



Drohobych Ivan Franko State Pedagogical University



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**THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR
(2014–2022): HISTORICAL, POLITICAL,
CULTURAL-EDUCATIONAL, RELIGIOUS,
ECONOMIC, AND LEGAL ASPECTS**

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RUSSIA AS A REVISIONIST STATE AND THE 2022 INVASION OF UKRAINE

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Problem statement. The issue of Russian state revisionism in the context of international relations is a matter of scholarly debate that so far has been examined mostly in its legal dimension and to a degree for its implications for international order. Legal rules and especially their application is intricately related to power distribution and the fact remains that legal discourse is also a part of strategy. Russia's revisionism is not an isolated incident; instead, it is a part of a continuum of foreign policy objectives and forms a fundamental part of Russian statecraft and power projection in relation to European states and on a global level. Therefore, Russian revisionism should be treated in the greater geopolitical context of Russia's attempt to undermine the international order and impose a new structural equilibrium of regional and, if possible, world balance.

Analysis of recent researches and publications. Recent researches and publications on the issue of Russian revisionism have concentrated mostly on the legal aspect of Russia's policies, carefully examining issues, such as: the legal dimension of Russian revisionism in general for international law; the arguments temporarily posed by the Russian authorities to justify their actions; and the use of legal principles to advance the goals of Russian foreign policy¹. Piontkovsky's 2015 paper outlines the main characteristics of Putin's Russia as a revisionist actor in international affairs. Allison's 2017 and 2020 papers examine the connection between Russian revisionist policies and a realist perception of international relations, as well as the implications for the international legal order, as the latter has been formed after the seminal event of the 2014 illegal annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation. Pisciotta's 2020 analysis on Russian revisionism in the Putin era is an insightful look into the aggressive policies of the Russian Federation in the 2000s and 2010s focusing on three distinct cases: Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria. In this context, Russian revisionism is examined through the various invasion incidents and military interventions

that have formed a stable feature of Russian foreign policy in the last period.

Identification of previously unresolved matters and goal statement. Russian revisionism as a complex phenomenon entailing multiple aspects of state behavior requires a thorough geopolitical interpretation that shall take into account principles of grand strategy and mid-term tactics on the war terrain. The aforementioned analyses tend to examine Russian revisionism mostly in its legal dimension and subsequently delve into the implications for international legal order. Our aim is to present an inclusive picture of Russian revisionism on a geopolitical level, as part of the greater macro-historical strategy of the Russian Federation to undermine international order on both a regional and global level. In this context, we rely on primary texts by leading Russian figures and the expressed operational war aims of the invading forces in Ukraine, as these have appeared and as they were manifested with the military operations of the invading Russian forces in Ukrainian territory. Analysis of Russian official discourse and de facto materialized or intended war aims form a useful base of primary material to dissect Russia's revisionism and its climax with the 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Presentation of research material.

1. Russian revisionism in stages

Our basic assumption is that Russia is a revisionist state par excellence that has employed various modes of subversion in the post-Cold War period.² Russian revisionism is an attempt to address the dominant post-Soviet inferiority complex that was and still influences to a considerable degree the actions of Moscow elites. Still, Russian revisionism is not just an adaptation to the post-Cold War period of relative reduction of power in relation to the West, it is a structural component of Russian foreign policy derived from its Soviet legacy and its historical self-perception that also entails ethnic and cultural dimensions.

In general, revisionism as a phenomenon as opposed to status-quo powers aiming to preserve the existing global order is intertwined with changes in the regional and global balance of power³. A revisionist power can be defined as the one that effectively threatens to undermine existing legal rules and international conventions

¹ Piontkovsky, A., Putin's Russia as a Revisionist Power. 2015. *Journal on Baltic Security* 1:1; Allison, R. Russia and the post-2014 international legal order: Revisionism and realpolitik. 2017. *International Affairs* No. 93, 519-543; Natsios, A., Introduction: Putin's New Russia: Fragile State or Revisionist Power? 2018. *South Central Review* 35:1, 1-21; Allison R., Russian revisionism, legal discourse and the 'rules-based' international order, 2020. *Europe-Asia Studies* No. 72:6, 976-995, DOI: 10.1080/09668136.2020.1773406; Pisciotta, B., Russian revisionism in the Putin era: An overview of post-communist military interventions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria. 2020. *Italian Political Science Review/Rivista Italiana Di Scienza Politica* No. 50:1, 87-106, doi:10.1017/ipo.2019.18.

