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Eurasiatique

NAVIGATING PERMACRISIS: REASSESSING DOMINANT NARRATIVES IN TIMES OF CONFLICT

Volume XII

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Eurasiatique vol. XII

Permacrisis (n.) an extended period of instability and insecurity, especially one resulting from a series of catastrophic events.

Collins English Dictionary Word of the Year 2022

As we continue to grapple with Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine since, we have had to reconsider the place we hold as researchers of Europe and Eurasia, the way we acquire knowledge, and critically assess unfolding global geopolitical events.

Eurasiatique's Volume XII explores the theme of "Navigating Permacrisis: Reassessing Dominant Narratives in Times of Conflict." Permacrisis denotes prolonged periods of instability, which have led to global turmoil and exacerbated polarization. The resulting discord between competing narratives has influenced which ones gain traction in the mainstream discourse. Therefore, needing to scrutinize colonial relationships of power, we set into sharp focus underrepresented minority voices and examine our prior biases and prejudices. The present edition attempts to challenge our understanding of the region and its historical and political actors.

Misrepresenting and constructing narratives for geopolitical objectives is a common tactic employed by present-day leaders and societal factions in an array of situations. Current events and their coverage at home and abroad suffice to grasp the prevalence of this phenomenon. Ekaterina Gonchar delves into the Kremlin's cognizant disinformation mechanisms, a legacy of Soviet practices, to evaluate the moral dilemmas of state officials and media outlet employees. The theological dynamics of global Orthodoxy are explored by Amir Nassar who critically assesses the Russian state's use of the Orthodox Church as an instrument of soft power to pull Ukraine back into its sphere of influence. Contributing to media studies with a novel analysis on the coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on Russia's Pervyi Kanal and the United States' NBC, Johnny Amundson highlights the absence of necessary context and impartiality and notes that both channels reflect the geopolitical interests of their countries, albeit influenced by different journalistic tendencies.

It has become increasingly important to focus our scholarship on whose voices have prevailed, particularly in areas of ongoing contention. In shifting angles from the majority and decentering Russia, Moscow, or the Kremlin as a starting point of analysis, we acknowledge the other, underrepresented, and undertheorized perspectives of Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans, Russia, and Central Asia. Shining a light on issues of queerness as a refugee in Istanbul, Ayberk Dizdarlar explores the nuanced understanding of life in Istanbul for queer individuals, examining their experiences with survival and the circumstances that brought them to the city. Sophie Sacilotto studies the significance of Babyn Yar in Kyiv, Ukraine, as a site of Holocaust massacre, highlighting the repression and subsequent memorialization by the Soviet Union and, later, independent Ukraine. She emphasizes the complexities of memorialization and the manipulation of memory by governments, particularly poignant in the context of Russia's allegations of Ukrainian neo- Nazism and recent bombing of the Babyn Yar park.

Periods of upheaval present an opening for reassessment and for the analysis of new voices to complicate academic discussions. As such, we welcomed submissions that question established interpretations and bring attention to overlooked narratives for a more comprehensive and adapted response on the part of states and international organizations.

Erlin Trifoni contributes to the literature on governance regarding refugees by delving into Finland's proactive response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis, which involves welcoming and integrating refugees while acknowledging the need for further social-services provisions and labor-market integration. He further considers enhanced dialogue with the EU to address the migration of Russian conscripts, balancing national security and foreign policy concerns. Özgür Özdemir highlights the usefulness of the constructivist framework in international relations by critically evaluating Lisel Hintz' *Identity Politics Inside Out: National Identity Contestation and Foreign Policy in Turkey* to push forth the need to acknowledge national specificities and actors for the formulation and implementation of foreign policy. The role of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is critically assessed across Thomas Law's and Blythe Gilbert's articles. Law examines Georgia's endeavours to establish stronger connections with NATO and the EU, its progress in democratization, and the absence of definite routes to membership. It serves as a case study to avoid bolstering Russia and encountering impeded democratization, similar to the experience in Georgia, as Ukraine pursues its own rapprochement with Western alliances. Gilbert, on the other hand, considers how the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the resurgence of major-power competition have led to a reevaluation of European defense strategy outlined in the NATO Security Concept and European Union Strategic Compass, with divergent national interests challenging the implementation of unified strategies, underscoring the ongoing struggle of European integration in enforcing shared principles amid evolving international competition.

Analyzing how perspectives are highlighted and silenced is fundamental if we are to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the past, present, and future. The rapid developments in the region and singular events of potential world-historical significance force us to better grasp the regional dynamics in conjunction with global ones, considering the heterogeneity of perspectives and experiences. This volume and its contributions aim to judiciously re-evaluate our understanding of historical, political, social, and cultural trajectories.

With many sincere thanks to the Editorial Board and the writers for their unwavering commitment to making this year's volume a timely and insightful addition to discussions of belonging, movement, worldviews, geopolitics, and memory amidst ever-changing circumstances.

Ioana Zamfir
Editor-in-Chief

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The Tricksters of the Modern Russia: Tracing Kremlin's Shamelessness Through Observable Hypocrisy

Ekaterina Gonchar

Abstract

This essay addresses the research question of how cognizant of objective facts are Kremlin officials, media propagandists, and state employees in contrast to state misinformation to determine whether the spread of state propaganda is a conscious action. This examination is performed in four steps: (1) assessing confessions given by former and current employees of state television and government ministries in 2022, (2) examining the importance of financial incentives and disincentives for state agents, (3) underlining the Kremlin officials' hypocrisy, and (4) examining the constantly-changing narrative of state fake news. Overall, this essay concludes that Kremlin officials and state employees are cognizant of spreading disinformation and, likely due to the legacy of Soviet teachings, choose to follow orders rather than listen to any resulting moral quandaries.

Introduction

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February of 2022, the Kremlin has significantly amplified and improved its propaganda machine. The state-controlled infosphere is packed with various anti-Western, nationalist, and imperialist narratives, as well as an abundance of fake news. The overwhelming amount of lies spread by the government begs the question: do government employees and Kremlin officials believe what they themselves say?

This paper explores the main theses of the Kremlin's cultivated lies spread by officials, propagandists, and media employees with the purpose of determining their general level of awareness about the conflict overall and, subsequently, whether they are knowingly lying to the Russian population. In this paper, the analysis focuses on finding the presence of a specific mentality called "shamelessness." This term presents itself as observable hypocrisy, the dissonance between the self-declared opinions or knowledge of objective facts possessed by state officials and their compliance with state propaganda narratives. This criterion has proven complicated to use since it is difficult (and some would argue impossible) to assess what an individual truly thinks and knows by examining their behaviors and words. This is expanded upon by what researchers Alexey Yurchak and Brian D. Taylor describe as "performatives" or a "code": in this case, a sort of Soviet doublethink mixed with loyalty to the state. Bearing this in mind, it becomes hard to categorize what is considered mindful deception. Nevertheless, there are a myriad of examples that show that there is considerable awareness across the government's sectors of the reality for every piece of disinformation – whether about the course of the invasion or the ownership of foreign assets by Kremlin officials. This demonstrates that spreading propaganda is a conscious effort for both officials and state employees, thus making it fair to call intentional lying.

Overall, this analysis provides a deeper understanding of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes as it sheds light on their inner workings, particularly the level of actual persuasion of state sectors by its own constructed narrative. Having conducted this research, it is safe to assume that the vast majority, if not all, of the Kremlin's circle and the Presidential Administration are aware of the actual facts and are purposefully lying to cover up the truth that is unfavorable to Russian President Vladimir Putin's regime.[i]

Materials and methods

The research conducted for this article heavily relied on both primary and secondary sources. News articles published by credible, openly anti-Kremlin outlets and think tanks in both Russian and English language were used to gather a large number of preliminary facts. Examples of such media are *Meduza, BBC News (Russian service), Novaya Gazeta Europe, The Guardian, CNN, The New Yorker, The Insider, The Atlantic,* the Council on Foreign Relations, etc. In addition, information was drawn from credible investigative agencies focused on Russia's war in Ukraine, such as the Institute for the Study of War and the Royal United Service Institute for Defense and Security Studies. In turn, Alexey Navalny's YouTube channel and *Fond Bor'by s Korruptsiyei's* ("The Fund Against Corruption," FBK) investigations served as sources on corruption in relation to state officials like Dmitry Medvedev and Sergei Lavrov. Additionally, official government websites like Govermnet.ru and Kremlin.ru were used to gather information on officials or their speeches. Similarly, news outlets like RBK (stands for RosBiznesConsulting) were included in the research as they presented the Kremlin's perspective on the war and current foreign relations.

With regard to primary sources, the research consulted numerous news reports from independent media agencies mentioned above, speeches of Russian officials and testimonies given by workers in Russia's state media and government ministries. Social media posts on platforms like Telegram, Twitter, and Instagram were also used as primary sources. With such information, it was possible to identify inconsistencies in official statements and the Kremlin's narrative, proving the presence of observable hypocrisy and therefore pointing to the Russian state media's shamelessness.

Limitations and the code of conduct

To claim that Kremlin officials and propagandists are truly shameless is to claim they are aware that the facts and their own opinions are contrary to the things that they are saying. By using the term "lie", one automatically suggests a simple binary as well as an indication of comprehending what is morally right and wrong. It is possible to claim, however, that the people who work for the Kremlin do not see their jobs that way. According to former employees at Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, what state workers say might not be in contradiction to what they believe. If it is the case that someone sides with the interpretation of facts that is not favorable to the government, it is possible it will not be viewed as a contradiction or an internal moral dilemma. It is likely that they don't have a clear-cut distinction between "truth" and "lie," which is supported by the *tak nado* mindset (it is ought to be like this) and the absence of a moral dilemma when publicly saying something they might not believe in. For them, their job—serving their country—forces them to live in between the two categories – the tak nado category. Here, the employees do whatever it takes to survive in the system and therefore stick to the script because those are the rules of the game. They do not see it as lying because they might not believe in it – they just say and do as they are ordered, creating a double mentality: a work mindset and a personal mindset. This also includes situations where employees are forced to lie to have a decent job in order to put bread on their family's table.

This theory is supported by Alexey Yurchak's *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More,* in which he argues that the behavioral mindset of Soviet people cannot be analyzed through a binary. He writes that "everyone was to some extent complicit in the system of patronage, lying, theft, hedging, and duplicity," and therefore, at its core, the Soviet people's relationship with their government was filled with moral perplexities. [ii] Stemming from that relationship are problematic and false assumptions that claim a literal interpretation of personal behavior—such as displaying pro-government acts like posting fake news or praising Vladimir Putin—as actually approving of the political regime. Instead, the author calls for actions to be seen as "performatives," which cannot be categorized as "true" or "false." Instead, "The barrier between truth and lies is effectively destroyed," as Yurchak suggests looking at them through the lens of effectiveness and circumstance. [iii] In addition, Brian D. Taylor in *The Code of*

Putinism points to a mindset of leading a double life as a state employee, that working close to the Kremlin enforces specific values. Taylor argues that those specific principles are control, power, order, statism, and loyalty, which all can be attributed the Soviet upbringing of Putin's close circle.[iv] These principles further demonstrate why Kremlin officials and employees feel pressured to do what they are told—not only to ensure their own personal survival in the system but also because of loyalty to the state and to Putin himself. With that, they perceive their employment as just a job, not a statement or action coming from a personal belief system.[v] Therefore, by using this framework, one might conclude that the Kremlin and its confederates cannot be accused of "knowingly lying" as this black-and-white divide simply does not exist and should not be pursued in the studies of Putin's Russia, thus questioning this paper's findings.

