



NATIONALISM AND PROXY WARS IN THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINE CRISIS

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ABSTRACT

The assertion by states over authority in regions critical to their perceived absolute and eternal power are often viewed as threats to sovereignty. Such claims can sometimes aim to protect cultural heritage or, at other times, transform into geopolitical obsessions. Russia's invasion of Ukraine represents both an effort to preserve its historical heritage and a manifestation of geopolitical ambition. This study therefore examines the complex interplay of nationalism and geopolitical strategies in the Ukrainian crisis. The study uses the qualitative approach for data analysis. It relies on upon, data gathered through secondary sources, and is reinforced with the argument on the new nationalism theoretical framework of analysis to explore Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The paper recognizes the strategic position of Ukraine for both Russia and the West but argued that the country was, caught between European cultural influence and Soviet legacy, which over the years has been exploited by the "West" to construct artificial nationalist barriers aimed at excluding Russia from Europe's political sphere. Ukraine's ability to navigate between two competing states' security is contingent upon its dominance over several states. The social orientation desired by Ukrainian society is the primary determinant of who will wield this authority. The state(s) that have influence over Ukraine's geopolitics can exert security pressure on the opposing state(s). Thus, Ukraine's geopolitical location serves as the focal point of Eurasian security. Consequently, a competition for survival has arisen, resulting in a debilitating impact, where Russia's intense focus on geopolitical matters is utilized and implemented through many identities. The primary objective is to establish a distinct "Western" Ukraine that is clearly separated from Russia, aligns with European nationalism, and maintains its historical dynamics. Consequently, the war has transformed into a battleground where Ukrainians demonstrate their European identity as a nation. How these events will unfold will depend on how the Ukraine government face Trump's proposition to end the war.

KEYWORDS: Nationalism, Proxy Wars, Ukraine Crisis, Geopolitical Obsession

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INTRODUCTION

Nationalism and national identity are intertwined with the distinguishing characteristics that individuals residing within a country perceive as setting them apart from other nations and bringing them together (Shulman, 2002). The conventional civic and ethnic classifications are established based on affiliation or disassociation, and these characteristics are influenced by the historical recollections of the fundamental components of the nation. Therefore, the statehood process reaches its most vital stage, where the nation's awareness is established, distinguishing it from other states. Since achieving independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine has emerged as the focal point of the political process, where vigorous discussions on national identity will distinguish it from other nations. While other Eastern European countries that were once part of the Soviet Union successfully implemented fully Westernized political programs, Ukraine was unable to achieve this in both political and economic aspects. Due to this factor, the region has undergone a transformation where the Soviet heritage and European boundaries, symbols, legends, and national histories clash intensely. This paper aims to elucidate the nationalist underpinnings behind Russia's declaration of war on Ukraine on

February 24, 2022, with the sole objective of denazifying the region.

This work examines the conflict between European culture and the Soviet inheritance rooted in Ukrainian nationalism. It explores the development of Ukrainian nationalism from the interwar period to the current day, and its relationship with the European political order.

POST-BREST-LITOVSK UKRAINE

After the conclusion of the First World War, Soviet Russia and Germany convened their inaugural official summit on December 22, 1917. During this meeting, Lenin expressed his belief that they would face a challenging and persistent struggle, as imperialism would employ all of its resources to combat the Soviets. The peace process ended as Lenin had foreseen. After the negotiations, Soviet Russia entered into a peace deal with Germany, leading to its withdrawal from the First World War. This had significant historical ramifications. The nascent Soviet Union's distinctive position in both domestic and international affairs compelled it to withdraw from Germany and acquiesce to severe peace terms (Wheeler, 1938). Consequently, following the signing of the Brest-Litovsk Agreement on 3 March 1918, Germany gained control over Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and certain regions of Belarus (Bekcan, 2013). Additionally, the independence of Finland, Ukraine (within its ethnic boundaries), and Georgia was officially acknowledged.



Figure 1: The New Political Situation After Brest-Litovsk.
Source (Wheeler-Bennett, 1940)

As a result of this deal, Russia experienced significant fragmentation and found itself surrounded by German economic and political influences. Germany justified its presence in non-Russian countries by eliminating all signs of Bolshevism, asserting that they were there solely as rescues rather than conquerors (Wheeler-Bennett, 1940, p. 97).

In addition to posing a significant challenge for Soviet Russia, this pact also gave the Allied Powers a legitimate reason to enforce economic isolation measures on Russia (Bulatov, 2011, p. 34). In addition, Germany and Austria both established settlements in the People’s Republic of Ukraine, viewing it as a source of abundant food to alleviate the hunger of their populations (Kenez, 2006). A substantial German and Austrian military force advanced towards the Ukrainian People’s

Republic with the purpose of gathering the pre-arranged food, as stipulated in a confidential protocol. Through the coup, the Germans orchestrated the replacement of the Ukrainian Republic’s administration with General Pavlo Skoropadsky, who was bestowed the title of “hetman” and was known for his peaceful conservative monarchist beliefs. This was done to ensure that the situation would remain unchanged. Following the central powers’ collapse in the war during the autumn of 1918, Ukraine was forced to evacuate. By 1919, the country became the epicenter of a violent civil war between the pro- and anti-Bolshevik Whites and Reds. The Ukrainian Republican Army actively participated in the conflicts involving both the red and the white forces, as the Ukrainian people perceived these conflicts as a civil war.

The recognition of the "Ukraine" vision by the Ukrainians in both armies led to this outcome (Yekelchyk, 2015, p. 42). In 1920, the Bolsheviks emerged victorious against the White Army on the Ukrainian mainland. Following this, despite the continuous fight in the Crimean Peninsula, the Ukrainian army retreated towards the territories under Polish governance (Moffat, 2015).