² Mead, W.R. The return of geopolitics: the revenge of the revisionist powers. 2014. *Foreign Affairs* 93, 69-79.

³ Davidson, J. *The Origins of Revisionist and Status-quo States*. New York: Palgrave, 2006.

of state behavior, destabilize international order and in the end impose a new equilibrium or in a more ambitious scheme a new international order⁴. According to Barry Buzan, 'Revisionist states [...] are those that find their domestic structures significantly out of tune with the prevailing pattern of relations, and which therefore feel threatened by, or at least hard done by, the existing status quo. Because of this, revisionist states tend to view security in terms of changing the system, and/or improving their position within it'⁵. In this context, willingness to breach international law and use force to influence balance of power and violate even state sovereignty is an essential part of the strategy of a revisionist state⁶.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine unfolded in two steps, one indirect in 2014 and one direct in 2022, is a clear manifestation of state revisionism against Ukraine as a sovereign state, still its implications are global, as it introduces a new concept of post-imperial geopolitical spaces. Russia's actions on the ground -invasion and territorial annexation at the expense of sovereign states by force- and its ideological justification is not a realist response to supposed expansion of NATO or Western influence, as has sometimes been claimed.⁷ In reality, it forms part of Russian revisionist attempt to impose a new perception of geopolitical realities globally. Our view of Russia is as an inherently revisionist state that continues albeit in a different form the disrupting attempts of the Soviet Union against world order.

Russian revisionism is directed against its neighbors in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, ranging from open threats, economic warfare, the strategic use of migrant flows against territorial sovereignty, support of sedition and insurgencies to full-scale invasion. In this context, Russian revisionism forms part of a greater global strategy to undermine international order and pursue foreign policy goals. It should also be remembered that Russia is the only state in the world to occupy-directly or indirectly-parts of the national territory of four other states; Russia has invaded Ukraine again in 2022 currently occupying a significant part of its territory to the east and the south, Russia occupies Crimea and the eastern provinces of Ukraine since

2014, Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia since 2008, Transnistria in Moldavia since 1991 and a part of the southern Kuril Islands of Japan since 1945 in a still unsolved frontier dispute.

Russian revisionism can be distinguished as a three-part phenomenon:

i. Towards post-Soviet space in Europe and the Caucasus.

i i. On a regional overseas level

iii. On a global level.

First, in the framework of post-Soviet space Russian revisionism features a gradual climax ranging from indirect involvement to full-blown invasion incidents. In the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union since 1991 Russia had not resorted to full-scale invasion, but had supported logistically and diplomatically secessionist movements in Moldova (Transnistria), Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh) and Georgia (Abkhazia, South Ossetia)⁸. Russian revisionism in its foreign policy has manifested at least since 2008 with the invasion in another post-Soviet state, Georgia, although its ramifications for subsequent Russian foreign policy have gone largely unnoticed in Western security circles.⁹ The 2008 invasion of Georgia was the first direct military action against a sovereign state, with the 2022 invasion of Ukraine being the second in this series. The greater geopolitical importance of Ukraine, a more realist approach adopted by the U.S. and the EU have laid the dimensions of Russian revisionism more explicit for the international community.

