The Ukraine-Russia War and Its Origins

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Abstract

This study uses political science theories of conflicts, wars, war crimes, and genocides and empirical analysis of thousands of primary and secondary sources to examine the war in Ukraine since the Russian invasion on February 24, 2022. The research question is as follow: What are the nature and origins of the war in Ukraine? The analysis shows that the Ukraine war is primarily an interstate war between Russia and Ukraine and a proxy war between NATO and Russia. The Russian invasion in February 2022 was illegal and extreme escalation of conflicts with Ukraine and the West and the civil war in Donbas that started after the Western-backed violent and illegal overthrow of the Ukrainian government by means of the Maidan massacre in 2014. There is no evidence of the Ukrainian genocide or Russian genocide but various evidence of war crimes, primarily by the Russian forces.

The Research Question

Truth is the first casualty of the war. Governments and media often disseminate propaganda during such armed conflicts. But the task of scholarly studies is not to rely on propaganda disseminated by the governments and often repeated by the media but on evidence, academic concepts and theories to research wars in non-partisan ways. This applies to the Ukraine-Russia war.

This conflict is the most significant armed conflict in the world in the 21st century. Russia and Ukraine, two largest countries in Europe, along with NATO and EU members are involved in this war directly or indirectly in various ways. The war is most significant conflict involving main nuclear powers in the world, specifically Russia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and France. In addition, the war has major political, economic, and financial impact on Ukraine and Russia, and many other countries of the world. Its outcome is likely to shape the international order.

This study examines the war in Ukraine since the Russian invasion on February 24, 2022. This is one of the first academic studies of this important and ongoing armed conflict. The research question is as follow: What are the nature and origins of this war in Ukraine?

Methodology and Data

This study uses political science theories of conflicts, wars, genocides, and war crimes and empirical analysis to examine the nature of war in Ukraine. The empirical evidence-based and theory-based academic analysis of the Ukraine-Russia war and the Maidan transition is needed to determine the nature of these highly politicized political conflicts which affected not only Ukraine and Russia but the entire world. This would also be helpful in conflict resolution.

It analyzes thousands of videos, interviews, and statements by key political actors involved in this war, testimonies and reports by hundreds of participants, journalists, and eyewitnesses of the Ukraine-Russia war. This study examines large amounts of primary and secondary sources in Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, and English. This research analyzes thousands of videos, interviews, statements, and publications in these languages in the media and the social media by key political and military actors, participants, journalists, and eyewitnesses. For space reasons, absolute majority of such primary sources cannot be cited in this study.

The analyzed sources include reports, statements, interviews, and statistical data by the American, British, Canadian, Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, and other countries governments and government officials and by international organizations, such as NATO, the EU, and the United Nations. The study also uses American, British, Canadian, Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, and other countries media reports, videos, statements, and interviews along with videos and other information concerning the war from various Telegram channels and other social media in Ukrainian, English, and Russian. The research includes determination of reliability, validity, and authenticity of the information and its corroboration by other independent sources.

Conflicting Narratives and Previous Studies

The Ukraine war produced conflicting narratives by the governments and the media in Ukraine, Russia, and the West. The Ukrainian government and media presented the war in 2022 as a full-scale Russian invasion and aggressive illegal war that was started by Russia in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas. They classified the war in 2022 as aimed in occupying entire Ukraine and stated that Russia conducts genocide of Ukrainians. The Ukrainian government and the Ukrainian and many Western media attributed civilian casualties

in separatist-controlled Donbas and occupied regions of Ukraine to false-flag shelling by the Russian forces.

The Western governments and most of the media presented the Ukraine war as an unprovoked illegal Russian invasion and aggression against democratic and sovereign state by the authoritarian Russian government aiming to occupy entire Ukraine.US president Biden and many other top Western government officials and politicians and media outlets, and some parliaments, classified the war as Russian genocide of Ukrainians and war crimes. The Ukrainian and Western governments and the media presented Ukraine and the West as allies after the Maidan, which was called as a popular democratic revolution, and the Western military and economic support of Ukraine during the Ukraine-Russia war as support for a fellow democracy and sovereign country.

The Russian government and the media called the war "special military operation" in Ukraine and not a "war." They justified the Russian invasion by security threats from Ukraine, such as possibility of joining NATO and possibility of deployment of US/NATO missiles and or the weapons or military in Ukraine which borders Russia. The Russian government and the media presented the invasion as a humanitarian intervention aimed at stopping a genocide of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers in Donbas during the civil war there. They also justified the invasion by claiming that the Ukrainian government is Nazi or partially-Nazi, that there was a Western-backed fascist coup in 2014, and that one of main goals of the invasion was to "denazify" Ukraine. They denied Russian war crimes or claimed that they were staged. The Russian government and the media presented Ukraine as a US colony after the Maidan. The Russian government and the media presented the Ukraine-Russia war as a war with the US and NATO and called the US and NATO direct participants of the war.

Media is often unreliable source since the Ukrainian and Russian media are largely not independent. Studies show that the Western media coverage, in particular of conflicts in foreign countries, such as Ukraine, often indexes the narratives of their own governments and the political elite. (Boyd-Barrett, 2016; Katchanovski and Morley, 2012).

There is a lack of academic studies of this war because it started relatively recently and is still ongoing. Some scholars rely on the dominant narratives by the Western governments and the media concerning the war. (See, for example, Hill and Stent, 2022). A few studies predicted the real possibility of the war between Russia and Ukraine. (See, for example, Katchanovski, 2016a; Mearsheimer, 2014).

Mearsheimer (2014) argued that the NATO expansion and integration of Ukraine could trigger a war with Russia. Roberts (2022) maintained that the Russian invasion of Ukraine was a preventive war aimed at preventing the anti-Russian government in Ukraine from making Ukraine a NATO bridgehead on the Russian border, taking back Crimea and separatist-controlled Donbas, and acquiring nuclear weapons. Götz and Staun (2022) stated that Russia attacked Ukraine because it perceived the Western drift of Ukraine as a security threat.