Several endeavors have been made thus far to establish Ukraine, which have existed simultaneously, been proclaimed, or ceased to exist (Ianevs'kyi, 2003). The Ukrainian People's Republic existed from 7 November 1917 to 28 April 1918. It was initially part of Russia but later gained independence. The Ukrainian State existed from 29 April to 15 November 1918. The West Ukrainian People's Republic existed from 18 October 1918 to 21 January 1919. The Ukrainian People's Republic existed from 26 December 1918 to 21 January 1919 and from 16 July 1919 to 20 November 1920. The Ukrainian Soviet Republic existed from 12 December 1917 to July 1918, and the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic existed from 6 January 1919 to December 1919 and from February to May 1920. In addition, it is possible to include local institutions in the list. The Donetsk Soviet Republic and Kryvyi Rih (27 December 1917 - 19 March 1918) were part of the Socialist Soviet Republic. The Odesa Soviet Republic existed from January 3 to March 13, 1918. The Tavria Socialist Soviet Republic lasted from 19 March to 30 April 1918, while the Galician Socialist Soviet Republic was active from 15 July to 21 September 1920 (Kasianov, 1978, pp. 76-77).

From 1917 to 1920, the Bolsheviks and the Soviet Union faced difficulties in fully asserting their authority over the entire territory of Ukraine. The lack of reciprocal response from the Ukrainian social foundation of Soviet power can be identified as the cause for this scenario. According to later declarations made by the Soviet government, the Ukrainian People's Republic had similar goals and methods in domestic policy as the Bolsheviks, despite having fewer supporters in the Ukrainian social base compared to the Soviet power base (Musial, 2015, pp. 324-325). This can be proven to be the primary motivation behind Soviet Russia's efforts to acquire Ukrainian land. On November 15, 1917, the Bolsheviks released a declaration called the "Rights of the Peoples of Russia." This declaration, signed by Lenin, Stalin, and Bukharin, promised all nationalities in Russia

the freedom to determine their own fate, including the right to break away and form independent states. The fact that they rejected the announcement of the Ukrainian People's Republic can be seen as evidence of this stance. This can be attributed to Stalin's ideological stance on the Russian political structure. During Stalin's rule over the Soviet Union, Ukraine held a significant position, both in terms of ideology and in terms of political and economic importance. The re-establishment of food security, utilization of coal and steel resources in Ukrainian territories, and the strategic advantage of Ukraine's Black Sea coast for the Russian army were highly advantageous for young Soviet Russia and its rulers, particularly in the post-war period.

NEW POLITICAL ORDER IN EUROPE AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The Brest-Litovsk peace agreement, reached in March 1918, was a significant turning point in the First World War and European political dynamics. It was a crucial moment for the Bolsheviks and Germany. The pact, characterized by Soviet Russian Diplomat G. Chicherin as a peace accord that revolutionary Russia reluctantly accepted, was in effect prior to the Locarno Pacts when Europe was divided into three fundamental components.

Regarding the British, winners, losers, and Russia... Due to Russia's influence, it is necessary for us to establish a security policy. The primary objective of Bolshevik Russia and its allied elements, even in the face of defeat, was to ensure that the burdens of the post-World War I era were so burdensome that nations would be deterred from initiating another war. This was aimed at preventing a recurrence of the devastating consequences experienced by countries during the war. In the aftermath of World War I, Bolshevik Russia and its allied forces, despite suffering defeat, sought to exhaust the war's obligations to deter any future conflicts and prevent countries from experiencing the devastating consequences of war again.

The pre-war equilibrium among the 5 countries was altered as a result of the new European political structure, which signifies the significant toll of the war in the peace treaties. With the concept of self-determination in mind, the recently formed nations situated between the boundaries of Germany and Soviet Russia were anticipating confrontation with one other,

despite their planned vulnerability to both states. In addition, although the USA first played a significant role in the war, it subsequently distanced itself from Europe, while Britain also became increasingly alienated in the aftermath of the war. As a result, France, one of the parties involved in the new distribution of power, developed a lasting apprehension towards Germany (Kissenger, 2014, pp. 97-98).

France's political position in the new European order has been influenced by its prioritization of security and its political endeavors to avert a potential war (Lebedeva, 2019). France's political attitude had a considerable impact on the subsequent balance of power and alliances. The foundation of the "League of Nations," which was seen as a significant factor in the system of interstate relations in terms of geography, did not adequately address France's security concerns. Prior to the signing of the Locarno accord in 1925, France's foreign policy was primarily focused on the European strategy, with a particular emphasis on addressing its security concerns. Furthermore, the most significant political advancement during the time following the war was the formation of the League of Nations. The USA, while leading the formation of a new understanding of security, did not actively participate in the process of establishing policies for the continuity of peace. Despite the need for states to work together towards the noble goal of achieving peace through idealism, this understanding reveals a state system characterized by anarchy, where no state trusts another.

As E. H. Carr (2015) argues in his theory of realism, each state acts independently and single-mindedly in pursuit of its own security. This situation has led to the establishment of a security system within Europe's new political structure, where the actions taken by each state to ensure security are only apparent when they implement their own security policies in line with their own objectives. Consequently, Germany and Japan withdrew from this organization mainly due to the League of Nations' policies, which were relatively restrictive and far from being effective solutions. The USSR, facing significant challenges in terms of internal and international recognition, was excluded from European politics. The conduct of France and England, who pursued colonies through the colonization and mandate system, ran counter to the principles of the Society (Polat,

2020, p. 1964). These factors contributed to the dysfunctionality of the newly founded League of Nations and expedited the process leading to the Second World War.