Ukraine as historical and cultural factor occupies a special case for Russian revisionist policies occupying a in Russian imaginary ideological constructions and foreign policy objectives.¹⁰ Especially, concerning the case of Ukraine, Russian revisionism was unfolded first de facto with the support of the sedition in Eastern Ukraine since 2014 and the annexation of Crimea. Russian revisionism is accompanied by dubious legal arguments and ideological constructions¹¹. Since 2014

⁴ Chan, S., Realism, revisionism, and the Great Powers. 2004. *Issues & Studies* 40, 135-172.

⁵ Buzan, B. *People, States & Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in Post-Cold War Era*. Essex: ECPR Press, 2008, 241. For a typology of revisionism as an international relations phenomenon see Buzan, B., *The logic and contradictions of 'peaceful rise/development' as China's grand strategy*. 2014. *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 7, 381-420; Pisciotta, B., *Russian revisionism in the Putin era*, 90-93.

⁶ Schweller, R.L., *Bandwagoning for profit: bringing the revisionist state back in*. 1994. *International Security* 19, 72-107. For Russian view on sovereignty see Ziegler C.E., *Conceptualizing sovereignty in Russian foreign policy: realist and constructivist perspectives*. 2012. *International Politics* 49, 400-417.

⁷ Mearsheimer, J. 'Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault', *Foreign Affairs*, 18 August 2014, URL: www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault

⁸ Riegl, M. and Doboš, B., *Geopolitics of secession: post-Soviet de facto States and Russian geopolitical strategy*. 2018. *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies* 12:1, 59-89.

⁹ Allison, R. *The Russian case for military intervention in Georgia: international law, norms and political calculation*. 2009. *European Security* 18, 173-200; Pisciotta, B., *Russian revisionism in the Putin era*, 94-95.

¹⁰ Plokhyy, S., *The Return of the Empire: The Ukraine Crisis in the Historical Perspective*. 2018. *South Central Review* 35:1, 111-126.

¹¹ For Russia's propaganda and legal outlook on the matter see Merezhko, O., 'Crimea's Annexation in the Light of International Law: A Critique of Russia's Legal Argumentation'. 2016. *Kyiv-Mohyla Law and Politics Journal* 2, 37-89; Dubinsky, D. & Rutland, P., 'Russia's Legal Position on the Annexation of Crimea'. 2019. *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 5:1, 45-79; Allison R., *Russian revisionism, legal discourse and the 'rules-based' International Order*, 983-987. For the military aspect see Bartles, C.K. and McDermott, R.N., *Russia's Military Operation in Crimea: Road-testing Rapid Reaction Capabilities*. 2014. *Problems of Post-Communism* 61, 46-63.

Russia has emphatically attempted to change European post-Cold War order and gradually introduce new modes of state relations and territorial perception¹². With its 2022 invasion against Ukraine Russia has upgraded its aggressive revisionist policy, as it now attempts to complete the effects of the 2014 invasion. With its 2022 invasion Russia wishes to create not just a zone of influence in parts of its former Soviet sphere of control, but an intermediate periphery of hegemony and a fluid network of polities, independent, autonomous or pseudo-states lying under its direct control or considerable influence. This new post-Soviet sphere of influence currently extends from Byelorussia and Ukraine to Georgia, war-torn land-locked Armenia in the Caucasus and the states of Central Asia.

Second, on an overseas regional level Russian interventions have manifested in Syria with its 2015 intervention on the side of the Assad regime and unofficially in Libya and sub-Saharan Africa, mostly with the employment of mercenaries¹³. Finally, on a global level, Russian revisionism is more cautious, as Russia had so far treaded more carefully appearing to employ a normative rhetoric seemingly in line with basic assumptions of international law, although distorted to meet its foreign policy goals. In this case, Russian legal rhetoric uses the principle of sovereignty in order to appear as a law-abiding actor in the international system.¹⁴ Still, having confirmed its presence and influence in Syria, Russia adopted a tone of assertiveness regarding the international system in its entirety. Foreign Minister Lavrov used the ideas of Russian philosopher Ivan Ilyin, stating that ‘a great power is the one which...introduces a creative and meaningful legal idea to the entire assembly of the nations, the entire “concert” of the peoples and states’. In this context, Russian officials attempt to introduce the notion of fluidity of international law and the image of Russia as a hegemonic legal contributor with its actions, creating international law through concrete (revisionist) actions¹⁵.