There is a debate whether the Russian actions during the war in Ukraine can be classified as a genocide (see Kursani, forthcoming). Dudko (2022: 133) states that "despite widespread evidence of Russia's genocidal behaviour, few scholars and lawyers believe it would be legally possible to prove Russia's genocide in Ukraine."

The Russian invasion and the war in Ukraine in 2022 are extreme escalation of the existing conflicts between Russia and Ukraine and Russia and the West. Previous studies show that these conflicts started with the violent overthrow of the relatively pro-Russian government in Ukraine by means of the Maidan massacre an assassination attempts against then President

Viktor Yanukovych. (See Bandeira, 2019; Black and Jones, 2015; Katchanovski, 2015, 2016a, 2016b; 2020, Hahn, 2018; Kudelia, 2016; Mandel, 2016; Lane, 2016; Sakwa, 2015).

Scholarly studies and the Maidan massacre trials and investigations revealed various evidence that both the police and at least the absolute majority of 49 killed and 157 wounded Maidan protesters were massacred on February 20, 2014, by snipers in Maidan-controlled buildings, in particular, from the Hotel Ukraina, which Svoboda declared before the massacre as being occupied and guarded by this far-right party. Such evidence includes testimonies of the absolute majority of wounded protesters and several hundred witnesses concerning such snipers, and testimonies by self-admitted members of Maidan snipers groups about shooting the police and the protesters, in particular, on the Maidan opposition leaders orders. Videos showed Maidan snipers in the Maidan-controlled buildings and areas aiming or shooting at the Berkut police and the Maidan protesters. Videos also showed that times and directions of shooting of the protesters did not coincide with shooting by the Berkut policemen. Forensic medical examinations found that the overwhelming majority of the protesters were shot from steep directions from the sides or the back and not from straight directions from the front when they faced the Berkut police on the ground. Government ballistic experts determined that many Maidan protesters were shot from the Maidan-controlled building, and the prosecution blocked court-ordered forensic examinations by ballistic experts. Because of the cover-up and stonewalling of the investigations and trials nobody is convicted or under arrest for the massacre of the protesters and the police after one of the most documented mass killings in history.[1] (Katchanovski, 2016a, 2020; Hahn, 2018).

The Yanukovych treason trial revealed various witness testimonies and other evidence that he fled from Kyiv and then from Ukraine to Russia because of a number of assassinations

attempts with involvement of the Maidan oligarchic leaders and the far right and after their attempts to capture him and his residence near Kyiv and likely execute him. (Katchanovski, 2020).

The US and other Western governments de facto backed the violent undemocratic and illegal overthrow of the Yanukovych government for geopolitical reasons, in particular, to contain Russia, and blamed him and his forces for the massacre of the Maidan protesters. They immediately recognized the new Maidan government after the seizure of the presidential administration and the parliament by the Maidan forces and the parliament vote to remove Yanukovych even though such actions violated the agreement signed on February 21, 2014, by Yanukovych, the Maidan opposition leaders, and representatives of France, Germany, and Poland as well as the Constitution of Ukraine.

The violent overthrow of the Yanukovych government escalated into the civil war in Donbas with pro-Russian separatists and an international conflict between Russia and Ukraine and the West and Russia. Russia escalated the conflict by conducting military interventions in Crimea and Donbas and annexing in the violation of the international law Crimea, which was populated by ethnic Russians. (See Katchanovski, 2015, 2016a; Kudelia, 2016; Hahn, 2018; Sakwa, 2015).

In contrast to the dominant narratives of the Ukrainian, Western, and Russian media and governments, the majority of scholarly studies classified the Donbas war as a civil war with Russian military interventions. Russia engaged in covert direct military interventions in Donbas in August 2014 and January-February 2015 and supported self-proclaimed Donbas separatist republics by providing military weapons, advisers, volunteers and mercenaries, and economic and humanitarian aid. (See, for instance, Arel and Driscoll, 2023; Bandeira, 2019; Black and

Jones, 2015; Boyd-Barrett, 2016; Correlates of War Project, 2022, Darden, Henshaw, and Szekely, 2019; Hahn, 2018; Katchanovski, 2016a; Kudelia, 2016; Lane, 2016; Mandel, 2016; Robinson, 2016; Sakwa, 2015; Uppsala Conflict Data Program, 2022; and Zhukov, 2016).

War is commonly defined in political science and conflict studies as an armed conflict with at least 1,000 battle-related casualties. For example, such definition is used by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program.[2] Wars can be classified as interstate, civil, and proxy wars depending on the nature of involvement of conflict parties. As the term suggests, intrastate wars are wars between two or more states or countries. World War One, World War Two, the Iraq-Iran war, and the China-Vietnam war are examples of interstate wars.

In contrast, civil or intrastate wars are wars between armed conflict parties within a single state or a country. (See, for example, Newman, 2014). Their examples included the civil wars in the US, the Russian Empire, Syria, and Bosnia. Proxy wars are wars in which one or more of the parties of the armed conflict is used as a proxy or proxies by other parties which are not involved directly in the warfare. The wars in Vietnam and Angola are examples of proxy wars, primarily, between the US and the Soviet Union. (See Mumford, 2013). Many wars, such as the wars in Vietnam, Angola, Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, combine elements of intrastate, civil, and/or proxy wars.

War crimes are violations of the laws concerning wars, such as the Geneva conventions. War crimes can be committed against civilians and prisoners of war during the war. There is a large variety of war crimes. (See Henckaerts, Doswald-Beck, Alvermann, Dörmann, and Rolle 2005). Genocide is the most significant and severe crime. Wars can be used to perpetrate genocide, like in the case of the genocides perpetrated by Nazi Germany during World War Two.