To that, I argue that, despite being forced to present the opinions ordered by the Kremlin while having divided mindset of the personal and the professional, there is a considerable level of awareness across governmental sectors, from state media to the Presidential Administration. We have seen that both national television workers and people close to Putin have access to factual information and often choose to ignore it or twist it in a favorable way. Since it is impossible to find out definitively what someone is actually thinking, recognizing observable hypocrisy and gathering evidence of general awareness about the war and its consequences is as close as we can get to spotting shamelessness in government officials, propagandists, and media workers.

Holes in the Iron Curtain

On March 14, 2022, Marina Ovsyannikova brought an anti-war poster into the heart of the Kremlin's propaganda machine – the studio of Russia's main state TV channel *Pervy Kanal* (Channel One), where she had worked for about 20 years.[vi] That evening, the air was interrupted by her protest where unsuspecting viewers witnessed Ovsyannikova show sharpie-drawn words that read, in Russian: "NO WAR. Stop the war. Do not believe the propaganda. They lie to you here. Russians against war."[vii] Due to its unprecedented nature, this act of protest shocked everyone, raising questions around whether state media employees believe what they say.

As a result of numerous acts of public disagreement with the Russian government after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, we may have answers to these questions. Elena Afanasieva—former Head of Creative Planning at Channel One and employee in the studio from 2006 to 2021—has shared her insights about workers' opinions on the war.[viii] It appears that, while some employees believe the lies they say, a lot of them do not.[ix] Afanasieva herself states that "everyone, without exception, understands that they are lying."[x] Some workers point out the cognitive dissonance that results from looking at credible sources in their workplace (for instance, from Reuters) and then, while translating into Russian, also 'translating' it into the language of Kremlin propaganda.[xi] Moreover, Channel One is not the only state media studio where people knowingly lie to do the Kremlin's bidding. An employee of another popular media holding *Rossiya Segodnya* (Russia Today), which is owned by Margarita Simonyan, described his current situation as resembling that of a "hostage", as his views on the war and Russian foreign policy differ from the state-controlled mainstream.[xii] In this way, it can be seen that the state media narrative is entirely controlled by the orders of the Presidential Administration and associated organizations. Among the Russian public, these orders are called *metodichki* (manuals).[xiii] The contents and orders of those manuals can be induced when looking at the similarities among all the state TV programs, official telegram posts, and the public statements of civil servants and Kremlin-affiliated individuals. Most famously, the main themes are the denazification of Ukraine, protection of the children in the Donbas, fighting NATO provocateurs, and Western Russophobia.

A major source of information from the Russian perspective that disseminates propaganda is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A former diplomat at the Ministry, Boris Bondaryov, described the workplace environment at the ministry, referring to a competition between working diplomats to make up lies in line with the Kremlin's agenda.[xiv] He went on to

explain how following the orders of the government—that would often come directly from the Presidential administration—is correlated with upward mobility within the Ministry and higher salaries.[xv] Essentially, there are clear incentives to create stories in service of the regime; the more outlandish, the higher the salary.[xvi] Another former employee, who decided to stay anonymous after having served the ministry for 25 years, commented on what he learned about the perplexing nature of employees' dichotomous and over-obedient mindsets. According to him, the question is not about whether they 'know they are lying' or not, for that suggests an inner moral dilemma for employees propagating the ideas they do not agree with. In his experience, the workers were not perplexed or torn by being assigned what to say at their jobs. In fact, they can go home and say the exact opposite because they look at their employment as a service to the nation or as their civilian debt.[xvii] What is expected is blind obedience to the orders no matter the personal beliefs. This remark fits into the criteria of shamelessness at is shows that that being conscious of spreading lies or fake news does not matter since determining one's personal opinion or individual belief through academic deduction is unachievable; after all, one cannot get inside someone's head. With that, what matters for academic analysis is the difference between personal belief or understanding of a fact—which has been shown through these aforementioned testimonies—and independent investigations and the resulting public action.

This phenomenon could be related to a popular Russian proverb tak nado, which describes the sense of duty to the state, an employer, or oneself. It explains the thought process behind spreading disinformation, even if, internally, the opinion of the spreader is diametrically opposite. Additionally, this is possibly related to an instilled post-Soviet mindset that emerged from Soviet doublethink described by Alexey Yurchak. He argues that what workers say does not equate to what they actually think as there is a certain performativity to public service.[xviii] Therefore, the Ministry's employees are likely aware of their lies and may disagree with the state's narrative, but they largely remain unbothered, probably not even admitting diverging opinion.[xix] In a similar fashion, Bondaryov elaborates on how the lack of public disagreement with the Ministry's work is due to the desire of employees to keep their jobs and a stable income. When discussing Lavrov's own possible inner moral dilemma and how Lavrov transformed from someone on the side of reason to spreading extraordinary lies, the former diplomat suggests that the Minister simply wanted to "stay in the warm minister's seat" and traded his own opinion for corresponding privileges.[xx]

In summation, looking at the stories of multiple current and former employees within the most important government structures—notably state media and ministries—we can assume that a good number of people who spread the Kremlin's lies are aware of what they are doing and can distinguish a fact from a fabrication. Additionally, many workers know that they are being ordered what to say, whether it be fact or distortion, yet choose to still follow the government's orders, thus pointing to a level of shamelessness.[xxi]

The Price of Shamelessness

Margarita Simonyan—head of Russia Today one of the main state-sponsored propaganda TV channels—is arguably the most well-known Kremlin propagandist. One of her recent projects on national television is called *Prekrasnaya Rossiya Bu-Bu-Bu* (Beautiful Russia Blah-Blah-Blah) and serves as a great example for estimating the price tag of Kremlin's lies. This talk-show program spreads misinformation about the Kremlin's opposition, for example by discussing Alexey Navalny and his team FBK (Anti-Corruption Fund) in a bad light.[xxii] Each of the main columnists-hosts at Russia Today receives roughly half a million rubles per month if they twist unfavorable events (such as the 2021 protests across Russia or Navalny's poisoning) into a narrative more useful to the Kremlin. These fake stories are then reposted by propagandists on their own Telegram channels, including Simonyan's, creating a thick fog of state disinformation online.[xxiii]

Why pay barely-experienced columnists and bloggers amounts that are 23 times more than a teacher's salary, 10 times more than a pilot's, and 7 times more than a submariner's?[xxiv] Evidently, there would be no reason to pay them disproportionally high rates if it were not to

say exactly what the Kremlin wants the Russian people to believe. Logically, purposefully scripting dialogues and buying the columnists' political opinions proves that the state media is aware it pays not for facts, but for lies.

With this strategy, the Kremlin's influence is widespread, from state television and programming to social media. After the success of Evgeny Prigozhin's infamous "Troll Factory"—which championed online misinformation and has been especially noted in Western media after it influenced the United States 2016 presidential election—the Kremlin started to lure people in with big money. In return, it exploits their opinions and labor to muddy the waters of the Russian infosphere; the purpose being to make the populace believe that it is impossible to know the truth except by having been in the heart of war, like in the towns of Bucha or Mariupol.[xxv] After the full-scale invasion began to take a bad course for the Russian army, Putin realized he needed more people on the fronts, which led to a mass draft of Russian men in September 2022.[xxvi] The significant negative response from the public to the mobilization led to mass emigration from Russia, which in turn prompted the government to employ a number of strategies to combat widespread panic. One of these solutions was paying bloggers on various social media platforms, such as TikTok and Instagram, to post about the draft in a positive manner, for example by saying that it only affects 1% of the population—information that could not be confirmed as the Kremlin kept the actual conscription numbers classified.[xxvii] Such posts were usually accompanied by hashtags such as "*#RussianLivesMatter*" to raise the public's defensive patriotism and "*#BezPaniki*" (#NoPanic) to fool them into submission.[xxviii] In tracing these posts, it is relatively easy to see repetition in their content, pointing to them being scripted.[xxix]

A big step towards controlling social media content related to the draft and the war stemmed from a desire to consciously undermine the truth for the purpose of holding a grip on public opinion regarding Russia's 'special military operation'. The specific goal of changing the narrative to influence public opinion means that muddying the waters is needed to hide specific truths. In the context of the war in Ukraine, the manipulation and reconstruction of narratives usually related to the considerable number of casualties, the level of the army's poor preparation and success, and the overwhelming number of war crimes committed by the soldiers. Therefore, hiding the truth means that the exact truth is known on some level, indicating the Kremlin's shamelessness and awareness that it is spreading disinformation.

Behind the Scenes

The Russian invasion has resulted in a swift response from the West, which unanimously levelled sanctions against Russia's financial, energy, and military sectors—in addition to personal restrictions on Russian oligarchs, propagandists, and officials.[xxx] According to a 2023 assessment by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "sanctions have kindled resentment and a feeling of injustice against the West among Russia's elites."[xxxi] Due to the significant impact of these moves, the Kremlin likes to preach to the Russian public that there is nothing appealing about the "collective West."[xxxii] The Kremlin says that officials and oligarchs have no property there, no travel plans, no luxuries, and it indicates that they do not want to be associated in any way with any of the "unfriendly" countries (such as US, Canada, Australia, the UK, and European states, among many others).[xxxiii] For instance, on May 31, 2022, Dmitry Medvedev shared in one of his Telegram posts, "None of us have foreign property, accounts or significant interests abroad. We do not go there to rest and work."[xxxiv] However, one of Navalny's investigations in 2017 revealed that Medvedev, while Prime Minister, owned a yacht called the *Photinia* and vineyards in Tuscany, Italy.[xxxv] According to Transparency International Russia, Medvedev changed the official owner of the yacht on the day of the invasion of Ukraine in order to avoid Western sanctions.[xxxvi]

Sergei Lavrov, Russia's current, long-serving Minister of Foreign Affairs, is another example of a Kremlin official who entertains himself with Western travel and luxuries.[xxxvii] For the last 8 years, Lavrov's lover, Svetlana Polyakova, has been using the Minister's position at and resources from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for her personal leisure.[xxxviii] FBK investigations have shown that she follows Lavrov on his work trips, labelling purposes of the

visits down when crossing the border as diplomatic. For instance, she went on a "visit for official negotiations between state institutions of power," while being in no way employed by the Ministry.[xxxix] This trick makes it financially and legally convenient to travel to such countries as France, Austria, Italy, Germany, USA, Switzerland, Portugal, and Greece.[xl] Moreover, Svetlana, her daughter, Polina Polyakova, and Svetlana's mother, Tamara Polyakova, also enjoy diplomatic status which comes with personal jets and tourist luxuries.[xli] In addition, Polina owns an apartment in London, and is a master's student registered at Britain's Imperial College London, despite the UK being on the Kremlin's list of "unfriendly" countries.[xlii] Lavrov himself was frequently seen using a private aircraft and relaxing on lavish yachts belonging to one of Russia's richest oligarchs, Oleg Deripaska.[xliii] In a perplexing fusion of corruption and conflation of government and private interest, the Minister frequently lobbied Deripaska's interests—such as the purchase of aluminum production plants and bauxite reserves—during official state visits to several African countries to keep Deripaska as his sponsor for travel luxuries.[xliv]

Lying about one's own travel tendencies and property cannot happen unconsciously; it is highly unlikely that a person does not know what they own. It is especially relevant if that property is purposefully transferred to another oligarch in an attempt to retain it as personal property following imposition of post-invasion restrictions. Therefore, it is safe to assume that Medvedev is aware that he is lying about his connections to the West, indicating observable hypocrisy. Similarly, a big part of Lavrov's job consists of setting a 'proper' example for Russian citizens by keeping up the façade that the West does not interest him. Such rhetorical spins aim to keep average Russians from missing European and North American travel or enjoying Western products. Seen that the Minister travels to the countries that he—according to the official line—despises, while at the same time allowing himself and his family to enjoy their vacations there, Lavrov's behavior proves to be highly hypocritical and fits within the set definition of shamelessness.