Still, it is interesting to note that the 2022 invasion of Ukraine was accompanied by a change in Russian rhetoric, especially in the context of the Sino-Russian diplomatic nexus. At least on a rhetorical level, the two states now attempt to formulate an ideological prerequisite and a united geopolitical front in order to pose a direct challenge to international order. Notions of a rising ‘new just democratic world order’ that shall supplant the Western-derived international system were put forward by Russian officials in March 2022¹⁶. This effort by Russia has been long in the making¹⁷, and was cited triumphantly in the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, where after the military intervention in Syria it was stated: “The world is currently going through fundamental changes related to the emergence of a multipolar international system”¹⁸. The revisionist attempt of Russia to restructure the global balance has significantly accelerated after the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, a landmark event for international order.

2. Parameters of Russian revisionism

Russian revisionism is attested through both its officially declared and unofficially expressed but clearly visible on the operational ground war aims concerning its 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Russian geopolitical revisionism is accompanied by a relevant discourse that includes both historical revisionism and the instrumentalization of WWII mental constructs¹⁹. Russian historical revisionism also includes the parameter of ethnocide, i.e. the denial of the separate existence of Ukrainians as a distinct nation in the long historical durée. The official declaration by Russian President Vladimir Putin issued during the first period of the invasion denied the very essence of state sovereignty and independence, by denying Ukraine’s right to exist as a free state and by attributing Ukrainian sovereignty over Crimea in par-

¹² Krastev, I., Russian Revisionism: Putin’s Plan for Overturning the European Order. 2014. *Foreign Affairs*, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-03-03/russian-revisionism>

¹³ Averre, D. and Davies, L. Russia, humanitarian intervention and the responsibility to protect: the case of Syria. 2015. *International Affairs* 91, 813-834; Allison R., Russian revisionism, legal discourse and the ‘rules-based’ International Order, 987-991.

¹⁴ Allison, R., *Russia, the West and Military Intervention*. Oxford, Oxford University Press 2013, 120-138, 213-216.

¹⁵ Lavrov, S., ‘Russia’s Foreign Policy in a Historical Perspective’. 2016. *Russia in Global Affairs*, 2, available at: <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/russias-foreign-policy-in-a-historical-perspective/>.

¹⁶ Saul, D., ‘Russia And China Are Leading A New ‘World Order,’ Russian Foreign Minister Says’, 30 March 2022, available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dereksaul/2022/03/30/russia-and-china-are-leading-a-new-world-order-russian-foreign-minister-says/>

¹⁷ Radin, A. and Reach, C., *Russian Views of the International Order*, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica 2017, available at: https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1800/RR1826/RAND_RR1826.pdf.

¹⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, 1 December 2016. Available at https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1538901/. See also Klishin, A. ‘Law and National Interest’. 25 September 2016. *Russia in Global Affairs* 4, available at: <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Law-and-National-Interest-18392>. Cf. Götz, E., *Russia and the question of world order*. 2019. *European Politics and Society* 20, 133-153.

¹⁹ Serhan, Y., *Who is Vladimir Putin’s Revisionist History For?*, *The Atlantic*, 27 February 2022, available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2022/02/putin-russia-ukraine-revisionist-history/622936/>

ticular to Soviet internal politics²⁰. Thus, the distorted image of the historical past of presenting Soviet Union as a benevolent force overlaps with a sense of injustice against the Russians committed by the supra-national Soviet regime. The arbitrary use of the historical past is evident in this case.