Genocide is commonly defined in political science and conflict studies as mass murder and other similar acts committed with the intent to destroy in whole or in part an ethnic, racial, religious, or social group. A similar definition was adopted by the UN Genocide Convention. It states that

> "In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."

The Genocide Convention was adopted by the UN in 1948 based specifically on all such actions and plans by Nazi Germany during World War Two. They included intended and implemented to various extent in occupied countries or territories physical annihilation of Jews in whole, and significant parts of other groups, which were declared by the Nazis as also racially inferior, in particular, Belarusians, Poles, Roma, Russians, and Ukrainians. (See, for example, Katchanovski, 2010).

Analysis of the Ukraine War

Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022, after Russian president Vladimir Putin declared what he called a "special military operation" in Ukraine. A new law made it illegal in Russia to refer to the Russian military actions in Ukraine as a war. Contrary to the Russian government and media, the Russia-Ukraine armed conflict is clearly classified as a war since the number of battle-related casualties far exceeds the 1,000 casualty threshold, which is typically used by scholars to define a war.

The author's estimates of casualties during the first year of the war are based on officially admitted own casualties by Ukraine and separatists and individual count of killed Russian forces members. Ukrainian forces casualties are estimated at more than 30 thousand killed. The estimate is based on the Zelenskyy presidential office adviser admission on June 11, 2022 of circa 10 thousand military members killed, admissions of another adviser of Zelenskyy about 100-200 killed per day in June and about 30-50 in August 2022, and admission of the Minister of Defense of Ukraine of 50-60 killed per day in mid-January 2023.[3] These numbers are adjusted by adding estimated casualties among the police, border guards, the National Guard, Security Service of Ukraine foreign volunteers and rough estimates of missing in action, who were killed. Numerous videos on different Telegram channels showed large numbers of bodies of killed Ukrainian soldiers on territories captured by the Russian and separatist forces. The Ukrainian government officials reported in November 2022 that 15,000 Ukrainian forces members and civilians were identified as missing, in addition to 3,392 identified Ukrainian POWs in Russia.[4] The number of wounded Ukrainian forces members is estimated at more than 120,000 based on the ratio of about 4 wounded for 1 killed based on a typical ratio of killed to wounded during the modern wars.

The minimal Russian forces casualties are estimated to be at least 16,000 killed and 64,000 wounded. The estimate is based on BBC Russian identification of 14,709 Russian military, National Guard, FSB, police, border guard members, and Wagner mercenaries identified as killed until February 17, 2023.[5] The number is adjusted by extrapolating the casualties to the whole year of the war plus a rough estimate of missing in action who were killed, Total casualties of Donbas separatist formations are more than 9,000 killed and more than 36,000 wounded. The estimate is based on the admission by the ombudsperson of the separatist

DNR of 4,133 killed and over 17,379 wounded members of all DNR forces in 2022 until December 16.[6] The casualty is extrapolated to February 23, 2023. A rough estimate of killed missing in action is added, while casualties in 2022 before the Russian invasion are excluded. The number of killed and wounded in the separatist LNR is extrapolated based on their population size relative to the separatist DNR.

The officially admitted own casualties by parties of the armed conflict provide the minimal confirmed casualties. The Russian, Ukrainian, and Western governments inflated the military casualties of their adversary. Various supposedly leaked military casualties have all features of fakes because they were inflated and lacked validity and reliability.

The war in Ukraine is an interstate war between Russia and Ukraine since the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is illegal under international law. Contrary to the Russian government claim, this war cannot be classified as a preventive war under the international law because there were no imminent security threats. While the Ukrainian government proclaimed plans to join NATO and NATO publicly stated during the Bucharest summit and before the war that Ukraine would become NATO member in the future, there was no immediate likelihood of NATO membership of Ukraine or deployment of long-range missiles or nuclear weapons by NATO there.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy reversed his election promises of peaceful resolution of the Donbas conflict, did not fulfill the Minsk agreements concerning the peaceful resolution of the conflict in Donbas, and proclaimed intention to return separatist-controlled Donbas and the Russian-annexed Crimea under the control of the central government before the Russian invasion. However, there was no confirmed evidence of imminent attack of the Ukrainian forces to take back separatist-controlled Donbas and Russian-annexed Crimea. While Zelenskyy

suggested during the Munich conference shortly before the Russian invasion that Ukraine might seek to become a nuclear power, there was no immediate prospect of Ukraine building nuclear or biological weapons. Russia inflated the imminent nature of such security threats to justify the illegal invasion of Ukraine.

The analysis of various evidence and the size and deployment of the Russian forces in Ukraine suggest that Russian plans do not envision occupation or annexation of entire Ukraine, in particular Western and Central Ukraine. The apparent initial goal of the Russian invasion was the regime change in Ukraine or to force the Ukrainian government to accept a peace deal with Russian demands of neutrality, demilitarization, "denazification" and recognition of separatist republics in Donbas in borders of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions. The Russian initial advance close to Kyiv without sufficient military force to capture it. Negotiations with the Zelenskyy government that started within days after the invasion are consistent with such goal.

The lack of creation of the Russian or separatist military-civilian administrations in the occupied regions of Ukraine, with the exceptions of Donbas, in the first month of the war suggested that the annexation or long-term occupation of these regions of Ukraine was not initially planned, with the exception of Donbas. However, creation of such administrations since April 2022, Putin's Victory Day speech on May 9, 2022, and various subsequent statements by other Russian and separatist officials and Russian-appointed officials in Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions suggested Russian policy shift and plans to annex these regions in Southern and Eastern Ukraine.

