry between Russia and the EU and US. Much of the Western discussion centres upon the mechanics and whether it was strategic feasible for the EU to enlarge into the former USSR (outside the three Baltic states). In Russian eyes the EU is not a serious foreign policy actor and in typical Soviet conspiratorial fashion Moscow sees the US pulling its strings behind the scenes.

The problem with Western writing on geopolitics is that it is framed as a geopolitical clash between great powers where Ukraine is not an active subject and “higher bodies” are deciding its fate. It is as though Ukraine is the rope in a tug of war between the US (working through the EU) and Russia. And yet it is worthwhile pointing out that NATO and the EU do not offer Ukraine membership and the Eastern Partnership only provides integration without membership or as Nicu Popescu and Andrew Wilson called it “enlargement-light.”

The majority of the writing on Russian imperialism and Putin's desire to build a new empire is produced by think tanks; Putin apologists tend to be found in academia. Such an example of a prominent think tank is the Royal Institute of International Affairs and scholars associated with it such as James Sherr or the many think tanks in Washington DC who publish excellent analyses of Russian policies.

Some of this writing by think tanks such as Bellingcat and other think tanks analyse in great detail Russian military actions in Ukraine and against Ukraine, cyber warfare and the many aspects of hybrid warfare. But, there are four problems with the large number of publications on hybrid warfare.

The first factor is that much of the literature ignores the Soviet origins of hybrid war thereby implying that Putin invented it. In fact, hybrid war in various forms has existed throughout the 69-year history of the USSR. The USSR has always practised *mokrye dela* (*wet jobs*) or assassinations; only five years after it was founded a Soviet agent assassinated Ukrainian military and political leader Symon Petlura in Paris in 1926. Three further assassinations of Ukrainian nationalist leaders took place in Rotterdam (1938) and Munich (1957, 1959). In the 1970s and 1980s the USSR practised *dezynformatsiya* (*disinformation*) and was successful at spreading lies around the world's media in the pre-Internet era (the most famous example was that the CIA invented Aids). *Maskirovka* (*deceiving one's enemies*) was also not invented by Putin but has a long Soviet tradition that Putin has perfected. Modern technology, social media and the Internet has been weaponised by Putin's regime to give it greater abilities than the USSR ever possessed to conduct hybrid, cyber and information warfare.

The second factor is that Western analyses miss a key point of Russian information warfare. The USSR consisted of fifteen republics but anti-nationalist propaganda was only directed at Ukrainians and the three Baltic states. Belarusian and Russian nationalisms were not considered a threat to the USSR because the former was not popular (as seen by its miniscule dissident movement) and the latter because Russian democrats and nationalists were never separatists. In 1991, Russia did not declare independence from the USSR and Yeltsin's Russia took control of Soviet institutions.

The third factor is that the greatest volume of anti-nationalist propaganda in the USSR was directed at Ukrainians both internally by the Communist Party and KGB and externally through the Society for Cultural Relations with Ukrainians Abroad (known as

Tovarystvo Ukrainy) and its weekly newspapers *News from Ukraine/Visti z Ukrainy*. As seen in August and December 1991, when Ukraine declared independence and held a referendum that won overwhelming support, Ukrainian nationalism was the major threat to the USSR. Nevertheless, Western analysts have failed to make the connection as to why in the contemporary era the greatest volume of Russian fake news and information attacks are directed at Ukraine (not the EU, US or any other country). The *Disinformation Review* published by the European External Action Service of the EU has documented 264 and 278 examples of "pro-Kremlin disinformation" directed at the EU and US and 642 directed against Ukraine [6].

The fourth factor is that Western analyses draw on Russian sources and largely ignore Ukrainian analysis and published work. Mark Galeotti's very good study of hybrid warfare for example is typical in not citing Ukrainian sources. This is again surprising as Ukraine has the most experience of hybrid warfare. It would be worthwhile for Western analysts and Russianists of hybrid warfare to consult Ukrainian sources such as Volodymyr Horbulin [7], who was Kuchma's national security adviser, and the Razumkov Centre's National Security and Defence magazine [8].

Western experts and academics write about the crisis and Russian aggression through nature of Russia's regime and Russian views of its neighbours as not possessing sovereignty. As early as 2003, Russian and Western scholars defined Putin's regime as a *militocracy* because all of the key leadership positions were controlled by the *siloviki* (*security forces*). If the hardline August 1991 coup in the USSR had been successful the country would have become a *militocracy*. Russia's *militocracy* is also, according to the human rights think tank Freedom House, a "consolidated authoritarian regime" [9]. Meanwhile, US academic Alexander Motyl and Russian scholar Vladislav Inozemtsev describe Russia as fascist state [10].