Another determinant influencing the formulation of security measures in Europe following the First World War was the political ideology influenced by scientific ideas. The concept of the "organic state," which had a significant impact on Germany's post-war political structure, was developed into a systematic political ideology by Ratzel (1844-1904) and Kjellen (1864-1922), drawing on the intellectual legacy of Carl Vogt (1817-1895). It was also employed as a tool in government policies with the involvement of Haushofer. Additionally, rival nations made substantial contributions to the discourse on Eastern Europe's strategy during the Second World War, incorporating inventive methodologies influenced by their own ideologies. Mackinder and Spykman were prominent academics. Significant debates on the future of Europe were presented in both classical Continental Europe and classical British geopolitics, and these debates later influenced state policies. These debates have had a significant impact on the future of Europe, Ukraine, and the territories formerly belonging to the USSR.

The concepts of Lebensraum, autarky, and all-out war discourses, which were popularized during the Haushofer period, reflect the political ideology of establishing superiority through the control of living space and the pursuit of self-sufficiency. These ideas also signify a significant shift in the thinking of war. During this time, the dominance-focused ideologies of Anglo-US geopolitics compelled Germany to develop its own doctrines that aligned with its unique dynamics, which ultimately elevated Haushofer's prominence. Lebensraum, a concept rooted in the organismic theory of the state, has its origins in the German political tradition and was developed by Ratzel and Kjellen. It was initially implemented as a state policy and later adopted as a military strategy with Haushofer.

According to this thesis, Haushofer believed that Germany's natural growth towards both the East and West was unavoidable. Consequently, he held the belief that Germany should exert control over the USSR and dismantle the British naval supremacy.

Based on his theory of domination, Haushofer made a prediction that the German hegemony region would naturally expand and that Germany would need to reconcile with the USSR. He urged Germany against engaging in a two-front conflict with the USSR in the East and France in the West (Kelly, 2016, p. 51).

UKRAINE BEFORE WORLD WAR II

The North American media primarily assessed the European occupation during World War II based on the nations that were invaded by the Nazis, the populations that were subjected to terror by the Gestapo, the arbitrary killings, and the existence of concentration camps. According to the same media, individuals who were considered “good” consistently opposed the Nazis, but those who were deemed “bad” collaborated with them. Although the portrayal of the Nazis in this aspect of the conflict created the belief that they were enemies of everyone and everything, it is emphasized that the morally just thing to do was to courageously combat the Nazis. It is important to highlight that certain Eastern European ethnic groups, such as Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, and Western Ukrainians, faced persecution from both the Nazis and the Soviet Army (Boshky, 1986, p. 6).

Prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, Ukraine was divided among the Ukrainian SSR within the Soviet Union, Poland, Romania, and Czechoslovakia. According to Zeman (1989, p. 80), approximately five million Ukrainians resided in the Galicia and Volhynia region of Poland. Despite comprising 13.8% of the Polish population and being the largest minority in the country according to the 1931 census, Ukrainians faced several restrictions as a result of Polish nationalism (Subtelny, 1991). This circumstance significantly influenced the aspirations of the Ukrainians to build a sovereign nation. By the time the 1930s were nearing, the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) had repressed the liberal UNDO, which was the dominant political

party in Ukraine. The OUN (Orhanisatsiya Ukrains'kykh Natsionalistiv, Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists) was established in 1929 and became the primary political organization for Ukrainians in Poland during the late 1930s (Marple, 1992). Furthermore, this political party, which advocated for Ukraine's independence and had chauvinistic and often fascist inclinations, was comparable to the political groups in other Eastern European nations during that time (Bilinsky, 1965, p. 87). The Ukrainian struggle for independence persisted during World War II, with conflicts including Poland, Germany, and Soviet Russia. However, these independence movements mostly concentrated on regions with a high concentration of ethnic Ukrainians.

On August 23, 1939, the foreign ministers of Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin, namely Joachim von Ribbentrop and Viacheslav Molotov, entered into a non-aggression pact. Through this pact, Hitler guaranteed that the invasion of Poland would not lead to a conflict with the USSR. Additionally, with a confidential agreement, Stalin was assured that the Soviet army had the freedom to invade the Eastern region of post-Versailles Poland, which was home to over five million Ukrainians (Isajiw, et al, 2013, p 22). The Molotov-Von Ribbentrop Pact was perceived as a treacherous deal by the Polish, but it was executed as an accord for the Ukrainians, resulting in Western Ukraine being part of the Ukrainian state (Snyder, 1999, p. 89). In its publication on 14 September 1939, the Pravda newspaper reported that the Polish government had mistreated the Ukrainian and White Russian minorities residing in Poland. This mistreatment, according to Pravda, provided justification for the Soviet Union's subsequent invasion of the occupied Polish territory, which occurred three days later. Pravda also stated that there were approximately eight million Ukrainians and White Russians living in Poland at that time. Although the USSR authorities justified the invasion as a moral obligation to support their Ukrainian and Belarusian compatriots in Poland, the USSR press referred to it as the “Great Liberation of the Ukrainian Brotherhood” (Map 2).



Figure 2. Occupation of Poland by Germany and Soviet Russia
Source (Gross, 1988, p. 2)

The initial Soviet invasion that took place from 1939 to 1941 led to the forced removal of the Polish intellectual and influential class to Siberia and Kazakhstan, severely damaging the governance of Polish society. The Ukrainian nationalists and the Polish saw this circumstance as an opportunity, and the new borders became a target for them (Snyder, 1999, p. 91). The cause of this situation is the repressive policies of the Polish government against Ukrainian culture prior to the Soviet occupation. Poland, adopting the slogan “Poland for Polish” shortly before the end of the First World War, implemented a policy of denying political and cultural rights to its minority groups, which account for approximately 30% of its population. This policy included severe measures against Ukrainians, who form a

significant portion of the minority population (Subtelny, 1991). The Ukrainian government’s approach towards its own citizens was changed when Ukrainian nationalists took advantage of the Soviet occupation, leading to killings against the Polish population (Buduwycz, 1983, p. 473).