The sting of consequences

As shown above, one of the main clichés of the Kremlin's propaganda, especially post-invasion, has become the theme of Russian pseudo-independence from the West and a seeming invincibility from Western sanctions. To prove that Russian officials and propagandists are, in fact, upset about the restrictions, we return to the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. According to the sources close to Putin and the government, the Ministry's morale has significantly lowered since the commencement of the war, with many employees becoming increasingly unsatisfied with the President. According to a source close to the Kremlin, "There is, probably, almost no one who is satisfied with Putin. Businesses and many members of the government are unhappy that the President started the war without thinking about the scale of the sanctions."[xlv] Even the highest-ranking officials and most influential businesspeople have suffered from large losses, and they have no guarantee that the Kremlin will ever compensating them for it.[xlvi] Therefore, the reality of post-invasion struggles in Russia are felt within the government, meaning that: a) the rhetoric of invincibility from sanctions is a conscious lie, and b) the Kremlin is not entirely isolated from the reality of Putin's failures. This indicates that they do not live in a bubble impervious to post-invasion hardships or entirely isolated from patriotic narratives and propaganda.

Moreover, we can see that businesspeople and government officials form partnerships to help each other avoid sanctions and safeguard their wealth. The aforementioned Oleg Deripaska was sanctioned by the U.S. in 2018, at which point Lavrov himself interceded on behalf of the oligarch's gas company, calling for the American government to lift the restrictions,—a move likely motivated by Lavrov's fear of losing Deripaska's financial sponsorship for his family's luxuries. [xlvii]

Deripaska even called for the Kremlin to end its war in Ukraine, urging for negotiations to begin "as soon as possible."[xlviii] Deripaska also pointed out the anguished economic state of Russia after the recent invasion, declaring that "it is necessary [for the government] to change the [country's] economic policy."[xlix] Another Russian billionaire,

Mikhail Fridman, joined Deripaska in March 2022 to call for Putin to end the invasion, having felt the harshness of the sanctions.[l] These public statements break the general code of conduct within the Kremlin's close circle, indicating a high level of desperation from Russian oligarchs. This is because "personal loyalty to the Kremlin is generously compensated "with extremely lucrative state contracts or control of entire economic sectors.""[li] Moreover, Chatham House also highlighted the control that Putin exercises over oligarchs in 2023: "The authorities want to make businesspeople scared and, therefore, more servile, so that the seizure of large assets and changes in ownership and management can take place more smoothly in the future."[lii] As such, going against the loyalist status quo is quite rare. Overall, these actions go entirely against the state-constructed positive narrative that depicts a self-sufficient Russia and Putin's everlasting, ever-growing popularity. This points to cracks in the system and an absence of the impervious bubble that the Kremlin is sometimes depicted as.

Constantly-changing narrative

The final proof of the Kremlin's shamelessness lies in its ever-changing propaganda narratives. Despite the Kremlin and Putin himself claiming in February 2022 that the "special military operation" was not aimed at occupying Ukraine, those words were quickly forgotten.[liii] According to a July 2022 report published by the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) for Defense and Security Studies, Putin's circle and the rest of the government planned to take over Kyiv and, subsequently, Ukraine in the time span of 3 to 10 days.liv The annexation of the entire country was planned to be done by August 2022.[lv] The Kremlin and the Russian army were entirely sure of their success, mainly relying on the army's speed and a multi-front invasion that they hoped would cause fear and confusion in the Ukrainian government.[lvi]

This was seen very clearly on state TV, where propagandists claimed to be able to take Kyiv in "1.5-3 days."[lvii] By the end of March, however, the propagandists said that "there is no question of any quick decision" and called Ukraine's army the second largest one in Europe.[lviii] The narratives kept changing: over the span of the first three months of the full-scale invasion, the goal of "denazification" and demilitarization of Ukraine changed to freeing the people of Donbas, then later to freeing the "independent republics" in Eastern Ukraine. Then, the propagandists started to include the threat of Western nuclear and chemical attacks, as well as the threat of Western occupation and imposition of cultural values on "traditional" Russia. In April 2022, the goal changed again when Lavrov publicly explained that the "operation" was launched to put an end to the audacious world domination of the United States and other Western countries.[lix]

It is evident that Lavrov knowingly lied to the public on February 25, 2022, when he declared that there was no goal to occupy Ukraine.[lx] The proof is in the aforementioned RUSI report that uncovered Putin's aim to occupy Ukraine.[lxi] This shows that Lavrov knowingly lied when claiming that the "operation" was launched to enable the Ukrainian people to choose their own future and their own government.[lxii] Furthermore, the ever changing narrative surrounding the goals and the reasons behind the invasion testify to the fact that the propagandists and the officials can track the discrepancies between each successive change, making it obvious to them that the government lies about most, if not all, of their motivations.

In addition, the Russian army's numerous failures in Ukraine have exposed the fact that Russia's Ministry of Defense's was aware of the reality of the conduct of the invasion. Over the course of the invasion, it exaggerated the army's success prior to the major failure in Kharkiv Oblast in September of 2022.[lxiii] The Kremlin has never recognized any major defeat.[lxiv] The Ministry was ordered not to include any specifics of the operation or to release any photographic evidence that could point to Russia's lack of success on the battlefield. The same was ordered for Russian bloggers and journalists covering the war on state media.[lxv] The fact that this type of order exists proves that the institutions that issued it—the Ministry of Defense or another state-controlled consultancy—knew what was actually happening on the battlefield.[lxvi]

This conscious effort to coverup the truth about the war correlates with some of the testimonies that were given by government employees, which indicate that it is reasonable to

assume some level of awareness among Kremlin officials and within Putin's circle. According to a source close to the Presidential Administration, "until recently, vice-premiers and ministers worked for the President at least as Google. We voiced the scenarios that he considered likely, and he would ask: 'And if you do this, what consequences can you expect? And if so, what will happen next?' Now, this doesn't exist."[lxvii] The source added that the fear of Putin's own unwillingness to hear problems delivered by his subordinates resulted in numerous officials significantly morphing the truth in their reports, for instance by failing to accurately convey the actual impact of sanctions on the economy.[lxviii] As such, it is likely that Putin was not aware of the extent of the army's failures. However, that would suggest that Kremlin officials are aware, as they have access to the unfiltered information that they then purposefully transform into more favorable news, which proves their shamelessness.

Conclusion

Having analyzed the confessions of state employees, the inner workings of the ministries, the private luxurious lives of government officials, and the narratives surrounding the invasion of Ukraine, it is logical to argue that the vast majority, if not all, members of the Kremlin and the Presidential Administration are aware of the actual facts related to the war and are purposefully lying to cover up the truths unfavorable to Vladimir Putin's regime. Testimonies of current and former employees from state-affiliated media agencies and ministries, people close to the Presidential Administration, and the amount of money paid to spread lies indicate that the Kremlin distinguishes between reality and false information. The proof that media workers have access to credible sources shows awareness, especially when considering there are people who do not believe in state propaganda anymore. Certain things, like enjoying Western luxuries and consciously bypassing sanctions, are impossible to be unaware of. This means that government officials are knowingly hypocritical and lie when claiming that they do not want to go abroad or that they have no ties there. The disappointment over Western sanctions and the decrease in morale within the Kremlin and the Presidential Administration points to the fact that officials are not entirely isolated from reality and the truths, particularly the consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, meaning that the lies are a conscious effort to safeguard Putin and his regime. Finally, the constantly-changing narrative surrounding the goals of the war and the lack of response to battlefront failures indicate awareness on the part of the Russian Ministry of Defense and Kremlin officials. All of this is a manifestation of the concept of shamelessness that runs through Russia's disinformation campaigns and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Researching this phenomenon is important for understanding Putin's system of governance. It is particularly useful for assessing the commitments of officials and propagandists to the state-imposed goal of spreading false information which keeps the regime in place. This further glimpse into the inner workings of military dictatorships and the nature of people that build them can potentially provide answers as to why Russia still functions: blind loyalty in exchange for money and blood.

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[i] When mentioning state of "awareness of facts," the author describes the access or possession of the knowledge that is unaffected by the Kremlin's manipulations, be it real-time events, independent sources, etc.

[ii] Alexey Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 7.

[iii] Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, 5, 22.

[iv] Brian D. Taylor, *The Code of Putinism* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[v] Taylor, *The Code of Putinism*, 27.

[vi] Sasha Sivcova, Svetlana Reiter, et al., "Vse bez iskliucheniia ponimaiut, chto vrut: Meduza rasskazyvaet istoriiu Mariny Ovsiannikovoĭ, vyshedshei s antivoiennym plakatom v efir Pervogo kanala. Bonus: chto na kanale proiskhodit iz-za voiny" [Everyone, without exception, understands that they are lying: Meduza tells the story of Marina Ovsyannikova, who went on air on Channel One with an anti-war poster. Bonus: what's happening on the channel because of the war], *Meduza*, March 15, 2022, https://meduza.io/feature/2022/03/15/vse-bez-isklyucheniya-ponimayut-chto-vrut.

[vii] Sasha Sivcova, Svetlana Reiter, et al., "Vse bez iskliucheniia ponimaiut, chto vrut..."

[viii] Sasha Sivcova, Svetlana Reiter, et al., "Vse bez iskliucheniia ponimaiut, chto vrut..."

[ix] Sasha Sivcova, Svetlana Reiter, et al., "Vse bez iskliucheniia ponimaiut, chto vrut..."

[x] Sasha Sivcova, Svetlana Reiter, et al., "Vse bez iskliucheniia ponimaiut, chto vrut..."

[xi] There is a limited number of sources that testify to the behind the scenes in the Kremlin's disinformation machine, particularly what news outlets employees and officials have access to. However, based on the fact that government media are ordered to transform the information that is available around the world into something more suitable for the Kremlin's narratives, one can conclude that the workers are able to legally access the unmanipulated information, including from Western countries. For more on Russian state journalists, see Steven Lee Myers, "From Russia, Elaborate Tales of Fake Journalists," *The New York Times*, March 21, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/18/business/media/russia-fake-journalists.html; "Vlasti pytayutsya provodit' v vuzakh propagandistskiye lektsyy po istirii I "bor'be s feikami". Nekotorye prepodavateli otkazyvayutsya ikh chitat'" [The authorities are trying to conduct propaganda lectures on history and the "fight against fairies" in universities. Some teachers refuse to read]" *Meduza*, March 22, 2022. https://meduza.io/feature/2022/03/26/vlasti-pytayutsya-provodit-v-vuzah-propagandistskie-lektsii-po-istorii-i-borbe-s-feykami-nekotorye-

prepodavateli-otkazyvayutsya-ih-chitat; Sasha Sivcova, Svetlana Reiter, et al., "Vse bez iskliucheniia ponimaiut, chto vrut...".

[xii] *Dedlain № 4*, hosted by Artem Efimov, "Moi kollegi proshli shkolu raschelovechivaniia: Episod, v kotorom my govorim s sotrudnikom Rossii Segodnia" [My colleagues went through the school of dehumanization: Episode in which we speak with a Rossiya Segodnya employee], *Meduza*, March 10, 2022, https://meduza.io/episodes/2022/03/10/dedlayn-4-moi-kollegi-proshli-shkolu-raschelovechivaniya-epizod-v-kotorom-my-govorim-s-sotrudnikom-rossii-segodnya.

[xiii] Darina Zhunussova, "Russia's Information War at Home: What Are These 'Metodichki'?," *SFS Center for Eurasian, Russian and East European Studies* (blog), Georgetown University, February 3, 2023, https://ceres.georgetown.edu/research/student-projects/russias-information-war-at-home-what-are-these-metodichki/.