The 2014 annexation of Crimea was treated by Russian propaganda as the undoing of a 'historical injustice' and as part of a greater project gradually unfolding, the 'protection of Russian-speaking communities' outside the borders of the Russian Federation²¹. Russian rhetoric emphasized this last aspect, by introducing a set of new concepts that would be fundamental over the next years and especially in the 2022 invasion to promote Russian imperialist aspirations. President Putin's speech on the annexation of Crimea introduced the notion of the so-called 'Ruskiy Mir' ('Russian World') and the concept of a 'divided nation', an imaginary national community torn by conventions of international borders. This is an ideological construction reminiscent of Inter-War German expansionist rhetoric.²²

An additional spatial concept was the new term of 'Novorossiya' ('new Russia'), a geographical unity that includes eight regions of Ukraine that according to Putin's imperialist propaganda were traditionally and historically Russian and were unjustly handed over to Ukraine by the Soviet regime. Similar elements can be located in the declarations of the then prime minister Medvedev. The Russian leadership thus introduced an ambivalent notion of Russians outside the national territory living in territories not only of the former Soviet Union but also even of pre-1917 Russian Empire that are subject to projection of Russian military power: 'We are talking about people whose relatives or themselves have lived permanently in Russia, as well as

in territories that belonged to Russia before the (1917) revolution, or were part of the Soviet Union'²³.

The 'Russian World' set of propagandistic notions was used during the 2022 invasion with Russian propaganda promoting the image that the war in Ukraine is not actually a confrontation between two sovereign states, but actually a proxy war between the Russian World that is only attempting to reassemble itself in its genuine historical borders and the hostile Anglo-Saxon world which uses Ukraine as an instrument in its fight against Russian interests.

Refusal to address Ukraine as an independent state and distinct nation were present in the 2014 official declarations and were echoed in the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation.²⁴ This seminal text tries to erase Ukraine's distinct identity by referring to Russia's cultural and spiritual ties with Ukraine as well as the desire to construct a partnership relation in line with Russia's national interests. This line of thinking was upgraded in 2022 to include the whole of Ukraine which would be abolished as a distinct state. Ukraine was characterized intermittingly as an 'armed anti-Russia' or was in essence described as a random historical accident not based on a distinct national identity.²⁵ Of all post-Soviet states, Ukraine is treated uniquely as a special case, not as an independent state or a possible international partner, but as a springboard of hostile operations, as a hostile territory used according to Putin's phraseology "by third countries to create threats towards Russia" and attack Russian interests²⁶.

3. Russian Strategic Objectives during the 2022 Invasion

The culmination of Russian revisionism is the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. On a military and political level, during the 2022 invasion the initial Russian strategic goal was the annexation of the whole territory of Ukraine and the declaration of a tripartite federal union consisting of Russian Federation proper, Byelorussia and Ukraine. Such a move would be celebrated by Russia propaganda

²⁰ See Putin's remarks in his Address on February 24, the first day of the 2022 invasion: "So, I will start with the fact that modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russia or, to be more precise, by Bolshevik, Communist Russia. This process started practically right after the 1917 revolution, and Lenin and his associates did it in a way that was extremely harsh on Russia – by separating, severing what is historically Russian land. Nobody asked the millions of people living there what they thought. Then, both before and after the Great Patriotic War, Stalin incorporated in the USSR and transferred to Ukraine some lands that previously belonged to Poland, Romania and Hungary. In the process, he gave Poland part of what was traditionally German land as compensation, and in 1954, Khrushchev took Crimea away from Russia for some reason and also gave it to Ukraine. In effect, this is how the territory of modern Ukraine was formed". For a full transcript see <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/67828>

²¹ Pursiainen, C. and Forsberg, T., 'The Principle of Territorial Integrity in Russian International Law Doctrine: The Case of Crimea', in P.S. Morris (ed.), *Russian Discourses on International Law: Sociological and Philosophical Phenomenon*, London: Routledge, 2019, 220-241.

²² Piontkovsky, A., Putin's Russia as a Revisionist Power, *ibid*.