The Russian government declared such annexation of the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions and the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Donbas in September 2022 after its organized referendums on joining Russia. The analysis of public opinion polls indicates that nearly

universal vote in favor of joining Russia is these regions was falsified in the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions and inflated in Donbas. For example, a KMIS survey in Spring 2014 showed marginal support for joining Russia in and Southern and Eastern Ukraine, with the exceptions of Crimea and Donbas.[7]

The war could had been avoided by Russia in 2022 by not launching the invasion of Ukraine. It was a war of choice for Russia. The war also could had been prevented by the Ukrainian government and the US, NATO. and the EU, for instance, by providing implementation of the Minsk agreements and neutrality and EU membership of Ukraine. The Minsk agreements were signed as result of covert Russian military interventions in Donbas in August 2014 and January-February 2015. The Ukrainian and Western governments did not implement the agreements. The former president Petro Poroshenko, the former German chancellor Angela Merkel, and the former French president Francois Hollande stated after the Russian invasion in 2022 that they signed the Minsk agreements to buy time and strengthen the Ukrainian forces.[8] Zelensky also admitted that he did not intend to implement the Minsk agreements.[9]

The war in Ukraine is also a proxy war between NATO and Russia. The US and NATO use Ukraine, in particular, the Ukrainian government and the forces, as a proxy. Various senior US officials and politicians admitted the proxy war. For example, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin stated that "we want to see Russia weakened to the degree that it can't do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine."[10] Former US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta said in March 2022 that the US is in a proxy war with Russia in Ukraine.[11] Minister of Defense of Ukraine Oleksiy Reznikov in an interview with the 1+1 TV channel stated that "we are

fulfilling NATO's mission today without them shedding their blood but with shedding our blood."[12]

The proxy war in Ukraine, like other proxy wars, such as the wars in Vietnam and Angola, prolonged the war. The massive supplies of weapons by the US-led NATO members and EU member countries, intelligence, advisers, military planning, and training, and large scale economic and humanitarian aid to Ukraine allowed Ukraine to continue resistance against the Russian and separatist forces. But such military supplies and other aid also made Ukraine heavily dependent on support of NATO and EU countries.

Ukraine fits definitions of a US client state sui generis after the Maidan. There is various evidence of the US-led regime change policy during the Maidan in Ukraine. An intercepted telephone call between a US State Department official and the US ambassador in Ukraine prior to February 20, 2014 shows them discussing which specific Maidan opposition leaders, specifically Arseniy Yatseniuk, can be in the Ukrainian government after Yanukovych offered the positions in his government to the opposition leaders.[13]

US President Barack Obama stated that "we had brokered a deal to transition power in Ukraine" after the massacre and before Yanukovych fled, but the US president or other American government officials did not release any specific information about the nature of this involvement.[14] Then US Vice-President Biden revealed in his memoirs that during the Maidan massacre he called Yanukovych and told him that "it was over; time for him to call off his gunmen and walk away" and "he shouldn't expect his Russian friends to rescue him from this disaster," that "Yanukovych had lost the confidence of the Ukrainian people, I said, and he was going to be judged harshly by history if he kept killing them." Biden wrote that "the disgraced president fled Ukraine the next day — owing to the courage and determination of the

demonstrators — and control of the government ended up temporarily in the hands of a young patriot named Arseniy Yatsenyuk."[15]

The far-right Svoboda party leader and the deputy head of the Ukrainian parliament from Svoboda stated in their separate interviews that a Western government representative during their and other Maidan leaders meeting told them a few weeks before the Maidan massacre that the Western governments would turn on Yanukovych after casualties among protesters would reach 100. (Braty, 2017, p. 94). The Maidan opposition right after the massacre called the killed Maidan protesters the "Heavenly Hundred." Some Maidan protesters and other people, who were not on the Maidan and died from illnesses and other causes were included in the "Heavenly Hundred" to bring the number of the victims to 100. The US and other Western governments blamed the Yanukovych government and his forces for the massacre of the Maidan protesters. They also immediately recognized the new Maidan government after the seizure of the presidential administration and the parliament by the Maidan Self-Defense and the parliament vote to remove Yanukovych even though such actions violated the agreement signed on February 21, 2014 by Yanukovych, the Maidan opposition leaders, and representatives of France, Germany, and Poland which stipulated withdrawal of the government forces from downtown Kyiv, disarmament of the Maidan activists, early presidential elections, and the investigation of the Maidan massacre with involvement of the Council of Europe. (See Katchanovski, 2016b, 2020).

There is no publicly available evidence of the direct involvement of the US or other Western governments and forces in the Maidan massacre. But these governments de facto backed the overthrow of the Ukrainian government in spite of evidence that this overthrow was

perpetrated by the elements of the Maidan oligarchic and far-right opposition by means of the false flag mass killing of the Maidan protesters and assassination attempts against Yanukovych.[16]

Jeffrey Sachs, a world-renowned American economist who was invited to serve as an economic adviser to new prime-minister Arsenii Yatseniuk right after the Yanukovych government overthrow, stated that the US government "definitely contributed to the overthrow of Yanukovych... I know this from inside, not just from outside. I know from top people involved in these issues."[17] Renowned American investigative journalist Seymour Hersh said based on his insider sources in the US intelligence and the government: "We certainly did overthrow [of the Ukrainian government] with a lot more American involvement than the press knows about right now."[18]

Various evidence shows US administration involvement in appointments and dismissals of top Ukrainian government officials and in key policy decisions in Ukraine since the Maidan. For example, the Ukrainian media reported that then US Vice President Joe Biden requested to put Arsenii Yatseniuk, Valentyn Nalyvaichenko, and foreigners in the Ukrainian government. (Dzerkalo, 2015). Yatseniuk became the prime-minister, Nalyvaichenko the head of the Security Service of Ukraine, and the former president of Georgia and his former Georgian government officials occupied various positions in the Ukrainian state. Ukrainian media reports and tapes of phone calls between then US Vice President Joe Biden and President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko revealed that he had say in Poroshenko's decision to dismiss Yatseniuk as prime-minister and in appointing his successor. The tapes, Ukrainian media reports, and public admission by Biden showed that he was involved in dismissal of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine and approval of his successor's appointment.[19] The declassified transcript of the Trump

and Zelenskyy phone call shows the same client-patron relationship between Ukraine and the US.[20]

The Ukrainian media, Ukrainian and US officials, and a declassified transcript of a meeting of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine also revealed that the US and other Western governments told the Maidan government leaders not to use military force during the Russian annexation of Crimea in order to avoid a war with Russia. The nearly perfect alignment of the Ukrainian and US government policies after the Maidan is also consistent with Ukraine becoming a US client state and remaining during the Ukraine-Russia war.