[xiv] "«V rossiiskoi diplomatii utverdilas' propaganda sovetskogo tipa» Byvshii diplomat Boris Bondaryov, vystupivshii protiv voiny, napisal stat'iu dlia Foreign Affairs – o «razryve sviazi s real'nostiu v MIDe»" [Soviet-style propaganda has taken hold in Russian diplomacy." Former diplomat Boris Bondaryov, who opposed the war, wrote an article for Foreign Affairs about the "break in touch with reality" in the Foreign Ministry], *Meduza*, October 18, 2022, https://meduza.io/feature/2022/10/18/v-rossiyskoy-diplomatii-utverdilas-propaganda-sovetskogo-tipa.

[xv] "Kak propaganda razviazala voinu i teper' pitaetsia eyo zhertvami / Issledovanie Novoi Gasety Evropa" [How Propaganda Started a War and Now Feeds on Its Victims / Research by Novaya Gazeta Europe], Novaya Gazeta, November 16, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Al8-UkKnFfk; "«V rossiiskoi diplomatii utverdilas' propaganda sovetskogo tipa»….

[xvi] "«V rossiiskoi diplomatii utverdilas' propaganda sovetskogo tipa»..."

[xvii] In Russia it is more a matter of blind obedience as a manifestation of civil service; personal convictions do not matter as long as what one says and does aligns with whatever the state requires.

[xviii] Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, 28.

[xix] In-person interview with an anonymous source currently employed by the United Nations Organization.

[xx] "«V rossiiskoi diplomatii utverdilas' propaganda sovetskogo tipa»..."

[xxi] People who currently work in the Russian media sphere do not have the freedom of choice regarding what to write as it is largely dictated by the government. Any job is a guaranteed paycheck to feed oneself and one's family. However, people still have a choice regarding whether they want to be employed by a state organization that spreads false information and justifies war crimes and attacks on human rights. There are certain spheres where employment means one lies way more compared to other spheres, those being in media, election committees, the government, etc. It is certainly the fault of the regime for creating these living conditions, but one should not discount the accountability of the people working for *Pervy Kanal* or state ministries.

[xxii] Mariia Pevchikh and Georgii Alburov, "Phantasticheskie tvari i skol'ko oni poluchaiut" [Fantastic Beasts and How Much They Get Paid], Alexey Navalny, April 28, 2021, 22:40, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5QDtACuZRp8.

[xxiii] "Phantasticheskie tvari i skol'ko oni poluchaiut."

[xxiv] "Phantasticheskie tvari i skol'ko oni poluchaiut."

[xxv] Masha Gessen, "Inside Putin's Propaganda Machine," *The New Yorker*, May 18, 2022, https://www.newyorker.com/news/annals-of-communications/inside-putins-propaganda-machine.

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[xxviii] "«Vidite, kak mal 1% kosmetichki?»…"

[xxix] Diyora Shadijanova, "Pro-War Memes, Z Symbols and Blue and Yellow Flags: Russian Influencers at War," *The Guardian*, April 23, 2022, sec. Media, https://www.theguardian.com/media/2022/apr/23/z-symbols-pro-war-memes-ukrainian-flags-russian-influencers-ukraine.

[xxx] Noah Berman and Anshu Siripurapu, "One Year of War in Ukraine: Are Sanctions Against Russia Making a Difference?," Council on Foreign Relations, February 21, 2023, https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/one-year-war-ukraine-are-sanctions-against-russia-making-difference.

[xxxi] Alexandra Prokopenko, "Putin Is Betting on a New Class of Asset Owners to Shore Up His Regime," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 14, 2023, https://www.carnegieendowment.org/politika/90543.

[xxxii] While Russian economy is experiencing a military boom and the sanctions did not achieve an economic collapse as was aimed, many Russian oligarchs and officials still personally felt the restrictions on their travel and the confiscations of their property as a result of these measures. For more on sanctions and the lack of economic result, see Paul Sonne and Josh Holder, "Russia's Brutal War Calculus," The New York Times, February 23, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/02/24/world/europe/russia-war-calculus.html.

[xxxiii] Anastasiia Antipova and Anastasiia Sannikova, "Kakie strany Rossiia schitaet nedruzhestvennymi. Karta" [Which countries does Russia consider unfriendly? Map], RBK-RosBiznesKonsalting [RBC-RosBiznesConsulting], November 2, 2022, https://www.rbc.ru/politics/02/11/2022/62e3b3f59a79472ed9cfd9ee.

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[xxxvi] Zakharov, "Medvedev zaiavil…"; To learn more on the politics of sanctions on Russia, see Charles E. Ziegler's "The politics of sanctions in U.S.-Russia relations" in Kanet, Roger E. and Moulioukova, Dina, *Russia and the World in the Putin Era: From Theory to Reality in Russian Global Strategy* (London, New York: Routledge. 2022), 214.

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[xxxix] "Iakhty, Vsiatki i Liubovnitsa. Chto Skryvaet Ministr Lavrov."

[xl] "Iakhty, Vsiatki i Liubovnitsa. Chto Skryvaet Ministr Lavrov."

[xli] "Iakhty, Vsiatki i Liubovnitsa. Chto Skryvaet Ministr Lavrov."

[xlii] "Iakhty, Vsiatki i Liubovnitsa. Chto Skryvaet Ministr Lavrov;" Michael Weiss, "Exclusive: Sergei Lavrov and Oleg Deripaska Traveled With a Sex Worker to Japan in 2018," *New Lines Magazine* (blog), April 20, 2022, https://newlinesmag.com/reportage/sergei-lavrov-and-oleg-deripaska-traveled-with-a-sex-worker-to-japan-in-2018/.

[xliii] "Iakhty, Vsiatki i Liubovnitsa. Chto Skryvaet Ministr Lavrov."

[xliv] "Iakhty, Vsiatki i Liubovnitsa. Chto Skryvaet Ministr Lavrov."

[xlv] Andrei Pertsev, "«Pered nim strakh do usrachki. No strakh bez uvazheniia» Vladimiru Putinu – 70 let. «Meduza» vyiasnila, kak k nemu teper' na samom dele otnosiatsia te, kogo priniato

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[xlvi] Pertsev, "«Pered nim strakh do usrachki. No strakh bez uvazheniia» Vladimiru Putinu – 70 let."
[xlvii] Weiss, "Exclusive;" "Shvedskaia Quintus Technologies otkazalas' ot postavok zapchasteĭ 'GAZu'" [Swedish Quintus Technologies refused to supply spare parts to 'GAZ'], Interfax.ru, October 5, 2020, https://www.interfax.ru/russia/730023.
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The New Face of European Grand Strategy: Promise and Peril

Blythe Gilbert

Abstract

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014 should have prompted an immediate and serious realignment of European grand strategy. It did not. Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022 finally provoked a *Zeitenwende* in European foreign policy and strategic thinking. This article examines this "turning point," and argues that the EU Strategic Compass and the NATO Strategic Concept have formulated an effective *European* grand strategy to face a world marked by rising great-power competition. However, because both the EU and NATO are made up of sovereign states, each with their own geopolitical interests, historical understandings of foreign policy, and domestic concerns, the unified implementation of these "grand principles" faces serious challenges. Each of the "big three" European military powers—Germany, France, and the United Kingdom—have put forward individual strategic documents which outline how their governments intend to meet NATO and EU requirements. These national security documents reveal the difficulties of integrating European defense among sovereign states, as each nation's response presents unique potential roadblocks for working closely with other European nations. The piece concludes that although the question of sovereignty still hinders the creation of a unified European defense system, the creation of a remarkably coherent grand strategy which the major powers agree on is a substantial step toward integration that bolsters Europe's status as a credible geopolitical actor.

Introduction

In 2014, following the ousting of Viktor Yanukovych, the Russian Federation invaded Ukraine with the intent of seizing Crimea. Using an effective combination of disinformation, deception, and applied force, the Russian military was swiftly able to entrench itself in Crimea in the face of resistance from poorly-organized Ukrainian forces. However, this blatant act of aggression and subsequent annexation did not result in a dramatic reassessment of the European security situation by North Atlantic Treaty Organization (hereafter, NATO) countries; it failed to instigate widespread military reform, increase spending allocations, or even initiate a European withdrawal from heavy reliance on Russian oil and gas. Instead, only Ukraine would initiate a broad rearmament and reorganization program for its armed forces. Furthermore, the sanctions imposed by Western powers with the intent to "send a strong message to the Russian government that there are consequences for their actions that threaten the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine" only wound up costing the Kremlin approximately $50 billion over a five-year period since their enactment—not nearly enough to inflict permanent harm on a roughly 1.7 trillion-dollar economy.[i]

The second Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was not predicated on hybrid warfare or subterfuge; it was an unabashed full-scale invasion. This, finally, prompted a real reaction from NATO and the European Union (hereafter, EU)—with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz proclaiming on February 27, 2022 that the invasion was a *Zeitenwende* (turning point) in European defense policy.[ii] Indeed, the response from Europe has thus far been prompt and steadfast in its rejection of Russian claims and its support for Ukrainian sovereignty.[iii] In light of the war in Ukraine and the ongoing security crisis in Europe, the EU published the Strategic Compass for Security and Defense in March 2022 which established the EU's strategic vision for Europe and provided for the creation of a joint Rapid Defense Capacity.[iv] This was closely followed by a June 2022 NATO summit in Madrid which produced the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept—the first update since 2010. This document provides a "blueprint for the Alliance in a more dangerous and competitive world," and is intended to guide NATO

member states' foreign policy and strategic outlooks to achieve a coherent and objectives-driven European grand strategy.[v]

Nevertheless, international organizations like the EU or NATO are heterogeneous geopolitical actors made up of sovereign states, with their own grand strategies, historical conceptions of national purpose, and methods of achieving their goals. It is a truly monumental task to organize a useful guiding grand strategy for Europe that can be implemented pragmatically at both the international and national level—particularly as the war in Ukraine rages on. While commentators have frequently pointed out the practical difficulties and haphazard measures which characterize European defense projects, few have examined how European national strategic documents relate to the implementation of European grand strategy.[vi] This paper will first outline the fundamentals of European grand strategy, and will then compare national strategic documents from France, Germany, and the United Kingdom to ascertain how the three major European powers have responded to the 2022 NATO and EU strategic guidelines. The strategic documents chosen form the basis of the "big three's" response to Europe's new grand strategy, and therefore constitute starting points for examining Europe's practical response to its novel grand strategy. A close analysis of these documents demonstrates that despite their priorities and objectives largely aligning with EU strategic principles, the European powers' unique approaches to foreign policy seriously complicate the practical implementation of a European "grand strategy."

NATO and the European Union's Grand Strategy

The NATO Strategic Concept (hereafter, NATOSC) and EU Strategic Compass (hereafter, EUSC) function more as "a *direction* and not a cookbook, or a recipe," in the words of Henry Kissinger (emphasis mine).[vii] While the EUSC does lay out certain actions to be taken immediately by EU member states, such as the creation of a rapid response capacity of 5,000 "modular" troops capable of being deployed in a variety of defense scenarios, the EUSC's primary contribution is the commitment of EU nations to achieving certain overarching goals as soon as possible.[viii] With the exception of the creation of the European Union Rapid Defense Capability (hereafter, EURDC), the document's chief purpose is to set the direction of EU strategic preparation. It identifies key geopolitical threats or potential realms of conflict, and establishes the framework by which the EU will prepare to respond to these threats.[ix] The NATOSC functions in a similar manner; it asserts that the three primary roles of NATO are defense and deterrence, crisis prevention and management, and cooperative security.[x] After this, it establishes the need for a strategic review in the dangerous circumstances NATO must respond to and then outlines a set of high-level strategic guidelines that will define NATO's approach to these developments. In short, both the NATOSC and EUSC provide guiding principles for European security, rather than mandating specific actions or approaches.