²³ Najibullah, F., Russia mulls fast-track citizenship, sparking brain-drain concerns elsewhere. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 12 March 2014. Available at <http://www.rferl.org/articleprintview/25294443.html>. See also Putin's statements on the matter: Steven Lee Myers and Ellen Barry, Putin Reclaims Crimea for Russia and Bitterly Denounces the West, *The New York Times*, 18 March 2014. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/19/world/europe/ukraine.html>

²⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 1 December 2016. Available at https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1538901/

²⁵ Ukraine as armed "anti-Russia" unacceptable for Moscow-Putin, TASS, 22 February 2022. Available at: <https://tass.com/world/1408599>

²⁶ Putin Says He Does Not Plan to 'Restore Empire', 22 February 2022, *Moscow Times*, available at: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/02/22/putin-says-he-does-not-plan-to-restore-empire-a76519>

as an important setback of Western aggression and of a return of Ukraine to its proper historical place, i.e. to a historic Slavic union with Russia and Belarus, forming a tripartite union. The Russian plan of annexing the whole of Ukraine was revealed when an article titled “The resolution of the Ukraine question” was mistakenly published by Russian media network RIA Novosti news agency. The article, tagged with a publication date of 8AM on February 26, was celebrating a phenomenal Russian victory and collapse of the Ukrainian state within an anticipated two days with occupation of Kyiv²⁷. In the context of state ‘justification’ of the invasion, once again Russian authorities have promoted the propagandistic notion of oppression of Russian people that had been used in the past in both the 2008 invasion of Georgia and the 2014 sedition of a part of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, as well as the intention of ‘de-Nazification’ of Ukraine equaling regime change and social engineering, in the same spirit of instrumentalization of a set of concepts around WWII and its ideological parameters²⁸.

After months of fighting, Russia’s war aims seem to have changed and adapted to the new operational realities of the war fronts. Fierce Ukrainian resistance has rendered obsolete the initial grandiose plans of absorbing the whole of Ukraine. The initial strategic goal of capturing Kyiv was abandoned with Russian forces withdrawing completely from the north and north-eastern front surrounding the Ukrainian capital. In late April 2022, Russian war aims were limited to the occupation of the administrative unity of Donetsk and Luhansk of Mariupol, as the only major urban center and an important strategic and economic industrial hub in the Azov Sea²⁹. Putin wanted to declare a victory in the late days of April, just in time for the WWII anniversary celebrations held in May 9, a seminal event of Russia’s self-promoted historical image. Variations of Russia’s strategic aims included control of the coastal region of southern Ukraine up to the breakaway region of Transnistria, officially a part of Moldova³⁰.

²⁷ The withdrawn text can be found at the Web Archive: <https://web.archive.org/web/20220226051154/https://ria.ru/20220226/rossiya-1775162336.html>

²⁸ See relevant remarks by Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov: ‘Denazification in Ukraine includes cancelling laws discriminating minority rights-Lavrov’, 18 March 2022, TASS-Russian News Agency, available at: <https://tass.com/world/1424165>; Berger, M., Putin says he will ‘denazify’ Ukraine. Here’s the history behind that claim. 24 February 2022. Washington Post, available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/24/putin-denazify-ukraine/>

²⁹ Mackinnon, A., What the Fall of Mariupol Would Mean for the War. 20 April 2022. Foreign Policy, available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/04/20/mariupol-ukraine-russia-siege-putin-offensive-eastern-ukrainian-forces/>

³⁰ Reimann, N., Why Russia Would Want to Capture Land Leading To Moldova’s Transnistria. 22 April 2022. Forbes, available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nicholasreimann/2022/04/22/why-russia-would-want-to-capture-land-leading-to-moldovas-transnistria>.