Clearly, the fact that Putin's Russia is a *militocracy* and a consolidated authoritarian and fascist regime will have an important impact upon its foreign policy and especially its national identity towards Ukrainians. Although Western scholars have admirably dissected the many negatives of Putin's regime few of them have connected the dots that would lead them to understand why a regime led by *siloviki* who were indoctrinated with Soviet Russian nationalism and anti-Western xenophobia would also hold a visceral hatred for Ukrainian identity that seeks to exist outside the *Russkii Mir* (*Russian World*).

Ukrainian National Identity

Ukraine is a unique post-colonial country in having western and eastern neighbours who both did not accept the existence of a Ukrainian nation. Ukraine's problem with Polish nationalistic chauvinism was resolved by Joseph Stalin when he created Communist Poland within new borders. In both the Polish and Russian cases there was, and remains, a struggle over Ukraine's borders. In the West, the border problem was resolved by Stalin in World War II while in the East it is still being fought over.

There are very few Western experts and academics who write about national identity in Russian-Ukrainian relations and these include, Mykola Riachuk and this author. Many books and articles have been published in the West by Russianists who dominate University centres devoted to post-communist studies. Columbia University's Timothy Frye is wrong in writing that Russian studies is thriving in the US as it has failed to produce good analysis of the crisis and war [11]. There are two problems with Russian studies in the West.

The first is that few studies (an exception being the work on Russian identity by Vera Tolz) have focused on Russian chauvinism towards Ukrainians and Belarusians and their treatment of them as branches of the "Russian" nation. In the recently published book *The New Russian Nationalism* edited by Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud [12] there is nothing on the subject of Russian nationalism and chauvinism towards Ukrainians and Belarusians. The second is that many Western Russianists downplay the influence, apologise for or make excuses about Russian nationalism in contemporary Russia. Marlene Laruelle, for example, plays down the importance of Putin's favourite author – White émigré fascist and anti-Semite Ivan Il'in. Laruelle like many Russian studies academics in the West downplays the influence of Russian nationalism in Putin's Russia. At the same time, many Russianists (especially left-wing critics and realists) echo Russia's information war when they grossly exaggerate the influence of ethnic nationalism in Ukraine.

The major reason why Western Russianists continue to ignore the national identity question is because they continue to use sources from Russia and they often therefore see Ukraine through Russian eyes. There is no excuse today to not use Ukrainian sources which are all available on the Internet. There are more Russian-language than Ukrainian-language media publications (for example, Ukraine publishes 3 Russian-language

weekly politics magazines and 2 Ukrainian-language). Some publications appear in both Ukrainian and Russian. More problematical and biased is the fondness for quoting Putin and disinterest in citing President Petro Poroshenko which indirectly suggests that the views of Ukrainian politicians are unimportant. There can be no excuse to not use the Ukrainian presidential, parliament and government web sites as they all appear in Ukrainian, Russian and English.

The problem of Russian nationalistic chauvinism will not go away if Putin is no longer Russian leader or – very unlikely – Russian democrats come to power. Opinion polls by the Levada Centre [13] show that Russian chauvinism towards Ukrainians and Russia's xenophobia towards the West permeates the majority of the population. So-called Russian "democrats" like Alexei Navalny are democrats at home and imperialists abroad, a point little understood or discussed in the West. Nearly all the so-called "opposition" supports the annexation of the Crimea (one exception is Garry Kasparov) and they rarely protest at Russian military aggression in eastern Ukraine. The phenomenon of being a democrat at home and imperialist abroad has a long history in Western Europe. Oliver Cromwell, after all was the founder of English parliamentary democracy, was also the butcher of the Irish Catholics.

The essence of Russian nationalistic chauvinism is four-fold:

1. Ukraine cannot exist as an independent state outside Russia's sphere of influence. This is because Ukrainians are not a nation and therefore they can only create an artificial and failed state which requires a foreign overlord – Russian or Western. Since the Euromaidan, Ukraine has been led by oligarchs who are in the West's pocket and they together prevent the *narod* (people) from doing what they earnestly desire, which is to unite with Russia. Such a view of Ukraine was not created by Putin as it also existed in the 1990s.

In Russian eyes, Belarus has adopted the correct course of action under Lukashenka by accepting Russia as its suzerain. Ukrainian elites have not but they will eventually return to "Mother Russia." Yanukovich was bribed in November-December 2013 with a \$15 billion "loan" to become Ukraine's Lukashenka but this failed as no Russian politicians had ever read Leonid Kuchma's book *Ukraine is not Russia*.