Before examining how the three major European powers have responded to this grand strategy, it is necessary to establish what guidelines these strategic frameworks set in place. The NATOSC and EUSC both:

1. Identify the Russian war in Ukraine as the most prominent threat to European security—with its invasion signalling a rise of revisionist powers attempting to shape/dismantle international norms to suit their purposes.[xi]
2. Enhance their ability to make united decisions and deliver coordinated responses as an international unit by bolstering credible collective defense and establishing common crisis management procedures.[xii]
3. Re-dedicate the European community to upholding international laws and human rights in the face of revisionist states and despite regional competition.[xiii]
4. Acknowledge the decline of disarmament treaties and call for a renewed effort to prevent nuclear and conventional arms proliferation.[xiv]
5. Call for a rapid development of European cyber capabilities and deterrents in the face of Russia's implementation of hybrid methods of warfare.[xv]

6. Require member countries to build resilience capacity into their economies, which would better prepare them for future crises and enable them to carry on extended conflict.[xvi]

These guidelines represent a comprehensive response to the many challenges Europe faces today. Russia presents the most immediate short-and medium-term threat to European security, and demands an effective response since Ukraine has been recently granted EU candidate status, has submitted a NATO fast track bid in 2022, and remains a vital part of European supply lines.[xvii] China is the longer-term threat to European values, as its government seeks to use international law to its advantage or to ignore it outright. Despite this, its massive economy and global leadership status represent an opportunity for the EU and NATO to secure a favorable peace for both parties. The need for unity in the face of a rapidly changing world is also emphasized, with the EUSC noting that the EU must develop the means to act as a credible strategic actor on the world stage. International human rights form the cornerstone of the EU and NATO charters, and their protection is mandated by both strategic documents. Nuclear proliferation, conventional arms races, and the increasing risk of cyber-hybrid attacks on critical infrastructure all constitute major challenges that both documents identify as strategic priorities. Finally, responding to the increasing global security risk, both documents call for the bolstering of domestic security through economic, energy, and cyber resilience—to be fostered through international and bilateral agreements.

The NATOSC and EUSC thus lay out an eminently coherent framework for strategic development, cooperation, and prioritization of resource allocations. Although the only specific action mandated by the documents is the creation of a rapid defense capability within the EU itself, the NATOSC and EUSC combined constitute an effective grand strategy with which the European community can approach the rapidly evolving threats and opportunities that surround it. Because both NATO and the EU are international organizations lacking strong mechanisms of enforcement, and because this grand strategy lays out a *framework* and not specific *actions,* each nation is free to meet these requirements as it sees fit. This allows European grand strategy to be flexible, but it also means that if measures like the creation of a rapid defense force and the development of resilient civilian and military systems are to be accomplished, it is imperative that the core European powers' own strategic documents sincerely align themselves with the pursuit of multilateral European cooperation. Unfortunately, as shall be demonstrated, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom's fundamental strategic outlines each contain elements which threaten the effective implementation of European grand strategy—potentially leaving Europe without a unified response to both short- and long-term threats.

Germany: A Directionless Turning Point?

Germany was once the center of military might in Europe, to great and terrible effect. Much of the Cold War was dedicated to answering the "German question" in Europe—with both the US and the USSR concerned that a reunified Germany could bring about another European war. German foreign policy has for years, therefore, been dominated not by aggression but by compromise and efforts at forwarding European integration—which it views as the surest method of guaranteeing its own sovereignty. The 2023 National Security Strategy (hereafter, NSS) is the first foundational strategic document of its kind in German history and forms the basis of Germany's pivot away from its previous strategy, *Ostpolitik. Ostpolitik* refers to the "approach to the East" pioneered by German Chancellor Willy Brandt in the 1970s which emphasized *détente*[xviii] and focused on cooperation with the Soviet Union as a means of achieving German reunification. *Ostpolitik's* effects have outlived the end of the Cold War, as exemplified by Germany's crippling reliance on Russian natural gas imports. The intent was that a mutually beneficial relationship would build trust between the East and West—a vision that was shattered with the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[xix]

Germany's preference for cooperation over conflict lives on in the NSS. But this strategy, as dictated in the NSS, now precludes Russia, and instead prioritizes bolstering European defense structures and increasing NATO and EU cooperation. The NSS places the

security and territorial integrity of Germany's European allies on the same level as German sovereignty—a remarkable commitment.[xx] This strong emphasis on multilateralism makes the German document the most conducive to the successful implementation of European grand strategy, especially compared to France and the United Kingdom. However, perhaps because the NSS is Germany's first attempt to concretely define its national strategy, it fails to elaborate on aspects of German foreign policy which could cause contention, not with Europe's grand strategy as outlined in the NATOSC and EUSC, but instead with its most important aforementioned European peers—France and the United Kingdom. In particular, the NSS's commitment to a values-based foreign policy does not provide policymakers with a framework for making tough decisions as to whether German interests or German values should be prioritized in cases where the two diverge.

As a whole, the NSS's close alignment with NATO and EU grand strategy is truly remarkable. Its delineation of Germany's security environment and core values practically mirrors those of the EUSC, and it foregrounds EU territorial integrity through the protection of the free democratic order and the strengthening of alliances in the Euro-Atlantic region. Moreover, its promotion of an international order based on international law and human rights is also entirely coherent with NATO's principles and core tasks.[xxi] More important for the implementation of European grand strategy is the NSS's evident commitment to viewing its own *national* interests as entirely intertwined with those of its European allies. Whereas France and the UK insist that national sovereignty is paramount (as will be elaborated below), Germany instead proposes "integrated security" as the cornerstone of its defense. Integrated security means "bringing together all issues and instruments that are relevant to protecting [Germany] from external threats," and posits that as part of this integrated approach, "collective and national defense are one and the same."[xxii] Not only does the NSS align itself with Europe's interests and pledge to contribute to its defense, it also repeatedly casts Germany in the role of acting as a key pillar of European integrated defense by committing itself to spearheading joint arms projects, cyber defense initiatives, and military rearmament.[xxiii] Thus, Germany's primary security document seems poised to further European collective defense in exactly the manner prescribed by the EUSC and NATOSC.

However, as mentioned, the NSS fails to delineate *clearly* where Germany will rely on a values-based foreign policy and where Germany will prioritize an interests-based foreign policy. The NSS describes German foreign policy broadly as "values-based and interest-driven," with the understanding that "it is in [Germany's] fundamental interest to defend our values."[xxiv] The NSS lays out Germany's interests according to values such as democratic order, freedom of speech, the rule of law, protection of the environment, and securing access to resources for women and minorities as established by Germany's commitment to following feminist foreign policy principles.[xxv] Indeed, the NSS dedicates far more space to values-based initiatives—such as through its comprehensive focus on the *Wehrhaft* (robustness) of German democracy and on the protection of human rights outside Europe—than do the corresponding French or British strategic documents.[xxvi] This is coherent with Germany's lasting commitment to the strength of European norms. What the NSS fails to detail, however, is how Germany will respond—notably, whether the underlying motivation be values- or interest-driven—should it be faced with a situation in which preserving European norms is potentially detrimental to German or European interests. For instance, cooperating with Victor Orbán's illiberal regime in Hungary is certainly in Germany's interest, but potentially threatens European norms such as the freedom of the press. Hungary's challenge to EU sanctions and the EU's blocking of Hungarian funding in response has already proved this to be a relevant issue, but the NSS is not clear about whether policymakers should prioritize Germany's interests or its core values in such situations.[xxvii]

France and the United Kingdom, as will be discussed, have not connected their own national security so closely to Europe. Germany's NSS differs on some major points from its peers; for example, the NSS posits that "nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought," and that *conventional* military strength is thus required from the German armed forces in order to uphold European defense.[xxviii] France, on the other hand, relies on its nuclear capacity as its

primary form of deterrence. If Germany is to act as a core nation driving European defense integration, it will have to reconcile its support for nuclear arms control with France's ongoing nuclear modernization program. Another practical example of this clash between Germany's values and interests has arisen recently in the conflict between Israel and Palestine. While the NSS declares repeatedly that Germany, because of its historical guilt, will uphold Israel's right to exist, such a foreign policy based on values makes enacting this commitment difficult.[xxix] What does "upholding the right to exist" mean? Does it mean providing economic or military aid to Israel as it wages a war whose civilian casualties far outstrip that of a war prosecuted according to international law? However, it also cannot mean abandoning Israel, as Hamas's stated intentions are to destroy the state of Israel. Since Israel is a key Western ally in the region, this outcome would be fundamentally contrary to German interests. In such situations, the NSS does not make clear how Germany will balance its interests and values, other than prioritizing the security of European territory against aggression. The NSS's ambiguity regarding its values and interests represents a major issue with German foreign policy and could leave German policymakers without direction in a period when German leadership is desperately needed in Europe.[xxx]

France: The Grand Idea of Independence

As Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* influenced Germany foreign policy before the war in Ukraine, so too does the shadow of Charles de Gaule loom large over French strategic thought. The introduction to the 2022 French National Strategic Review (hereafter, NSR)—the foundational document of French strategy—begins with President Emmanual Macron's stated desire for France to solidify itself as both a globally influential power and a "driving force behind European autonomy."[xxxi] Fundamentally, the NSR's assessment of France's strategic environment agrees with the NATOSC and EUSC in a series of 52 points: it assigns primacy of place to the Russian invasion, the rise of China, the need to bolster international institutions, and hybrid threats such as cyberwarfare, terrorism, and disinformation. However, the NSR proposes a method for answering these trends that is based in distinctly *national* strategic thinking. According to the NSR, France's right to self-determination and independence on the international stage is paramount—just as it was under Charles de Gaulle. This approach, though in principle aligned with European grand strategy, presents its own unique challenges in practice by limiting the potential for real multilateral cooperation in favor of preserving French national liberty.

De Gaulle approached international relations with the aim to secure French "grandeur," insisting on France's autonomy in decision-making at the international scale, the refusal to accept American dominance in Europe (both military and cultural), and the prioritization of the nation-state and its defense above multilateralism.[xxxii] Grandeur was centered on French cultural authority and the legacy of French colonial power, which, although fading, still gave France unique inroads and diplomatic opportunities all around the globe. Furthermore, it was a way to achieve French goals by "aiming high" in a world where Cold War superpowers often dominated the allocation of resources.[xxxiii] When De Gaulle fell from power in 1969, France returned to the NATO command structure and has since largely supported European integration—most prominently by acquiescing to the United Kingdom's application to join the EU. However, the shadow of grandeur still looms large over the French approach to foreign policy. One need only look to Jacques Chirac's opposition to the 2003 American-led invasion of Iraq or to Macron's maverick attempts to broker peace in Ukraine following Russia's 2022 invasion to recognize these lingering effects.[xxxiv] The NSR, although committing to support the NATOSC and EUSC grand strategy, continues to emphasize this independence.

The NSR strongly supports the development of collective European defense capabilities and a common strategic culture—even committing France to taking the lead in their development—however, it also firmly posits that France "*refuses* to be locked into bloc geopolitics."[xxxv] Fundamentally, the document fails to establish how French sovereignty can be

reconciled with the creation of an effective and united European defense system. The NSR repeatedly asserts the need for France to sustain its role as a "balancing power, placing this objective on par with the containment of Russia, the confirmation of the international order, and the modernization of French defense capability."[xxxvi] The necessity of acting as a balancing power is a concept rooted in post-WWII French foreign policy—another legacy of De Gaulle.[xxxvii]

This is not to say the NSR does not attempt to balance these two opposing concepts. To connect French independence with European integration, the NSR declares that the promotion of French fundamental interests "cannot be limited to the national level" because Europe is "united in a common destiny."[xxxviii] In short, the NSR argues pragmatically that French national interest lies in supporting the EU as a credible, united actor on the international stage because Europe's defense is the defense of France. However, this does not get around the fundamental primacy of France's right to self-determination, which the document repeatedly sets as a prerequisite for French security.