SOVIET OCCUPATION OF UKRAINE (SEPTEMBER 17, 1939-41)

The Soviet Union initiated the invasion of Ukraine on September 17, 1939, which endured for a duration of twenty-one months and necessitated their withdrawal due to the “Barbarossa” operation. The Soviet occupation aimed to “win hearts,” but it resulted in the destruction of Ukrainian cultural and economic institutions.

The regime's oppressive policies, including numerous arrests and deportations, systematically dismantled the progress made by Ukrainian society in the face of the Polish government's oppression (Marples, 1985, p. 159). While it was widely believed that the local population welcomed the Soviet soldiers in 1939, there were also opinions indicating that the Ukrainians merely accepted the promise of being "rescued from the oppression of Polish oppression". This was the primary propaganda used by the Soviets against the Ukrainians (Bilinsky, 1965, p. 85). In order to legitimize the occupation, the Soviet regime demonstrated its intention to assist the Ukrainian and Belarusian populations by sending a Ukrainian general to the Galicia region, which had a high concentration of Ukrainians. This was done with the aim of preserving the official language of Western Ukraine, enhancing the education system, promoting Ukrainianization in universities, and improving health services. The proposition to seize the properties of the affluent landowners in Poland and distribute them among the rural population held great importance (Doroshenko, 1975, pp. 741-744). While the Soviet mentality was responsible for this predicament, it also led to Ukrainian peasants, who were interested in pursuing farming as a profession, adopting a wary attitude towards the Soviet authority.

In spite of its attempts at reform in Ukraine, the Soviet administration concurrently implemented measures to suppress the political expression of Western Ukrainians. As a result of the rise in arrests and exiles, as well as the

repression, the remaining politicians were compelled to escape to German-occupied Poland. Additionally, the major centrist and somewhat liberal political parties in Ukraine were disbanded (Subtelny, 1991). The year 1940 represents a time when the intensity of strain was particularly heightened. During this period, it became evident that the limits had transformed into acts of violence. In the beginning, the Soviet administration expelled politicians, industrialists, landowners, merchants, bureaucrats, judges, lawyers, retired officers, and priests whom they believed were connected to the Nazi authorities. However, this soon evolved into a completely arbitrary practice, where anyone who was even remotely suspected was targeted for elimination (Hryciuk, 2005, p. 2). In 1941, the occupation entered a phase of widespread deportation, resulting in the loss of thousands of lives in several killings. With the initiation of the German-Soviet war, the NKVD (Naródnyy komissariát vnutrennikh del)

The internal affairs department executed a significant number of convicts it had apprehended on suspicion between June 22nd and June 29th, 1941, without considering the severity of their crimes, their previous convictions, or their status as detainees awaiting questioning (Picture 1). The cities of Lviv, Sambir, Stanyslaviv, Zolochiv, Chortkiv, and Dobromyl witnessed a significant number of casualties, with around 1,500, 1,200, 2,500, 800, 800, and 500 victims respectively. According to Subtelny (1991), some 10,000 captives in Galicia and approximately 5,000 in Volhynia, specifically in the towns of Rivne and Lutske, were slain to such an extent that their identities could not be determined.



Figure 3. The corpses of prisoners killed in the garden of Brygidki prison in early July 1941

Source. (Struve, 2015)

The Ukrainians were driven by a desire for revenge and a feeling of insecurity in their collective memory due to the horrors left behind by the Soviets during their retreat. The advent of the German soldiers into Ukraine was marked by enduring festivities that continue to be discussed to this day.

GERMANY'S SOVIET INVASION OF UKRAINE, 1941-44

Without a doubt, the concept of "Lebensraum" was deeply rooted in the ideology of Germany and its precursor, and was a key element in Hitler's plan to carry out an operation towards the east. This idea, rooted in the 18th century's organismic view of the state, and passed down to the 19th century, characterized the state's expansionism as a crucial requirement. Drawing on Darwinian natural selection, the state was perceived as a living entity, and this perspective gave rise to an organic political ideology that aimed to sustain the state's existence.

Within this political ideology, which forms the fundamental belief in the extension of the German state system, three crucial factors were identified for the takeover of Soviet Russia. One of the parameters was the Nazi ideology's perspective on the Slavic People as a "inferior race." This viewpoint led to the development of a policy called Lebensraum, which involved progressively removing the national identity and eradicating the Slavic peoples, or using them to further German interests (Gross, 1979). Another factor that contributed to the initiation of the invasion was the conviction that the Soviet territories were ideal for agricultural colonization. Hitler regarded the villages as the epitome of national purity and power, attributing this belief to the prevailing circumstances of his day. Conversely, he held the view that large towns fostered corruption (Heim, 2016). Hitler believed that the Soviet Union might assist German peasants in preserving their fertility and conservative values due to this assumption.

The ultimate worry revolved around the conviction that the establishment of the Nazi nation-state can only be achieved by physical conquest. Hitler perceived the expansion of Germany as an inherent outcome of the organic state. Hitler's belief in Germany's demographic expansion beyond its borders served as the legal basis for the German people to assert their ownership and utilization of Ukraine and the other territories in Eastern Europe.

During this time, Germany was developing its political ideology for the war, while Ukraine was still grappling with the traumatic effects of nationalism that occurred between the First and Second World Wars. Following the commencement of the "Barbarossa" military campaign, the Germans conquered Ukraine, which then became the largest Soviet republic under their control. The majority of the war was fought on Ukrainian territory until 1944. In this particular geographical region, which encompasses 42% of the territory of the USSR (as depicted in Map 4), over 700 cities and towns, as well as more than 28 thousand villages, were completely devastated. Additionally, the war resulted in the loss of 1.4 million soldiers who

either perished on the front lines or were taken as prisoners of war. Furthermore, a total of 600,000 Jews, along with 6.8 million individuals in total, tragically lost their lives. In addition, almost 2 million individuals were sent to Germany as "forced laborers" (Dawidowicz, 1975; Prociuk, 1973).