In general, Russia perceives the normality of inter-state relations established in Eastern Europe after 1991 as an abnormality that needs to be addressed. In a strange but revealing perception, the freedom of each state to make its own choices regarding its foreign policy goals and international cooperation mechanisms, including membership in supra-national organizations, such as NATO or the EU, is perceived as an essentially anomalous situation. For Russian propaganda it was the Soviet sphere of influence or at least a consensus of ‘non-interference’ in perceived zones of regional influence that was the normative situation, the one that should remain unaltered to the greatest degree possible after the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc. Normal inter-state relations are perceived as ‘Western hegemony’ over Russia’s vital zone of interests and the right of every state as a sovereign actor to make its own choices is perceived as a challenge to Russian national interests. In this context of propaganda argumentation, the expansion of NATO through new member-states of Eastern Europe during a period of Russian geopolitical weakness is characterized as an ‘aggressive expansion’ at Russia’s expense and not as a free choice of sovereign states³¹.

4. Policy recommendations

The West needs to realize the inherent dangers in accepting de facto the consequences of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and reaffirm its commitment to the principle of state sovereignty and free choice. This fundamental principle of national independence in decision-making and territorial sovereignty from external pressures is essential for a stable international order. If Russian revisionism, war crimes and its aggressiveness against Ukraine and other states of Eastern Europe remain unchecked, there shall rise a new perception of arbitrary inter-state relations and a menacing new landscape of post-imperial geopolitical spaces. Only when Russia re-invents itself and becomes a normal nation-state and not an ambitious empire can it be accepted as legitimate international partner of the power cores of East Asia, North America and Europe. Only when the aspirations of d Russian imperialism are permanently shattered, can it enjoy a fruitful relation with the West. In this context, only the withdrawal of the Russian invading forces from all occupied territories of Ukraine is the only plausible way forward. Of course, this shall be a long-term procedure and a form of intermediate stage shall necessarily be employed that can offer also a way out for Russia after it shall realize its strategic defeat in Ukraine.

On a normative level, the Western states as responsible members of the international community and de facto upholders of international order need to address Russian revisionism in all its aspects. As the invasion

³¹ Allison R., Russian revisionism, legal discourse and the ‘rules-based’ International Order, 981-982.

of Ukraine is still unfolding, the Western states have to meaningfully increase their support of Ukraine on all levels: military, logistical, technological and informational, financial and diplomatic. This is a decisive moment for the unity of the Western world against the autocratic Eurasian nexus, one that the West, especially the EU states need to fully grasp, in order for a meaningful international order to be possible to continue in the near future.

Conclusions

The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine is a clear and violent manifestation of Russian revisionism in its purest form and a crime of aggression according to international criminal law, as it violates the fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Russian revisionism in its most radical dimension with the invasion aims to transform not only the regional balance of power and state relations, but also impose a new perception of inter-state relations on a global level with the emergence of post-imperial geopolitical spaces and zones of militarily projected influence by hegemonic actors. Russia reserves for itself the right to intervene militarily in the spatial unity identified as 'Russian world', a geographical region encompassing not just the territory of the Russian Federation or even post-Soviet space, but also areas where Russian-speaking elements reside.

On a geopolitical level, the 2022 invasion is also an attempt by Putin's regime to reap benefits that would be not possible in the long run due to the decreasing relative power, economic output and influence of Russia in the greater Eurasian geopolitical framework. Russia is trying to establish favorable security conditions for the decades ahead. In fact, Russia is attempting to freeze time, as its influence is posed to decrease over the next decades due to a deteriorating demographic base and growing energy independence of the European Union.

Finally, a word is due about Russia itself and its international self-perception is necessary, because the problem of Russian aggression and inherent revisionism lies with Russia's self-understanding as an international actor. Only when Russia re-invents itself and becomes a normal nation-state and not an ambitious empire can it be accepted as legitimate international partner of the power cores of East Asia, North America and Europe. Only when the aspirations of Russian imperialism are permanently shattered, shall these two states enjoy a fruitful relation with the West. In this context, only the withdrawal of the Russian invading forces from all occupied territories of Ukraine is the only plausible way forward. Of course, this shall be a long-term procedure and a form of intermediate stage shall necessarily be employed that can offer also a way out for Russia after it shall realize its strategic defeat in Ukraine.

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