The NSR envisions France's capacity to intervene in global affairs as a means of ensuring the protection of French territory, French citizens abroad, and French allies. According to the NSR, the ability to intervene militarily without the immediate support of allies lends credibility to French national standing and also to the credibility of its allies in Europe. However, French national interests are not guaranteed to align entirely with European grand strategic principles. France's ongoing prosecution of counter-terror operations in Francophone Africa constitutes a contemporary example of this issue.[xxxix] The NSR does not establish a clear method for determining whether terrorism or European integrated defense efforts take priority—both are characterized as fundamental to French security.[xl] Following the French withdrawal from Mali at the Malian government's request, West Africa's increasing political volatility has made the region a hub for terrorism, violent civil wars, and—of particular cause for concern—Russian mercenary activity.[xli] It is possible to foresee a situation in which critical and already limited French resources could be diverted away from European defense to West Africa in the joint name of countering Russian influence and deterring terrorism. Since the terror attacks in France of the mid-2010s, counterterror operations have been particularly popular amongst the French electorate, so given the region's current instability such a scenario is both plausible and an excellent demonstration of how the NSR's emphasis on sovereign independence could problematize the implementation of European grand strategy.[xlii]

Additionally, it is interesting to note the precedence that the NSR gives to French nuclear autonomy. The NSR posits that French influence abroad rests largely on its *status* as a great power—again connected to its status as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and as a perennial European leader—and this emphasis has real implications for France's defense priorities. France's spending has thus far reflected the NSR's commitment to nuclear independence, having dramatically increased its spending on nuclear modernization programs since 2019. Although Macron has assured European allies that France's nuclear weapons remain a tool in the European arsenal of defense, it is does not bode well for the future of European grand strategy that a potential leader of European integration like France does not place its trust in the mechanisms of unified defense, but instead in unilateral nuclear capacity.[xliii] Not only is the use of nuclear weapons entirely impossible to integrate into a shared defense network—as only the President of France may employ them—but France's reliance on nuclear weapons could encourage other European powers to seek similar "real" security.[xliv] Although the EUSC and NATOSC commit European nations to respecting the international laws of war, it is reasonable to assume that nations may follow France's lead and seek "real" security elsewhere. If not from nuclear weapons, which few states in Europe could realistically produce, then from other non-conventional weapons systems which the EUSC condemns as destabilizing.[xlv]

As a careful examination of the French 2022 National Strategic Review exposes, the European grand strategy outlined by the NATOSC and EUSC has been considered and applied within the tradition of French foreign policy and national grand strategy. France remains proud of its role as a balancing power, and intends to uphold this autonomy at the potential expense of

the European grand strategy. Although the NSR argues that French autonomy supports European strategic autonomy, this emphasis on national independence and sovereignty could seriously undermine the attempt to create a combined European military command—since every French military action must, according to the NSR, first-and-foremost defend French independence, even at the risk of its European allies' security.

The United Kingdom: The Pragmatic Outsider

The United Kingdom (hereafter, UK) is unique among the three major European powers, as it is part of NATO but not of the EU. Since leaving the EU in January 2020, the United Kingdom has had to reorient its defense strategy and position in Europe, having concomitantly been excluded from the body charged with formulating the EUSC. This has not, however, diminished the importance of the UK as a European actor or as a member of NATO. The UK retains its permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), and has been a staunch supporter of Ukraine since the beginning of the invasion. An analysis of the UK's current primary strategic document, the 2023 Integrated Review Refresh (hereafter, IRR), demonstrates that the UK largely shares the same principles as those espoused by the NATOSC and EUSC, but, like Germany and France, its response to these principles presents potential problems for the future of European defense coordination.[xlvi] The strategy put forward in the 2023 IRR places great emphasis both on pursuing pragmatic partnerships that augment British strengths rather than pursuing strictly values-based objectives, as well as on maintaining the UK's ability to actively shape international events. This strategy results in a British foreign policy that is far less-European oriented than that of France or Germany.

The 2023 IRR approaches the question of European security from a "Euro-Atlantic" viewpoint instead of a strictly European one. Much of the review is not centered on Europe, but rather on the maintenance of the UK's close ties with its allies around the globe, from Canada to Australia.[xlvii] However, this is *not* to say that the UK review does not strongly support the upholding of NATO's defense capacity—in fact, Britain is the only power to explicitly pledge itself to committing more than 2% of its GDP which is the baseline of the NATO Defense Investment Pledge.[xlviii] Furthermore, the UK has maintained its position of prominence within NATO, as London has been selected as one of two Defense Innovation Accelerator of the North Atlantic (DIANA) headquarters, with the set to operate out of Tallinn, Estonia. This is a significant commitment to maintaining the UK's security ties to the continent; however, the UK does not tie itself to a "common destiny" with Europe or position itself as the center of multilateral cooperation. Instead, the UK commits itself to upholding the British legacy of a European balancing power. As Robert Johnson writes, British foreign policy is uniquely influenced by historical considerations. Akin to France's role as a "balancing power," the UK's foreign policy is primarily concerned with upholding a favorable balance of power on the continent and around the globe. Although not always expressed, this consideration has influenced British foreign policy from the Napoleonic Wars through the World Wars and is still evident in the UK's emphasis on working alongside global partners like the US, Australia, and India.[xlix]

The enthusiasm to partner with states outside Europe necessarily results in a foreign policy that is more tolerant of ideological differences. For example, while Germany's NSS accuses China of being a revisionist power trying to "remould the world order in its image," the IRR asserts that Britain will strive to work *bilaterally* with China to defend British and international security as long as their policies do not infringe on British interests.[l] This approach, called "promiscuous bilateralism" by critics, has long been part of the UK's strategy to maintain the global balance of power and has come at the cost of developing enduring multilateral understandings in Europe.[li] This is a fundamentally realist approach to foreign policy, based on the long-term goals of the UK rather than on the defense of European security. Continental defense is important to the UK, but the IRR makes it clear that countering threats to international stability "will mean working through other groupings and beyond the Euro-Atlantic theatre."[lii] This includes nations that are not explicitly bound to upholding British

values, like China, but which are "willing to work with us on the basis of respect."[liii] The IRR stresses that the British definition of multilateralism relies on national independence to realistically assess state interests and create multiple bilateral arrangements in the pursuit of international stability and on honing the UK's strategic edge, rather than establishing deeper ties with European states or pursuing a foreign policy based on European values.[liv]

Furthermore, the IRR's repeated emphasis on the UK's strong relationship with the United States means that British pragmatic bilateralism could force the country to divide its resources between the United States and its European allies should their respective interests separate.[lv] While the Ukrainian conflict has largely coordinated UK and European efforts, this sort of cooperation is not guaranteed to extend into future conflicts, such as in the potential case of a war over Taiwan—a region in which the EU and the UK have diverging strategic commitments. The European community, although largely supportive of Taiwanese independence, has not committed to defending Taiwanese sovereignty as has the United States. As the war in Ukraine rages on and European resources remain employed defending European territory, it is possible to foresee a scenario in which Chinese aggression against Taiwan is deemed too costly by the EU to resist militarily, but the UK—respecting its close alliance with the United States—joins a US-led coalition. Such a situation would inevitably divert British resources away from European defense, thereby weakening the UK's commitment to its NATO obligations in Europe.

Although the UK's 2023 IRR emphasizes Britain's continuing commitment to NATO and its broad adherence to the European grand strategy as laid out in the NATOSC, Britain's unique position following Brexit means it does not need to follow EU strategic guidelines, offering Britain greater freedom to form independent alliances. Accordingly, the IRR seeks to maximize the UK's position by emphasizing British freedom to create alliances based on fundamentally pragmatic considerations in order to preserve the international balance of power. Such an approach, however, could seriously damage the UK's ability to cooperate meaningfully with its European allies. For example: Germany has committed to a foreign policy based on European values and the preservation of the international order—can this approach tolerate a rogue United Kingdom's willingness to work with "revisionist" states? In a world of increasing strategic competition, it is unclear whether Britain will be able to effectively balance its commitment to European defense and European priorities with its pursuit of strategic advantage across the Atlantic and elsewhere.

Conclusion: Solid Foundation, Shaky Superstructure

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the re-emergence of major-power competition have provided the impetus for a major reassessment of European defense strategy and integration. The NATO Security Concept and European Union Strategic Compass are more than just a "geopolitical awakening;"[lvi] they form a set of coherent principles for directing European multilateral efforts and utilizing Europe's resources to their greatest effect in the pursuit of strategic security. This grand strategy prioritizes the short- and medium-term threat to European security posed by Russia's destabilizing invasion of Ukraine, the long-term risk posed by China and other revisionist powers, the modernization and integration of European defense capabilities, and the need to create resilience among all aspects of European economies—from cyber capabilities to energy independence. Above all, the NATOSC and EUSC provide a framework by which member states might become a credible, united actor on the global scale—and whereby non-NATO and non-EU countries might align with these organizations' respective strategic principles. These two documents cannot be understood without reference to another; they are part of the same attempt to define European grand strategy. To this end, they have succeeded.

However, the difficulty of enacting international principles—even when coherently developed and universally agreed upon—remains. In the absence of a federalized "United States of Europe" (a near impossibility given European national sentiments), each individual member of NATO and the EU are free to decide for themselves how to implement this

European grand strategy. At first glance, the documents from Germany, France, and the United Kingdom appear to be remarkably aligned with European principles. All three identify the same key threats and challenges, and they often propose similar measures to counter them. Yet on closer inspection, it is evident that national interests and strategic thought still prevail in practice. Germany, although committing wholeheartedly to European integrated security, has not defined how its values-based foreign policy will address the interests of its potentially divergent partners. France, though willing to cooperate, remains intent on upholding its absolute sovereignty and reserving its right to act unilaterally—a real roadblock for European defense integration efforts. Finally, the UK (already a non-EU member) has laid out a foreign policy approach that prefers bilateral, pragmatic, and interests-based relationships (particularly with the US) over a long-term multilateral understanding with Europe. Its insistence on maximizing its strategic advantages through these bilateral partnerships does not preclude it from establishing treaties outside the European defense community that could be detrimental to the ongoing effort to re-integrate the UK into the European Defense Community following Brexit.

Thus, Europe is left with a remarkably coherent grand strategy that lacks the mechanisms to enforce its own principles. This has remained an ongoing problem of the European integration project—one that even the outbreak of war on the European continent has not been able to solve and which presents real challenges in formulating a unified European response to aggression in Europe and abroad. Despite this, it is worth noting that real progress has been made since 2014. The creation of a rapid defense capability and the modernization of all the three powers' militaries is a substantial boost to European credible defense. Furthermore, although these national strategic documents differ in approach, their acknowledgement of similar objectives provides some common ground for negotiation that is much needed in a world increasingly defined by insecurity and evolving international competition.