2. Ukraine is a surrogate battleground of Russia's bigger war with the West. The EU was wrong to attempt to take Ukraine away from Russia and it failed to understand how Putin had become hostile to EU enlargement

from 2010–2012. The origin of Putin's views of Ukraine lies in Soviet nationality policy where the three eastern Slavs of the once medieval state of Kyiv Rus were the kernel of the USSR, just as today they would be the core of the CIS Customs Union and Eurasian Union. In 2016, Putin unveiled a monument to Grand Prince Volodymyr who ruled Kyiv Rus before Moscow existed.

3. Russian speakers in Ukraine are “Russian” compatriots who are suppressed by “fascists” and “nationalists” and need Russia's protection. *Russkii* can be translated into “Russian” in English meaning ethnic Russian but *Russkii* can also be understood as representing the three branches of the Russian people – Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians. Western Russianists have ignored Putin's return to Tsarist chauvinism about Russians and Ukrainians constituting *odyn narod* (one people).

4. Ukraine's relationship with Russia has always been beneficial and advantageous to it and Russia has never undertaken any bad policies towards Ukraine. Russification did not take place in Ukraine as there was simply the desire of Ukrainians to adopt a more “civilised” language that is used in the modern urbanised and industrialised world. Such views were and remain common in Europe and can be found in current French attitudes towards regional minorities or earlier in English attitudes towards the Welsh and Irish languages.

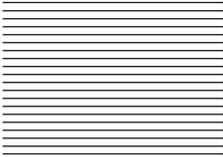
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Conclusions

Western scholars have written a lot about the Russia-Ukraine crisis and Russian aggression but in many cases, as this article shows, they have missed the wood for the trees. It is as though they have wished to dissect the crisis and aggression from a multitude of angles while not wishing to draw the conclusion that national identity is the root cause of the crisis; specifically Russian chauvinism towards Ukraine and Ukrainians.

While there is hope that over time some Western scholars writing from the vantage points of geopolitics, Russian empire and Russian regime will come around to understanding the root causes of the crisis and aggression. This though will be highly unlikely in Moscow where Russian political leaders and so-called “experts” will remain for many years to come too deeply influenced by their stereotypes and myths of Ukrainians to be able to understand the internal dynamics of Ukraine. Russian political leaders and the *siloviki* got Ukraine wrong in 2004 and 2013–2014 and are very likely to keep getting Ukraine wrong. That is why it is time for Western Russianists to switch from using Russian to Ukrainian sources and opinion polls in their research and in doing so come to better understand internal dynamics in Ukraine and the root causes of Europe's biggest crisis since World War II.



ГУМАНІТАРНА БЕЗПЕКА

УДК 37(477)(094.4/.5):323.15+34

МІЖНАРОДНІ І ПРАВОВІ АСПЕКТИ ВПРОВАДЖЕННЯ НОВОГО ЗАКОНУ УКРАЇНИ «ПРО ОСВІТУ» (В ЧАСТИНІ ВИЗНАЧЕННЯ МОВ НАВЧАННЯ)



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У статті розглянуто проблеми, пов'язані з ухваленням нового Закону України «Про освіту», а саме з реакцією окремих сусідніх держав (передусім Угорщини та Румунії) на положення, що визначають мови навчання в освітніх закладах різних рівнів. Проаналізовано відповідність зазначених положень міжнародним правовим актам, ратифікованим Україною.

Ключові слова: закон, освіта, мови, національні меншини.

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INTERNATIONAL AND LEGAL ASPECTS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW LAW OF UKRAINE «ON EDUCATION» (WITH REGARD TO LANGUAGES OF INSTRUCTION)

The article considers some problems connected with the adoption of the new Law of Ukraine "On Education", namely the reaction of certain neighboring states (primarily, Hungary and Romania) to the provisions defining the language of instruction in educational institutions of different levels. The authors analyze compliance of the mentioned provisions with the international legal acts ratified by Ukraine.

Keywords: legislation, education, languages, national minorities.

Постановка проблеми. Закон «Про освіту», ухвалений Верховною Радою України 5 вересня 2017 р. і підписаний Президентом України 25 вересня цього ж року, викликав значний негативний резонанс в окремих сусідніх країнах. Слід зауважити, що низка коментарів та гучних заяв діючих політиків цих країн пролунали майже одночасно та доволі безапеляційно. Втім, новітні

законодавчі зміни з метою якісного реформування вітчизняної освіти зацікавили представників міжнародного політикуму виключно через ст. 7 нового Закону України «Про освіту», присвячену зміні підходів до мов в українській освіті.

Аналіз останніх публікацій. Складна соціально-політична ситуація в Україні зумовила підвищення