The Ukrainian forces and the government becoming largely depended after the Russian invasion on supplies of weapons and financial aid by the US and other NATO members and the EU also fits a classification of a client state. The amount of the military, financial, and humanitarian aid, mostly in the form of loans, by these countries to Ukraine in 2022 exceeded the size of the state budget of Ukraine. As noted, the Western military and financial aid, provision of intelligence, training, and war planning enabled the Ukrainian forces to rearm themselves with mostly Western-supplied weapons and to continue the war with Russia for a long time.

Various evidence of US and UK direct involvement in planning, training, intelligence gathering, arming, and financing of the Ukrainian forces, in particular, for the Kherson and Kharkiv counter-offensives, is consistent with the proxy war.[21] The US provided real-time intelligence to the Ukrainian forces to identify, precisely locate, and target the Russian and separatist forces, military equipment and weapons, Russian generals and and the Black Sea flagship Moskva.[22] There are reports of deployment of US and British special forces in Ukraine during the war. For example, a senior British general admitted that 350 British marine

commandos took part in covert operations in Ukraine, specifically, supported "discreet operations" that carried "a high level of political and military risk" in a "hugely sensitive environment."[23]

The investigation by a leading American investigative journalist Seymour Hersh based on insider information from the US intelligence found that the US Navy and intelligence with involvement of the Norwegian forces on the Biden's order blew up in September 2022 the Nord Stream gas pipelines that supplied natural gas from Russia to Germany. Such evidence of the direct US involvement is corroborated by the public promise of Biden to end the Nord Stream 2 pipeline in case of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and lack of any evidence that Ukraine, Russia, Poland, or any other country blew up these pipelines.[24]

Ukrainian officials close to Zelenskyy revealed that the British prime minister visited Kyiv in April 2022 to block a peace deal with Russia after the Ukrainian government delegation in peace talks with Russia in its written peace plan proposal reportedly agreed to neutrality of Ukraine, no bases and troops from foreign countries, and no nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.[25] Putin made a similar statement. Naftali Bennett, the former Israeli prime minister also said that Western leaders, primarily the US and the UK, blocked the Ukraine-Russia peace deal, which he negotiated with Putin on Zelensky's request in March 2022 and which had about 50% chance of being reached, because they wanted to continue to strike Putin. He says that after Putin promised him not to kill Zelensky and dropped demilitarization of Ukraine demand during his meeting on March 5, 2022, Zelensky dropped NATO membership of Ukraine.[26] "Multiple former senior U.S. officials" confirmed that Russia and Ukraine agreed in April on a peace deal outline (Hill and Stent, 2022).

Zelenskyy abandoned the negotiations right after this visit by the British prime-minister and not after the revelations of the Russian war crimes in Bucha. He stated after visiting Bucha his willingness to continue the negotiations.[27] But after the Boris Johnson's visit, Zelenskyy and other senior government officials of Ukraine rejected peace talks. Zelenskyy and the Defense Minister of Ukraine stated that the war would only end with taking back all lost territory of Ukraine, i.e., not only territories occupied during the Russian invasion but also separatist-controlled Donbas and Russian annexed Crimea, and that such outcome would constitute the Ukrainian victory. Such policy shift happened even though the odds of such outcome remained extremely small because of the Russian military advantage over Ukraine in terms of weapons and potential military personnel.

Contrary to claims by the Russian leaders and the media, there is no conventional war of Russia with the US and other NATO countries and NATO as a military alliance in Ukraine. The regular military forces of the US and other NATO members do not participate directly in the war with Russia in Ukraine, with some relatively limited exceptions. The US and British media reports revealed deployments of their special forces and intelligence personnel in Ukraine numbering in hundreds. A British general reported that British Royal Marine commandos took part in covert operations in Ukraine and supported "discreet operations" in a "hugely sensitive environment."[28]

However, the proxy war and such deployment of the American and British forces increased a possibility that the Ukraine war could escalate into a war between NATO and Russia, including potentially a nuclear war. Possibility of this war escalating into a nuclear war is the most significant since at least the Cuban missile crisis 60 years ago. However, such significant

escalation is not very likely because consequences of such a nuclear war would be devastating to both the US and Russia.

The war in Ukraine also has elements of the civil war which began in Donbas in 2014. For instance, there were no video, satellite, or other verifiable evidence of regular Russian military units in Donbas at the time of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2023. The British Ministry of Defense map of the deployment of the Russian forces on the eve of the invasion also did not show any regular Russian military units in Donbas. Similarly to the involvement of the NATO members in the war in Ukraine, the Russian involvement in the war in Donbas in the form of weapons supplies and economic aid to Donbas separatists, the covert deployment of the Russian military intelligence units and military advisers, the relatively limited in time and place direct military participation in the war, and de facto client state status of self-proclaimed separatists republics do not make the Donbas war an interstate war before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

In contrast to the brief direct Russian military interventions in Donbas in support of pro-Russian separatist in August 2014 and January-February 2015, the Russian forces numbers, casualties, and POWs since February 24, 2022 far outnumbered those of the Donbas separatist forces. As noted, there were at least 13,000 Russian forces casualties and at least 8,000 Donbas separatist forces casualties in Ukraine since February 24, 2024. In contrast, the Donbas separatist forces casualties before the invasion were estimated based on the UN reports at a few thousand killed, while Russian forces casualties in Donbas were estimated at couple hundred based on identification of specific killed Russian forces members in the media reports, videos, and social media.