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[iii] Biscop, "European Defence: No Zeitenwende Yet," 2-3; Sabine Siebold and John Irish, "NATO expected to raise munitions stockpile targets as war depletes reserves," *Reuters,* February 13, 2023, https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/nato-expected-raise-munitions-stockpile-targets-war-depletes-reserves-2023-02-13/.
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[v] North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept (Madrid: NATO, 2022)*, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf.
[vi] Sophia Besch, "EU Defense and the War in Ukraine," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, December 21, 2022, https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/12/21/eu-defense-and-war-in-ukraine-pub-88680; Matthew Karnitschnig, "The truth about Germany's defense policy shift," *Politico,* February 27, 2023, https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-zeitenwende-defense-spending-nato-gdp-target-scholz-ukraine-war-russia/
[vii] Applying the lens of "grand strategy"—which is generally a national term—to a multinational organization requires a broader view of the notion of grand strategy. This paper will rely on Brand and Porter's conception of grand strategy as *grand principles.* They note that "[grand strategy] may not dictate every decision, but it lays down the basic parameters by which interests are defined, opportunities and challenges are assessed, and power is applied."[vii] Indeed, this is exactly how the EUSC and NATOSC function. See Hall Brands, Patrick Porter, "Why Grand Strategy Still Matters," National Interest; and Kissinger, Henry A. "Background Press Briefing by the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), Foreign Relations of the United States 1969—1976, vol 1.
[viii] EU Strategic Compass 2022, 25.
[ix] EU Strategic Compass 2022, 17-24; Jordan Becker, Michael Dudab, and Douglas Lute, "From context to concept: history and strategic environment for NATO's 2022 strategic concept," 1-3, DOI:10.1080/14702436.2022.2082959.
[x] NATO Strategic Concept 2022, 1.
[xi] The EUSC defines revisionist states as states which "[promote] a strict sovereigntist approach that constitutes in reality a return to power politics." Essentially, those states which reject the international rules-based order that the European community has striven to uphold. NATOSC, 4-5; EUSC, 4-5, 17-18.
[xii] NATOSC, 6-7; EUSC, 25-28.
[xiii] NATOSC, 10; EUSC, 10, 14, 28.
[xiv] NATOSC, 8; EUSC, 15, 18, 22.
[xv] NATOSC, 7; EUSC, 34-35.
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[xviii] The relaxation of political relations through diplomatic efforts.
[xix] Per Högselius, *Red Gas,* 105-109, 135.
[xx] NSS, 21.
[xxi] NSS, 22-24; EUSC, 17-23; NATOSC, 3, 6-8.
[xxii] NSS, 30.
[xxiii] NSS, 31-33.

[xxiv] NSS, 20.
[xxv] The Federal Foreign Office of Germany outlines what Feminist Foreign Policy (hereafter, FFP) means in Germany and how it will be applied in a 2023 Guideline entitled "Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy." In short, German FFP is centered around "three R's": rights, representation, and resources. This means upholding the equal rights of women and minorities worldwide, ensuring foreign and domestic equitable participation of women or minorities in all areas of society, and ensuring women and minorities' equal access to natural, educational, societal, or financial resources. This method "attempts to center gender equity and human security more strongly in foreign policy activities," and constitutes a profoundly *values-led* foreign policy—not simply a policy limited to women's issues. (See Uwe Fromm, "Feminist Foreign Policy—A Question of Definition," *EURAC Research,* and Federal Foreign Office of Germany, "Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy.")
[xxvi] NSS 29, 46-48, 51-52.
[xxvii] Lorne Cook, "EU proposes to suspend billions in funds to Hungary," *Associated Press (AP) News*, September 18, 2022, https://apnews.com/article/hungary-executive-branch-viktor-orban-aefd56b81ace179655d58ba0735dd292.
[xxviii] NSS, 32.
[xxix] NSS, 11,19.
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[xxxi] French National Strategic Review 2022, 1
[xxxii] Thierry Balzacq, "French Grand Strategy," in *Comparative Grand Strategy: A Framework and Cases.* ed. Balzacq, Dombrowski, and Reich, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 99.
[xxxiii] Philip Gordon*, A Certain Idea of France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 18-20.
[xxxiv] As David Styan argues, Chirac's opposition arose from a uniquely French line of diplomatic thought, which prioritized the UN Security Council as the main method of solving international disputes and which also considered France to be in a unique position to uphold the developing world against the unilateral actions of the US—which France rejected on principle. (See Styan, "Jacques Chirac's 'non': France, Iraq and the United Nations, 1991–2003," *Modern and Contemporary France* 12, no. 3, 372).
[xxxv] NSR, 13-15. Emphasis mine.
[xxxvi] NSR, 7.
[xxxvii] France's position as an alternative to the established great powers has continued after the collapse of the USSR; for example, it has sold advanced weapons systems to nations such as Qatar which do not meet the strict democratic or human rights requirements necessary to purchase from the USA or Germany. As an example of this trend, see Elisabeth Gosselin-Malo, "Rafales on the upswing? French fighter eyes additional Mideast sales," *Defense News,* September 7, 2023, https://www.defensenews.com/air/2023/09/07/rafales-on-the-upswing-french-fighter-eyes-additional-mideast-sales/.
[xxxviii] NSR, 19.
[xxxix] For more on this, see Gani Joses Yoroms, "France's counterterrorism and counterinsurgency strategy in Africa," in *Routledge Handbook of Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency in Africa,* ed. Usman Tar (New York, Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2021).
[xl] In fact, the NSR at times seems to place counterterrorism above European defence. "Protection of the national territory, including France's overseas territories, and of French nationals against external threats and attempts at internal destabilization, *including the terrorist threat*" takes precedence before "Security of EU Member States and the Euro-Atlantic area." More bluntly, the NSR states that "France's main lever for defending its interests remains the long-term maintenance of its autonomy of decision-making and sovereign action in response to

all threats that arise." The priority of French *national* interests makes the hierarchy between terrorism and European security an ambiguous one. See NSR, p 19.
[xli] For more on the French withdrawal, see Catrina Doxsee, Jared Thompson, and Marielle Harris, "The End of Operation Barkhane and the Future of Counterterrorism in Mali," CSIS, March 2, 2022. Russian forces have been accused by the UN Human Rights Watch of committing various crimes against civilians in their anti-terror operations in the Central African Republic. Wagner's presence serves to both bolster the Kremlin's control over regional resources and disrupt Western influence. See United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner, "CAR: Russian Wagner Group harassing and intimidating civilians—UN Experts," October 27, 2021.
[xlii] Jonathan Fenby, *France: A Modern History from the Revolution to the War on Terror* (New York: St. Martin's Press; 2016), 475-478.
[xliii] Michel Rose, "Amid arms race, Macron offers Europe French nuclear wargames insight," *Reuters,* February 7, 2022, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-defence-macron-idCAKBN20119O/.
[xliv] Meaning, security backed not by treaties or agreements but by boots-on-the-ground warfighting capacity.
[xlv] EUSC, 22. The NATOSC makes clear that NATO's goal is "a world without nuclear weapons,"—inconsistent with France's elevated view of its own nuclear capacity, see NATOSC 5, 7-8; and "Russian drones, missiles and shells target Ukrainian infrastructure," *Al Jazeera,* November 3, 2023.
[xlvi] For areas where the UK's priorities match the European grand strategy outlined in the NATOSC and the EUSC, see 2023 Integrated Review Refresh 4-6, 44-45, 49.
[xlvii] 2023 Integrated Review Refresh*,* 10-11, 17.
[xlviii] 2023 Integrated Review Refresh, 43.
[xlix] Robert Johnson, "UK Grand Strategy," *Comparative Grand Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019) 123-127; 2023 Review, 19.
[l] 2023 Review, 34-35; NSS, 23.
[li] Richard G. Whitman, "Brexit or Bremain: what future for the UK's European diplomatic strategy?" *International Affairs,* no. 3 (2016): 511.
[lii] 2023 Review, 20.
[liii] 2023 Review, 23.
[liv] Reiterating that "traditional multilateral approaches and defending the post-Cold War 'rules-based international system' are no longer sufficient on their own," the review pledges the UK's foreign policy to "actively shape the environment in which it operates." Freedom to operate is not enough to secure British interests, rather, the UK must pursue arrangements that generate strategic *advantage.* In the face of growing powers like China and established blocs like the EU, the review asserts that the UK must define its core strengths and seek to enhance these advantages through careful manipulation of the international order. These core strengths include the London Stock Exchange, the UK's cyber capabilities, and the fact that the UK has the second highest GDP in Europe. See 2023 Review, 22-23, 57-58.
[lv] The IRR repeatedly stresses the UK's close relationship with its "most important ally and partner"—the United States. See 2023 Review, 23.
[lvi] EU Strategic Compass 2023, 4.

New Cold War Narratives

As Seen on TV: The Israeli-Palestine Conflict in Russia and America

Johnny Amundson

Abstract

The Israeli-Palestinian permacrisis in 2023 was on track to be —even before Hamas's attack and Israel's invasion of Gaza — one of the deadliest years for Palestinians on record. TV news remains one of the most common mediums through which people make sense of crises around them, and this holds true for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As Russia pushes its invasion of Ukraine into its third year and America expands its military intervention throughout West Asia, the reporting produced in both countries presents competing narratives to hundreds of millions of people. Though American and (to a lesser degree) Russian news coverage of the conflict has been studied, there has been no research comparing the coverage of the conflict in both countries.

This paper juxtaposes the coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on Russia's state-ran *1TV* and America's *National Broadcasting Company*, or *NBC*, focusing on the reporting of three key news events. It examines coverage with relation to framing theory, Raymond Williams' idea of 'flow,' and the depiction of gender. Neither *1TV* nor *NBC* has provided the necessary context or impartiality needed to paint an accurate and complete picture for their viewers. Instead, the coverage on both channels has reflected the geopolitical interests of their respective countries, although this was caused by different journalistic tendencies.

Introduction

Few conflicts are as aptly described to be in a state of permacrisis as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The years 2018, 2014, 2005, 1987, 1982, 1973, 1972, 1967, 1956, and 1948 signify their own crises. 2023, for its part, was a particularly deadly year in occupied Palestine even before Hamas' attack on October 7th and Israel's subsequent bombardment, full blockade, and invasion of the Gaza Strip.[i] Narratives put forth by Israelis and Palestinians to legitimate one course of action or another fight for international attention, including in Russia and the United States — who are themselves at odds once again over Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. At the same time, the militaries of both countries are active in West Asia. This paper will examine how Russian and American TV news discuss the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Literature Review & Methodology

Three episodes of *NBC Nightly News with Lester Holt* and three episodes of Pervyĭ Kanal ("Channel One", hereafter 1TV)'s *Evening News* (two of which were hosted by Ekaterina Berezovskaya and one by Andrei Ukharev) were selected and analyzed for the purposes of this paper; the rationale for selecting media outlets and episodes as well as the criteria for analysis are discussed below. 1TV and NBC were chosen as they are popular in their respective countries and share important similarities: both are geared toward domestic audiences, constitute basic cable channels available to the public at large, and have a wide variety of programming including sports, comedies, dramas, game shows, reality TV, news, and more. One important difference to note is ownership: 1TV's largest owner is the Russian government, and NBC is a subsidiary of Comcast Corporation, an American multinational corporation.

The three set of episodes correspond to three newsworthy events: Israel's announcement of its ground invasion of the Gaza Strip on October 27, 2023, the end of the seven-day truce on December 1, 2023, and Israel's killing of a Hamas leader outside Beirut, Lebanon accompanied with a terrorist attack in Iran that killed 84 people — for which the

Islamic State later claimed credit — on January 3, 2024. It should be noted that I analyzed the first available nightly news program on 1TV following the announcement of the ground invasion aired on October 28, 2023, a Saturday. This meant that the Ukharev hosted instead of Berezovskaya. Due to the time difference, the first available nightly news program on NBC after the announcement was on October 27.