There are numerous factors contributing to Germany's swift advancement on Ukrainian soil and the subsequent retreat of Soviet forces. The crucial aspect to highlight here is the response of Ukrainian inhabitants to the occupation in light of German advancement (Picture 2). Due to the swift retreat of the Soviet army, a significant portion of cattle from state collective farms in Soviet Ukraine, amounting to around 45%, was transported to Russia. This was part of Stalin's strategy to eliminate anything that could not be evacuated, including factories, food stores, and livestock. Furthermore, following the departure of the Ukrainian intellectuals, the inhabitants of Ukraine were left to confront the German army alone. Furthermore, the NKVD's execution of tens of thousands of captives during the Soviet retreat, along with the extensive devastation left in its wake, eradicated the already feeble mistrust that the Ukrainians harbored towards the Soviet regime (Krakivski Visti, 1941).



Figure 4. Local Residents Greet German Soldiers June 30, 1941

Source. (Struve, 2015)

Following the Soviet army's conquest of Poland in 1939, a number of Western Ukrainians migrated to the German-occupied side of Poland and engaged in political activities alongside German political and military officials. During the German occupation of Soviet Russia, the presence of the German soldiers was met with a warm reception in certain cities in West Ukraine (Dallin, 1981). The Germans granted authorization for the establishment of the "Ukraine Central Committee" (Ukriains'kyi tsentral'nyi kompit or UTsK) in Krakow. This decision played a significant role in the development of Ukrainian nationalists' belief in Ukrainian sovereignty, which was based on the idea of ethnic homogeneity. As a result of this circumstance, Ukrainians took action to expel Poles and Jews from the "ethnographic lands" of Ukraine by enlisting in the German army (Khromeychuk, 2016).

The collaboration between the organization of Ukrainian nationalists and the German authorities fostered the growth of the concept of an autonomous Ukraine within the realm of aggressive political ideology. This condition facilitated the implementation of activities aligned with Hitler's ideology, which aimed to advance the German agenda at the expense of other minority groups residing in Ukraine. These nationalist movements, which will have a significant impact on the political history of modern Ukraine, have given rise to their own legendary figures. These nationalist heroes were emblematic figures in the efforts of Ukrainian nationalists against Russia in modern Ukrainian history, fostering unity among the people. The Ukrainian nationalists' acts during the Second World War were characterized by a nationalist ideology that embraced mass killings, which can be accurately described as "massacres" in historical terms.

The famous historian Snyder (2003) explains the situation of Ukrainian nationalists by claiming that *"because the Ukrainian state had to be established [...] Ukrainian nationalists had a political reason to cooperate with the Germans and to encourage Ukrainian youth to join the bodies of Nazi power"*.

POST-SECOND WORLD WAR: THE EUROPEAN POLITICAL SYSTEM AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH UKRAINE

Despite the Germans' unconditional surrender, the political influence provided by the Second World War continues to have an impact

today. The war, which led to the rise of two major global powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, had a profound impact on the political landscape of 20th-century Europe, resulting in significant restructuring. The Second World War in Europe resulted in a significant imbalance of power in the European political structure, rather than only causing destruction. During the pre-war time, England, France, and Germany were able to effectively address any disruptions in the political order. However, in the post-war period, Europe lacked the necessary ability to fulfill this role. Consequently, the political rivalry between the Soviet Union and the USA played out in the context of European balance of power politics. Therefore, the political process following the Second World War occurred based on the premise that the USA would be granted influence in the Soviet Union's triumph in Europe. Kissinger (2014) asserts that Russia is geographically close enough to Europe to have a shared cultural repertoire, but remains distant from the historical patterns of the continent.

The United States and European nations, who were compelled to adhere to the Soviet Union's requisitions during the Second World War, were not fully cognizant of the Soviets' intention to exploit those demands as a political advantage once the war concluded. The post-war political environment in Iran serves as the most evident manifestation of this fact. In 1942, a pathway was created in Iran to facilitate the transportation of military resources to the Soviet Union, which was engaged in a conflict with Germany. According to Article 5 of the agreement, the corridor formed by the British and Soviet occupation of Iran had to be vacated within six months after the end of the war. Following the formal conclusion of the war on September 2, 1945, the United States and Britain refrained from taking any action in Iran until March 2, 1946, when the Soviet Union withdrew its troops. During this time, they provided assistance to local forces in order to establish a communist regime in Iran. Hence, the Soviet Union pursued a strategy of attaining economic advantages by means of Iran (Armaoğlu, 2021, pp. 322-324). This political and military crisis is the initial political repercussion of the Soviet Union's explicit lack of trust in the alliance. Understanding the motivations behind the Soviet Union's stance during the Second World War is feasible. The Soviet Union bolstered the Allied states' gradual advance on the Western Front, intending to

alleviate their own burden on the battlefield, while also aiming to exhaust the Germans. The conclusion of the war transformed the partnership into a restricted alliance throughout the post-war era. Subsequently, as the partnership dissolved entirely, the political expression of polarization became evident in global politics.