Similarly, the examination of government officials, media, and social media reports and various videos of POWs that were exchanged from the Ukrainian captivity since the Russian invasion in 2022, showed that the absolute majority of them were Russian forces members and a significant minority were members of the Donbas separatist forces. In contrast, the analysis of similar sources identified that POWs exchanged from the Ukrainian captivity in 2014-2021 included only about 1.5 percent of identified Russian forces members and 3.5% Russian volunteers and mercenaries. Furthermore, the Russian invasion in 2022 involved not only Donbas but also other regions in the Eastern, Southern, and Central Ukraine.

Out of more than 8 million Ukrainian refugees recorded by the UN in January 2023, 2.9 million were reported in Russia before October 2022, compared to 1.6 million in Poland and 1.0 million in Germany.[29] Such large number of Ukrainian refugees in Russia during the Russian invasion of Ukraine is another evidence of the civil war in Ukraine. Various UN, government, and media reports, videos, and testimonies showed that many Ukrainian refugees were forced to move to Russia during the war. However, the analysis of similar sources shows that absolute majority of the Ukrainian refugees remained in Russia long after their arrival and did not move to other countries despite better economic benefits and opportunities for Ukrainian refugees in EU member states, Canada, and the US.

The Russian government recognized the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk separatist republics as independent states a few days before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. But they de facto remained client states of Russia. For instance, Russian officials were appointed to the top positions in the DNR and LNR governments, and the separatist forces under de facto Russian command were deployed beyond Donbas to the Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, and Kharkiv Regions.

The analysis shows no evidence of Ukrainian genocide in separatist-controlled Donbas and Russian genocide in Ukraine. The UN and the US intelligence also did not find evidence of the genocide in Ukraine corroborating the analysis of this study.[30] False genocide claims were used by Putin to justify the invasion of Ukraine, which resulted in many more civilian casualties than the war in Donbas prior to the invasion. False claims of genocide and inflated Russian war crimes in Bucha were also used by the Zelenskyy government and the US and some other Western governments to justify ending the peace talks to stop the war. There have been many more additional civilian casualties as a result of the ongoing war versus a possible peace deal that was close to agreement by the beginning of April 2022.

More than 6 thousand civilians were killed in separatist-controlled Donbas during the civil war since 2014 and the first year of the Ukraine-Russia war. These estimates are based on the UN confirmed civilian casualties of the Donbas war in 2014-21 of at least 3,404 and at about 1,000 in Russian-controlled and separatist-controlled Donbas from the start of the Ukraine-Russia war and until February 15 2023, plus estimated casualties in Russian-occupied regions of Ukraine and unaccounted casualties. The annexed DNR government reported more than 1,000 civilians killed in 2022.[31] The UN estimated about 11,000 members of the Ukrainian and separatist forces killed in 2014-2021. (UN, 2022).

More than 13,000 civilians were killed in Ukraine during the first year of the war. This estimate is based on the UN confirmed 8,006 civilians killed in Ukraine from the start of the Russian invasion until February 15, 2023, including about 1,000 civilians killed in separatist and Russian controlled territories of Ukraine. These documented casualties are adjusted by adding estimated unaccounted casualties in Mariupol and other cities in Donbas and other regions and missing persons who were killed. (OHCHR, 2023). The head of the Office of President of

Ukraine stated in the mid-January 2023 that more than 9,000 civilians were identified as killed during the war.[32] About 3 thousand numbered graves filmed in Mariupol by the French television were primarily civilian residents killed during the war in 2022.[33] The head of the Investigative Committee of Russia stated that over 3,000 bodies of dead civilians had been found in Mariupol.[34]

Civilian casualties were often inflated or misrepresented for political reasons. For instance, the claim that more than 100,000 Mariupol residents were killed is implausible since it implies that all city residents were killed or wounded, based on typical ratio of 1 killed to 3-4 wounded during the modern wars.

The UN reported that 85% of confirmed 8,006 killed civilians in Ukraine, including separatist and Russian-controlled territories of Ukraine, were killed from February 24, 2022 till February 15, 2023 by shells, bombs, missiles, mines, and explosives. And 15% or 1,202 civilians were killed by other weapons, i.e., by small arms and light weapons (handguns, automatic assault rifles, machine guns, grenades, grenade launchers, etc.) in crossfire, indiscriminate fire, willful killing, and in road accidents involving military (OHCHR, 2023). The analysis of various videos, photos, media and social media reports, and the UN reports shows that the absolute majority of civilian casualties were in the Ukrainian government-controlled territory and inflicted by the Russian and separatist forces.

Various evidence, such as thousands of videos, media and social media reports, along with findings of UN and Amnesty International reports and US intelligence and military experts, shows that the overwhelming majority of civilians in the Ukrainian-controlled territories and in separatist-controlled Donbas were killed by explosive weapons with wide area effect or not-precise weapons during, respectively, Russian and too a much lesser extent Ukrainian military

strikes. Civilians were killed during apparent indiscriminate shelling/bombing, overwhelmingly by the Russian forces, in populated urban and rural settlements. Videos, photos, and Amnesty International (2022a) report show that populated civilian areas and facilities, such as cities, towns, villages, apartment buildings, schools, universities, hospitals, hotels, etc. were often used for military purposes, primarily by the Ukrainian forces for defense.

For example, such Russian shelling/bombing and missile strikes resulted in large numbers of Ukrainian civilian casualties in Mariupol, Vinnytsia, Kremenchuk, Chernihiv, Chasiv Yar, Izium, Chaplino, Bilohorivka, Mykolaiv, Kharkiv, and other locations in Ukraine. Both civilian and military casualties of the Russian missile strikes in Vinnytsia, Chasiv Yar, Chaplino, and Bilohorivka were identified by various Ukrainian media.