The political system of Europe following the Second World War demonstrates the policymaking process in collaboration with the USA, characterized by a profound lack of trust towards the Soviet Union. The United States of America assumes the dual role as both the author and overseer of this emerging political structure. The political concept of the balance of power during the Cold War era dictated that the only viable alliance to counter Soviet hegemony was with the United States. This implies that the political order policies established by the USA at its core are implemented without any conditions by all parties involved. The Soviet Union, situated on the opposite side of the spectrum from the USA, was influenced by a policy of establishing political colonies that were deemed justified following a victorious war that resulted in significant devastation. When Soviet policies were permitted to infiltrate to a certain degree, a specific issue arose. Europe's concerns stem from the lack of national borders in Soviet ideology. Conversely, the USA implements regulations that aim to restrict and control this worldview within specific limits. If Soviet policies strayed beyond the boundaries established by the USA, it seemed as though a full-scale war had erupted. In reference to the political structure of Europe following World War II, as described by Kissinger (2014), the intellectual framework mentioned above was reconfigured so that the United States took the lead in this collaborative effort, rather than the member countries of the alliance working together to maintain equilibrium. Hence, any opposition to the Soviet ideology was clandestinely backed, operating covertly beyond the boundaries that the Soviets desired to maintain.

In the context of the new post-war political order in Europe, Ukraine was not recognized as an independent country and no specific policy was implemented in this regard. In order for this event to occur, it is anticipated that the dissolution of the Soviet Union will be necessary. However, during the Yalta conference in 1945, Stalin compelled Britain and the USA to agree to the annexation of

nearly all of Galicia and Volhynia, regions predominantly inhabited by Ukrainians, into Soviet territory. Consequently, the Curzon Line was officially recognized as the demarcation line between Soviet Ukraine and Poland. As a result, the city of Lviv, which holds significant cultural significance for Poland, remained within the Soviet border. Stalin's official justification for establishing this boundary was that the Ukrainians should join their brethren in Soviet Ukraine (Subtelny, 2009, p. 484). However, Stalin was cognizant of the fact that acquiring Western Ukraine would confer a substantial strategic edge not only over Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, but more crucially, over Eastern Europe as a whole.

Following this procedure, the Ukrainian regions underwent a deliberate Sovietization effort, which involved implementing artificial population control measures under the Soviet government. Additionally, the Russian population in the region was deliberately and substantially boosted. Therefore, although the division between East and West Ukraine ceased to exist politically, the diverse structure of Ukraine was transformed into a structure consisting of two nations, which still has an impact today, particularly due to the presence of significant Russian minority settlements. Nevertheless, the final incorporation of Ukraine into the Soviet Union did not hinder the American-led bloc from interacting with Ukrainian nationalists (CIA Archive, 1950).

THE DISSOLUTION OF THE SOVIET UNION, THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MODERN UKRAINE, AND THE ENSUING CONFLICT.

In the late 1980s, the central authority of the Soviet Union started to diminish its control over the periphery republics due to two distinct factors. These criteria exerted both direct and indirect pressure on the Soviet government, operating in a "bottom-up" and "top-down" manner. In the instances of the Baltic republics, Georgia, and Armenia, the general populace applied pressure on the ruling class through large-scale protests and voting, enabling the effective expression of the desire for independence. In the context of top-down pressure, the elites in Central Asia, lacking strong pro-independence sentiments, opted to engage in negotiations with Moscow to secure greater economic control. As a result, they were able to achieve slow advancements. Following the demise of the Soviet Union, these states acknowledged independence as a compulsory

course of action. The political situation in Ukraine is more intricate than both parameters. Ukraine has adopted a cautious strategic approach towards achieving independence, mostly because of the lack of strong nationalistic sentiments and minimal external pressure. Initially, the communist elites chose to renegotiate the Treaty of Union in order to restore the Soviet Union as a voluntary federation. However, after the failed August 1991 coup by the Soviet rigoristic, who wanted to reverse the reform process, the Ukrainian communist elites strongly opposed renewing the Union. They joined forces with the opposition and decisively pursued Ukraine's exit from the Soviet Union (Wolczuk, 2001, p. 60).

Following attaining independence, Ukraine, along with other nations in the post-Soviet region, embarked on a new political trajectory during the post-Communist transition era. During the post-Soviet era, several Eastern and Central European nations successfully achieved European integration between 2004-2007. However, Ukraine, despite making substantial progress in politics and economics, was unable to finish this transition phase. The primary catalyst for this was the Ukrainian concept inside Russia's political perspective. Although the Russian governing and civic elites were compelled to acknowledge the independence of the "brother" republics, Ukraine held a unique cultural and geopolitical importance in the Russian mindset. In addition, it was inconceivable for numerous Russians that "Little Russia" - Ukraine - was not a constituent of Russia. In his speech, Russian President Vladimir Putin acknowledged the separatist governments in Eastern Ukraine, emphasizing that Ukraine is not only a neighboring country, but also an integral component of Russia's history, culture, and spiritual realm. These individuals are not only our comrades, relatives, coworkers, and friends, but they also share blood and family links with us. This highlights the depth of Ukraine's connection with Russia.

The robust yet intangible Ukrainian geopolitical influence within the Russian ideological framework during that era fostered a network of social, economic, and cultural connections that grew stronger throughout the Soviet era. The political and administrative bureaucracies of both countries were predominantly directed by Ukrainian leaders or individuals with Ukrainian origins, such as Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev, Konstantin