These findings are corroborated by assessments made by US military and intelligence experts, a Newsweek investigation, which was partly based on the US intelligence, of Russian missile strikes with the largest number of reported civilian casualties, and by the Amnesty International reports.[35]

For example, the analysis of various videos, eyewitness testimonies, and experts used in Amnesty International reports suggest that explosions in Mariupol maternity hospital and the Mariupol theater were likely from large Russian unguided avia bombs, which lack precision and can strike far from targets. (Amnesty International, 2022b). There is similar evidence of large Russian unguided avia bombs killing several dozen residents in an apartment building in Izium and in a street queue in Chernihiv. (Amnesty International, 2022c). Such bombings by inaccurate aviation bombs with wide impact area in populated areas during combat fit definitions of indiscriminate attacks in the international humanitarian law. See (Henckaerts, Doswald-Beck, Alvermann, Dörmann, and Rolle 2005).

Contrary to claims by the Russian Defense Ministry and Donbas separatists, there is no confirmed evidence of false flag bombings of the Mariupol maternity hospital and the Mariupol theater by the Azov Regiment or other Ukrainian forces. Contrary to the claims by the Ukrainian government officials and the Ukrainian and Western media, there is no corroborating evidence of several hundred casualties of the Mariupol theater bombing. Similarly, the analysis of videos and testimonies suggests that a shot-down Ukrainian Tochka-U missile, which killed about two dozen civilians in Donetsk, apparently aimed at the nearby separatist DNR government headquarters. The evidence concerning the Tochka-U missile strike that killed 60 civilians in the Kramatorsk train station is contradictory.

There is no corroborated evidence of systematic false-flag shelling/bombing of civilians by the Russian, separatist, and Ukrainian forces. This concerns, for example, claims by the Russian and separatist governments that the bombing of the maternity hospital and a theater in Mariupol were false flag attacks and claims by the Ukrainian government that the shelling of Donetsk and the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant were false flags. But there is clear evidence of Russian missile and Iranian drone strikes of thermal and hydro power plants and electrical substations in Ukrainian government-controlled regions in September-December 2022. These strikes resulted in significant power, heating, water, and internet outages in Ukraine.

However, there is various evidence of war crimes by individual soldiers, commanders, or units, primarily by the Russian forces. Contrary to the Russian government claims of staged killings in Bucha, analysis of UN and Amnesty International reports, forensic expert reports, videos, satellite images, eyewitness reports, media investigative reports, and other sources confirms that the total of about several dozen civilians and territorial defense members were shot

or summarily executed by individual Russian soldiers or Russian units during the Russian occupation of Bucha. Such summary executions are classified as war crimes.

The UN human rights mission report documented unlawful killing, including by summary executions and indiscriminate shootings, of 73 civilians in the town Bucha and 441 civilians in the Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Sumy regions of Ukraine from 24 February until 6 April 2022, in particular during searches and detention of suspected supporters of the Ukrainian forces. (OHCHR, 2022). Videos, satellite images, and eyewitness testimonies confirmed indiscriminate shooting or summary executions of various civilian residents and at least 8 unarmed territorial defense members in Bucha by the Russian forces.[36]

Contrary to the claims by the Ukrainian and Western governments and the media, there is no documented evidence of Srebrenica-like mass execution (massacre) of a large proportion of the Bucha town residents by the Russian forces. The total 458 victims identified in Bucha after the Russian force's withdrawal included some non-civilians, and 39 who "appeared to have died of natural causes."[37] Forensic experts confirmed that many victims were shot in the head or by automatic gunfire but did not reveal their specific number. (Guardian, 2022). The other victims or the absolute majority of them were likely killed by shelling since videos, photos and eyewitnesses showed shelling in Bucha by Russian and Ukrainian forces during fighting for control of this town. For example, forensic experts revealed that dozens of Bucha residents were "killed by tiny metal arrows from shells" (flechettes).[38]

The UN mission report found that in 100 civilians killings, which it examined in detail out of confirmed killings of 441 civilians during the Russian invasion in the Kyiv, Chernihiv and Sumy regions of Ukraine from February 24 until 6 April 2022, 57 victims were summarily executed. Thirty of them were killed in places of their detention by the Russian forces, and 27

persons were killed on the spot after coming under the Russian forces control. The executed Ukrainian civilians were primarily accused or suspected of providing assistance to the Ukrainian forces. (OHCHR, 2022).

Contrary to the Russian government and media claims used to justify the Russian invasion, the Ukrainian government and the military are not Nazi or neo-Nazi. The Ukrainian government and the Ukrainian parliament do not include any neo-Nazis. The author's estimate based on the membership of neo-Nazi organizations and neo-Nazi-led units, such as the Azov regiment, shows that members of neo-Nazi organizations constituted approximately 1% of the Ukrainian forces during the war. However, contrary to the Ukrainian and Western governments and media claims, the far-right, including neo-Nazis, in particular in the neo-Nazi-led Azov regiment and other neo-Nazi-led formations and members of neo-Nazi organizations, are integrated in the National Guard, the police, and the Security Service of Ukraine. They have outsize power relative to their numbers. In particular, the neo-Nazi founder and the first commander of the Azov battalion threated Zelenskyy against making a peace deal at the beginning of the war. The Azov regiment played a leading role in the Mariupol battle in Spring 2022, but its members surrendered to the Russian and Donbas separatist forces in May 2022 after the siege of Azovstal steel plant.

There are videos and eyewitness testimonies suggesting that Azov regiment members killed a certain number of Mariupol residents during the battle for Mariupol and used apartment buildings, schools, and other civilian facilities during the fighting with the Russian and separatist forces.[39] Videos and eyewitness testimonies reveal executions of Russian POWs by the Georgian Legion and by the neo-Nazi-led Kraken unit, which was formed by the civilian wing of the neo-Nazi-led Azov regiment. There were also admissions, photos, and videos posted on Telegram

channels by Azov leaders of killing of Ukrainian civilians accused of collaboration with Russians.[40] Such killings are classified as war crimes.