Chernenko, and others. The political control of this familial connection lies in Moscow, but the economic control demonstrates Russia's integration with Ukraine (Magocsi, 2010, p. 726). Undoubtedly, the unexpected emergence of Ukraine as an autonomous entity apart from the Soviet Union is a surprising development to the international community. In his address to the Kyiv legislature on August 1, 1991, US President George H. W. Bush made a clear distinction between freedom and independence. He emphasized that the United States would not assist those who advocated for "suicidal nationalism," stating that Americans would not back efforts to replace a distant tyranny with a local despotism (Daahlborg, 1991). The remark, which implied that Ukraine was not considered an independent country in the geopolitical plans of the United States, was subsequently dubbed "Chicken Kyiv". As a political consequence of the interconnectedness of these two structures, Russia implemented a policy of not officially acknowledging the borders of Ukraine until 1999. Nevertheless, the 1999 accord illustrated the prevailing acceptance of separation over integration, with both countries acknowledging this reality. However, due to the inability to fully resolve the issue of controlling the strategic Soviet heritage, the final separation agreement did not provide a guarantee. As a result, the subsequent political process between the two nations was built on an unsteady foundation. Russia's perception of the creation of Ukraine as an independent country, together with the signing of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum and the 1999 Friendship Agreements, as a geopolitical error during Putin's tenure, has become evident. These agreements aim to prevent Russia from encroaching on Ukraine's borders in the future. There are numerous examples that support Russia's doubts in its own manner. For instance, when the Warsaw Pact disbanded and the satellite republics fully aligned with Europe and NATO, there was a geopolitical risk that Ukraine may adopt similar practices. In his 2019 publication, Brzezinski asserted that if the Baltic States and Poland were not included, only Ukraine and the Soviets would be able to pursue their goal of establishing dominance over the non-Slavic populations in the southern and southeastern regions of the Eurasian empire. When we consider the other perspective, it becomes apparent that an independent Ukraine, aligned with Western

values, would undermine Russia's influence in Europe and result in a loss of authority over Crimea and the Black Sea. Brzezinski (2019) also stated that the loss of Ukraine greatly restricted Russia's geostrategic choices.

THE GENESIS OF MODERN UKRAINIAN NATIONALISM

Following the disintegration of multi-ethnic empires after the First World War, the concept of eugenics has gained significant prominence in European political discourse (Turda, 2007). This trend is seen in various European countries (Turda and Weindling, 2007; Felder and Weindling, 2013). Eugenics has emerged as a feasible strategy for fledgling states or nations undergoing social stratification, particularly due to its tight association with the modernization programs of developing nation-states. The current far-right nationalism in Ukraine has influenced its views on eugenic rhetoric based on historical ethnicity and identity.

The implementation of eugenics-based programs by various nationalist ideologies in Europe, along with the organizations that promoted these beliefs as a political force, allowed Ukrainian nationalists of that time to develop intellectual mechanisms that fostered national and ethnic awareness. The introduction of eugenics into Ukrainian nationalist ideology in the early 20th century resulted in the erosion of more moderate

nationalist factions. This shift brought extremist leaders, who embraced extreme beliefs and are today hailed as "heroes," to prominence. (Rudling, 2021) The partial invasion of Poland by Germany and the Soviet Union in September 1939 specifically propelled West Ukrainian Nationalist agitation to prominence and facilitated its organization. Various nationalist groups rallied around Bandera, especially during the period when Stepan Bandera was released from prison and the subsequent organizing efforts took place.

Both Oleksandr Shumkov and Mykola Lebed were convicted of terrorism and murder and sentenced to life imprisonment. Shumkov lived from 1909 to 1959, while Lebed's birth year is uncertain, however he lived from either 1909 or 1910 until 1998. Kraków swiftly emerged as the central hub for Ukrainian nationalists. Simultaneously, the German armies provided assistance to these formations, and Ukrainian nationalists participated both as members of the German military and as militia forces in anticipation of Operation Barbarossa (Picture 3) (Struve, 2015). The majority of Ukrainian nationalists who served in the German army, as well as members of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), actively participated in different police and militia groups. They collaborated with the security and intelligence agencies of Nazi Germany, and extensive research has shown their involvement in the Nazi genocide, particularly in providing assistance (Katchanovski, 2013; Khromeychuk, 2015).



Source. (Struve, 2015, p. 304)

Figure 5 Ukrainian Militia serving under the German Army (The person on the militia card is seen in the left picture (with a hat) in the middle and is the second person on the right)

The Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) played a significant role in post-Soviet Ukraine, particularly after the “Orange Revolution” (Katchanovski, 2015), becoming major political problems in contemporary Ukrainian history. During the period from 2005 to 2010, Viktor Yushchenko, while holding power, took steps to establish the legitimacy of the OUN and UPA, in collaboration with his political bloc “Our Ukraine” party and other nationalist groups. During this period, the prevailing narrative depicted the OUN and UPA as a large-scale liberation movement that fought against both the Soviet Union and Germany in order to secure Ukraine's independence. Consequently, the leaders of both organizations were officially recognized as national heroes. In accordance with this approach, UPA High Commander Roman Shukhevych and Stepan Bandera, the leader of the primary faction of the OUN (OUN-B), were individually bestowed with the distinction of national hero in 2007 and 2010, as documented by Katchanovski (2013).

Consequently, distinct personalities were formed to foster a sense of national identity among Ukrainians during the process of Westernization and to equip them with the valor of previous conflicts for future battles.

The Euro-maidan events (2013-2014) in Ukraine gave rise to a multitude of novel political and social phenomena, which were primarily inspired by the views of individuals who were hailed as heroes. The most well-structured battalion is the “Azov” battalion, named after the Sea of Azov. It formed in the late spring of 2014 as a voluntary armed unit with some government support. This occurred in response to Russia's covert paramilitary intervention in Eastern Ukraine (Umland, 2019). Although there are other volunteer groups with a history of far-right ideology, the Azov battalion stands out as the most distinctive and representative organization among Ukraine's newly formed armed units.

The Azov battalion has transformed into a military organization comprising individuals from national movements, including football hooligans,

as well as members of ultra-nationalist and right-wing groups. In 2014, the group, which participated in successful operations against the pro-Russian separatist territories, became associated with the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine (Golubov, 2014). The initial symbol of Azov comprises the Latin letters "I" and "N" (representing National Idea) overlaid on one another, reflecting the former emblem of the Social-National Party of Ukraine and the official logo of the SNA/PU. In addition to its literal interpretation, the insignia serves as a reflection of the "wolf hook" (Wolfsangel in German) utilized by the SS division "Das Reich" and the Dutch SS division "Landstorm Nederland" in the course of the Second World War. The logo of the Azov Battalion features the Black Sun picture, which serves as a symbol of the "Nation Idea" and represents the political ideology of the battalion within the context of Ukrainian history. The resemblance between Azov's wolf hook and far-right emblems from other countries and historical periods is not only coincidence (Umland, 2019).

The presence of far-right nationalism in irregular and semi-regular units since 2014, particularly in Western Ukraine, is driven by accredited organizations. This nationalism has a hybrid structure that is rooted in the political thought infrastructure of the Second World War. The study of the 2009 and 2013 KIIS Surveys demonstrates that public sentiments towards OUN-B, UPA, and Bandera are notably robust in Western Ukraine, with much greater intensity in Galicia and Volhynia. According to the study, the OUN-B leader had the lowest level of popularity in the Crimea and Donbas regions (Katchanovski, 2015). The military conduct of the organizations that emerged as a consequence of this political ideology in Ukraine's evolving political system also differs based on the regions of the nation. IX. Russian Analysis on Ukrainian Nationalism and the Conflict

Following Russia's commencement of a comprehensive invasion of Ukraine, the "denazification" strategy persisted by means of propaganda targeting the dismantling of the institutions associated with the recollections of Ukrainian nationalist organizations OUN, UPA, and OUN-B. These organizations have gained notoriety for their involvement in the killing of civilians, espousing an antisemitic ideology, and collaborating with Nazi Germany. Contrarily, Putin characterized Stepan Bandera, the leader of the

Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), as someone who collaborated with the Nazis and committed war crimes. He regarded the declaration of Bandera as a national hero as an effort to eliminate the recognition of genuine patriots and victors from the recollection of younger generations.

Putin's critique of Ukrainian nationalism stems from his disapproval of the systematic eradication of cultural elements by both the populace and the government in their efforts to establish a national identity during and after the Euromaidan or Revolution of Honor events. Stepan Bandera, who was formerly considered heroic, gained public attention through the involvement of far-right parties during the Maidan protests. This trend persisted as the Ukrainian government imposed limitations on Russian culture. The Russian aggression in Ukraine was fueled by the ability of far-right nationalist groups to mobilize public support and carry out actions that posed a threat to the government, using their historical symbols. Additionally, the Ukrainian government's efforts to suppress Russian culture within the country further contributed to the underlying tensions.

Since 2014, there has been a successful effort to combat separatists in Eastern Ukraine, which can be attributed to the enhanced availability of firearms to the extreme right (Umland, 2021). The Azov Battalion's capture of the strategically vital region of Mariupol is the paramount outcome of this conflict. The state's backing for these organizations grew following the military triumph of a faction affiliated with the extremist right's militant branch. Additionally, the involvement of these groups rose due to popular empathy, especially in Western Ukraine. It is clear that those living in the Eastern portion of Ukraine, who are influenced by Russian culture, cannot assert the opposite.

In Ukraine, concurrent with the growth and increased influence of the extreme right, state-based ethnocentric policies have been implemented. An essential political measure in this regard was the imposition of constraints on the usage of the Russian language (Kabanen, 2021). TV channels broadcasting in Russia and operating in Ukraine had program restrictions before ultimately being outlawed (Aref'ev, 2018). In 2021, a comprehensive law was enacted that significantly limited the participation of Russians in Ukraine's social activities.

The legitimacy of ultra-nationalist groups and their military successes, as well as the ethnocentric practices of the Ukrainian government, can be attributed to Ukraine's domestic politics. These factors are exploited by Russia's propaganda to justify military action against Ukrainian nationalism. Furthermore, in the case of Russia, the perception that the historical coexistence of Ukrainian territories with the Soviet Union posed a threat of cultural annihilation to the Russian population residing in Ukraine has been cited as the primary justification for the war.

CONCLUSION

Ukraine's ability to influence competing states' security is contingent upon its dominance over several states. The social orientation desired by Ukrainian society is the primary determinant of who will wield this authority. The state(s) that have influence over Ukraine's geopolitics can exert security pressure on the opposing state(s). Thus, Ukraine's geopolitical location serves as the focal point of Eurasian security. The geopolitical dynamics of Ukraine are influenced by the axis of alignment that the Ukrainians choose to adopt as a unified entity. Thus, the Ukrainians' sense of national identity has emerged as a crucial political instrument for governments to exert control in the geopolitical landscape of Eurasia. Consequently, the majority of the Orange Revolution in 2004-2005 and the Euromaidan protests in 2013-2014 have transformed into interstate political confrontations characterized by historical nationalism. Russia's physical location and historical impact in the area have been perceived as a threat to national security due to Ukraine's strong nationalist desire to separate from Russia based on linguistic and cultural differences, as well as their political intentions. Russia's strategy of deliberately fostering instability in Ukraine's Eastern regions, which are closely tied to it through national sentiments, has resulted in a significant void inside the country's democratic structure. Conversely, the United States and European nations politically, culturally, and militarily promoted the Ukrainian national identity across Europe, capitalizing on the unfamiliarity of Ukrainian history. Consequently, a competition for survival has arisen, resulting in a debilitating impact, where Russia's intense focus on geopolitical matters is utilized and implemented through many identities.

The primary objective is to establish a distinct "Western" Ukraine that is clearly separated from Russia, aligns with European nationalism, and maintains its historical dynamics. Consequently, the war has transformed into a battleground where Ukrainians demonstrate their European identity as a nation.

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