Contrary to the Western and Ukrainian governments and media narratives, Ukraine is not a democracy but is largely undemocratic. After a brief period of relative democratization and semi-democracy following a victory of Zelenskyy in the presidential elections, he moved to institute a largely authoritarian rule, for instance by blocking the Constitutional Court of Ukraine and by imposing sanctions against some opposition leaders on treason charges that appeared trumped-up.

Zelenskyy used the Russian invasion and the war as a pretext to eliminate most of the political opposition and potential rivals for power and to consolidate his largely undemocratic rule in Ukraine. Sixteen opposition parties that were banned by a court in Lviv in Western Ukraine after hasty proceedings and without any lawyers present include several left parties. They were banned even though these parties condemned the Russian invasion or did not endorse it. Six leaders of major Ukrainian political parties are charged with state treason or are reportedly investigated on state treason charges that appear to be trumped up. Opinion polls show that half of voters in Ukraine before the Ukraine-Russia war expressed intention to vote for the political parties, whose leaders are charged with or are reportedly investigated for state treason. This was three times more than for the Zelenskyy's ruling party.[41] The Zelenskyy government also closed four opposition TV news channels and after the start of the Russian invasion required all remaining TV news channels to broadcast the single television news marathon program.

Conclusion

The ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine since February 24, 2022, contrary to the denials by the Russian government and the media is a war because the number of combat casualties far exceeds the 1,000 casualty threshold, which is typically used by scholars to define a war. The war combines elements of an interstate war between Russia and Ukraine, a proxy war between the West and Russia, and a civil war in Ukraine. Interstate war between Russia and Ukraine and the proxy war between the West/NATO and Russia since the Russian invasion in 2022 are much more dominant than the civil war, which continued in Donbas since 2014. Contrary to the claims of the Russian government leaders and the media, the war in Ukraine is not a war between NATO and Russia.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is illegal under international law. It cannot be classified as a preventive war because security threats, such as NATO membership of Ukraine or Ukraine developing nuclear weapons, were not imminent and were inflated or misrepresented by the Russian government.

Russia drastically escalated conflicts with Ukraine and the West and the civil war in Donbas in February 2022 by launching the invasion of Ukraine. These conflicts started with the Western-backed illegal and undemocratic violent overthrow of the pro-Russian Ukrainian government by means of the false-flag Maidan massacre and assassination attempts against Yanukovych that were perpetrated by the elements of the Maidan oligarchic and the far-right opposition in February 2014. In response, Russia escalated the conflicts by annexing pro-separatist Crimea and supporting pro-Russian separatists in Donbas, including by means of the direct military interventions in August 2014 and January-February 2015.

Contrary to the claims of respectively the Ukrainian and Western governments and much of the media and the Russian government and the media, there is no evidence of the Ukrainian

genocide of ethnic Russians in separatist-controlled Donbas and the Russian genocide of Ukrainians in Ukraine. But there is various evidence of war crimes, such as summary executions of civilians and POWs by individual soldiers or units of the Russian forces and the neo-Nazi-led Azov and the Georgian Legion. The publicly available evidence suggests that the Russian forces committed most such war crimes, in particular, shooting several dozens of civilians and territorial defense members in Bucha, Similarly, various evidence shows that the absolute majority of civilian casualties resulted from indiscriminate shelling or bombing, overwhelmingly by the Russian forces, typically, in populated areas that were often used for military purposes, primarily by the Ukrainian forces.

The Ukraine-Russia war already resulted in the second largest total military and civilian casualties of a war in Europe since World War Two. It exceeded casualties of the civil war and Russian military interventions in Donbas and other wars in Europe, with the exception of the civil war in Bosnia in the first half of the 1990s. Based on confirmed casualties, during the first year of the war, there were more than 30 thousand Ukrainian forces members killed, at least 16,000 thousand Russian forces members killed, and over 9 thousand Donbas separatist forces members killed. The numbers of wounded were about 4 times higher. Based on civilian casualties documented by the UN, more than 13 thousand civilians were killed during the first year of the war.

Truth also became a casualty of the war in Ukraine. Many claims promoted by the Russian, Donbas separatist, Ukrainian, and Western governments and the media are not supported by evidence. This includes claims that there have been Ukrainian genocide of Russian-speakers in Donbas, the Russian genocide of Ukrainians, the neo-Nazi regime in Ukraine, and

false-flag killings or attacks in Bucha, Mariupol, the Zaporizhzhia nuclear station, and separatist/Russian controlled Donbas.

The outcome of the Ukraine war would determine the future not only of Ukraine but also of the world order. Based on Russian military superiority over Ukraine in terms of the number of weapons and military personnel potential, the most likely outcome of the war ceteris paribus would be a limited military defeat of Ukraine and annexation of significant parts of Eastern and Southern Ukraine by Russia. The chances of the Ukrainian victory are minimal. Such victory would have to involve taking back not only parts of Ukraine annexed by Russia since February 24, 2022, but also a large part of Donbas, which controlled by the separatist DNR and LNR before the Russian invasion, and/or Russian-annexed Crimea. The US and other NATO countries use Ukraine as a client state in a proxy war with Russia and blocked a possibility of a peaceful deal by the beginning of April 2022. Their military, economic, and humanitarian aid, military intelligence, target selection, military advise and planning of military operations enabled Ukraine to extend the war significantly. However, NATO is unlikely to intervene directly in the Ukraine-Russian war because it would involve a war with a nuclear Russia with a real possibility of a nuclear war.

The Ukraine war outcome would also affect Russia, the West, NATO, the EU, and other countries, their position in the world, and the future of the US-led world order. The defeat of Ukraine would also mean the defeat of the US and NATO in a proxy war. The same concerns Russia. Because of such high stakes of the war for Ukraine, Russia, and the US, a dangerous escalation of the war cannot be excluded.

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