Framing:

The framing of news stories is an insightful tool in gauging the level and direction of bias of news reporting. It is worth quoting Robert Entman at length as his 1993 article has proven highly influential:

> Framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.[ii]

In other words, news-creators — consciously or otherwise — highlight one perspective over another through methods such as repetition, source selection, omission, cultural signifiers, headlines, proximity to the top of the story, word selection, and others. According to Entman, news frames define problems, assign causality, make moral judgments, and recommend solutions. When one problem definition is made more salient than another definition (or one causal agent more than another agent, and so on), then the news consumer is more likely to recognize and internalize one interpretation over another. Though news frames are not omnipotent, Entman sees them as "the imprint of power — it registers the identity of actors or interests that competed to dominate the text."[iii]

When analyzing news frames across languages, as this paper does, it is important to go beyond the literal understanding of the languages and also consider the cultural and political context.[iv] Indeed, Dimitrova and Strömbäck's multi-country analysis of coverage of the initial phase of the US invasion of Iraq suggests that national political environments play a significant role in the news' framing of war, especially when news outlets rely heavily on official government sources.[v]

In analyzing how sources were framed, I coded two variables: quotes and paraphrases of sources (e.g., government representetives, military leaders, and civilians). If a single quote or paraphrase used multiple frames, a primary frame and secondary frame were chosen based on what was most salient. Fourteen news frames were identified based on the frameworks in Dimitrova and Strömbäck's aforementioned study and Joya Chakraborty, Anjuman Borah, and Muktikam Hazarika's framing analysis of coverage on ethnic conflicts and seperatist movements.[vi] Some important frames that might have an unclear definition include: *conflict* (focuses on military action, strategy, and equipment); *humanitarian* (focuses on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, now or in the recent past); *responsibility* (states who are responsible for an event); *human interest* (incorporates a human face and emphasizes the individual); and *prognostic* (discusses the future, including possible consequences and possible solutions).

Flow:

In his comprehensive history and analysis of television and broadcast technology, Raymond Williams details the importance of 'flow' when analyzing TV content. Flow, to Williams, is sequencing; one word, shot, segment, or show after the other. Williams argues that flow is one of the key distinguishers between television and other media, such as a movie, a book, or a sporting event. The latter are all "discrete events" with "specific and in some degree temporary" social relationships.[vii] Television, on the other hand, brings all these events in "a single dimension and in a single operation," back-to-back-to-back.[viii]

Williams identifies three levels of flow: Long-range flow, medium-range flow, and close-range flow. Long-range flow concerns the ordering of a day's worth of TV programs; e.g.

drama, news, game show, drama. Medium-range flow zooms into the sequencing within a program. Williams examined relationships between segments of a news program including commercial breaks. He explored how these individual parts can share themes and meaning, noting that American TV news (at the time) appeared less deliberately arranged than its British counterpart. Close-range flow brings attention to individual words, sentences, and shots, showing how repetition can convey meaning. Because the viewer's interpretation of a show, advertisement or news segment can be impacted by what precedes or follows it, Williams argues that analyzing only individual units is insufficient.

To analyze long-range flow, I looked at the TV listings for January 3, 2024 on 1TV and NBC. I watched an episode of a new hour-long celebrity gameshow on 1TV that immediately followed the evening news from January 2–5, which is an important holiday week in Russia. The gameshow premiered on 1TV in the fall of 2023 and aired each Saturday until this particular holiday week. The show is called *I Love my Country*, and it is the Russian version of a Dutch TV show *I love Holland*. The United Kindgom, Ukraine, Saudi Arabia, China, and many other countries have had their own versions of the show.

To analyze medium-range flow, I watched the entirety of all three nightly news episodes on both channels to look for points of comparison. Although Williams was also interested in how commercials played a role in informing news programs, commercials were not available for the online version on 1TV and NBC and, therefore, were not analyzed.[ix]

Gender:

In summarizing the academic literature at the intersection of gender, media, and security in his 2017 article, "Gender, Media and Security," Romy Fröhlich identified common tropes of how women are portrayed by news media during times of insecurity, especially armed conflict; these tropes will be useful in analyzing how 1TV and NBC depict women in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Fröhlich notes how women are rarely presented as an acting subject. Men are often shown as the promoters of war, women are peace-loving and suffer from violence. In other words, men are portrayed as the protectors, and women as those in need of protection. This is compounded by the trend in war reporting that decentralizes the individual and instead presents victims as "anonymous masses."[x] Stories specifically about the security of women are therefore further ignored. I examined the episodes utilizing these tools for the portrayal of gender.

Main Findings

NBC covered the Israeli-Palestinian conflict more than 1TV. Each *NBC Nightly News* episode had two to four segments that either directly dealt with or mentioned the conflict. 1TV had one segment per episode, and, apart from the more comprehensive segment on October 28, the two following episodes spent less than a minute each discussing the conflict. This, perhaps, makes sense when considering the United States ("US") is critically involved in the conflict, arming and providing diplomatic and military cover for Israel. Russia, on the other hand, has limited participation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and is waging its own war in Ukraine — the news of which took up large parts of 1TV airtime in the episodes I coded.

Both 1TV and NBC failed to provide the necessary context to understand the conflict. In the episodes I coded for both channels, the history of the conflict went only as far back as October 7, 2023. Even before Hamas' October 7 attacks, 2023 was on track to be the deadliest year for Palestinian children at the hands of Israeli forces in the West Bank since the UN began recording this data in 2005; it was on pace to surpass 2022, which had been the deadliest year on record.[xi] NBC used the word 'occupied' only once, 1TV did not mention the occupation, and neither outlet provided viewers with context to what Israel's illegal military occupation looks like for Palestinians. This lack of context serves to mystify the root causes of the most recent escalation, which Amnesty International considers to be Israeli "apartheid" and a "blockade on Gaza." In an editorial, the Israeli newspaper Haaretz similarly laid the blame on Israeli Prime

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his government of "annexation and dispossession" which "openly ignored the existence and rights of Palestinians.[xii]

Frames:

Two differences are immediately apparent in how sources are framed on 1TV and NBC news. The first is the scarcity of *human-interest* frames on 1TV (3%), whereas 47% of sources on NBC are framed in this category. *Human-interest* frames highlight individuals in war coverage who are usually 'anonymous masses,' so the frames play an important role in humanizing the subjects being reported on.

Despite the lack of *human-interest* frames during Israeli-Palestinian segments on 1TV, the channel did employ *human-interest* frames in multiple segments reporting on Russian soldiers involved in Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In the episodes analyzed, 1TV never used *human-interest* frames for Ukrainians who opposed or were harmed by Russia's invasion. Of the four parties in the two conflicts (i.e. Israel, Palestine, Russia, and Ukraine), 1TV humanized only individuals on the Russian side while covering the other three sides as 'anonymous masses.'

Primary Frames Overall	*Channel*		
Frame Used	1TV	NBC	Grand Total
Anti-Iran		2%	1%
Anti-Israel		2%	1%
Anti-terrorism	7%	4%	5%
Anti-war	28%		9%
Conflict	24%	12%	16%
Human Interest	3%	47%	33%
Humanitarian	10%	4%	6%
Other	3%		1%
Prognostic	14%	9%	10%
Responsibility	10%	21%	17%
Grand Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Secondary Fram	*Channel*		
Frame Used	1TV	NBC	Grand Total
Anti-Israel		4%	2%
Anti-terrorism	10%	7%	8%
Anti-war	3%	2%	2%
Conflict		5%	3%
Hostages		16%	10%
Humanitarian	14%	2%	6%
Jewish Americans		4%	2%
None	69%	39%	49%
Palestinian Americans		11%	7%
Pro-war		11%	7%
Responsibility	3%	2%	2%
Grand Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Figure 1: Overall usage of primary and secondary frames by channel

On NBC there was — until the final episode — a reasonably equitable distribution of *human-interest* quotes by Jews and Palestinians, both in America and abroad.[xiii] After coding the third episode, however, a segment involving interviews with Orthodox-Jewish Israeli soldiers and family members led to the appearance of a *pro-war* secondary frame. This secondary frame was paired with 22% of *human-interest* primary frames on NBC (see Figure 2). Those interviewed spoke of "the way to live the real religious life" and their "duty and obligation as an observant Jew" to fight in Israel's army.[xiv] This means that NBC humanized members on the Israeli side of the conflict in 55% of quotes or paraphrases whose primary frame was *human-interest*; for Palestinians it was 26%. Figure 1 shows how NBC's most common primary frame was *human- interest* (46%). If this primary frame is separated by secondary frames (see Figure 2) that support the Israeli point of view (i.e. *hostages, Jewish Americans,* and *pro-war*) and those that do not, then this new pro-Israeli *human-interest* frame constitutes the most used frame by NBC (26%).

HI Secondary Overall	Secondary frame use
Hostages	26%
Humanitarian	4%
Jewish Americans	7%
None	15%
Palestinian Americans	22%
Pro-war	22%
Responsibility	4%
Grand Total	**100%**

HI Secondary no 3rd ep	Secondary frame use
Hostages	35%
Humanitarian	5%
Jewish Americans	10%
None	15%
Palestinian Americans	30%
Responsibility	5%
Grand Total	**100%**

Figure 2: NBC secondary frame when primary is *human interest*. All 3 episodes vs first 2 episodes only

The second major difference was that 1TV never framed a source as *pro-war*, and, in fact, the *anti-war* frame was their most commonly used primary frame (28%). NBC, on the other hand, used an *anti-war* frame just once (2%). Notably, the *anti-war* frame was not used by either news outlet except in the first episode. On 1TV the discussion of anti-war protests around the world and calls for a ceasefire at the United Nations (UN) were the visuals by which this frame was used. 1TV used the *anti-war* frame to show that Russia was voting with the "overwhelming majority" of countries in the UN by calling for a ceasefire, while "Western partners continue to only see one side of the problem."[xv] In coded episodes, NBC did not discuss anti-war protests, nor did they discuss the US' Ambassador to the UN voting against a ceasefire resolution.

The *responsibility* frame is also worth addressing as it is a key way in which the two outlets highlight causality of unfolding events for their audiences. The frame (whether primary or secondary) was used by 1TV in 13% of sources and by NBC in 23%. Both employed the *responsibility* frame to report what the Israeli and Palestinian sides were saying as well as to criticize official state enemies. NBC used the frame to blame Iran for allegedly helping Hamas plan its attack on October 7.[xvi] Notably, it also used the frame once to blame the US State Department for not doing enough to help Americans who were unable to leave Gaza.[xvii] 1TV, for its part, used the frame to assign blame to Western governments for their vetoing of a ceasefire resolution at the UN and the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza.[xviii]

1TV deployed the anti-West *responsibility* argument in a slightly contradictory way later in the episode: a correspondent prefaced a quote made by Israel's Permanent Representative to the UN, Gilad Erdan, by sympathetically noting that he had had a tough day. He is then shown speaking before the UN: "Today is a day that will go down in infamy. We have all witnessed that the UN no longer holds even one ounce of legitimacy or relevance." Immediately after Erdan's quote, Israel is shown as a victim, justifiably not taking a step back.[xix]

1TV producers could have chosen to show other parts of Erdan's speech, such as when he says that Israel has a right to defend itself and that atrocities like the October 7 attack must be prevented from happening again.[xx] This alternative quote, in fact, would have tied in nicely with the immediately preceding and following sections which mentioned Hamas' attack. 1TV's decision to quote that section of Erdan's speech could very easily produce in viewers doubts of the UN's legitimacy. By portraying Israeli actions as justifiable and the Israeli UN representative as sympathetic, 1TV seems to contradict the earlier part of the segment where Western countries were criticized for stopping the UN form taking action. Some sort of coherency can be found, however, if 1TV is trying to delegitimize both the 'West' and international organizations. [xxi]

Flow:

Analyzing medium-range flow provides a space to examine this anti-West rhetoric in other segments. The large amount of airtime on 1TV that was dedicated to Russia's (illegal) invasion of Ukraine included interviews of soldiers, demonstrations of military equipment, and quotes from Russian officials on how well the "special military operation" was going. The national origin (e.g., German, American) of Ukrainian equipment being destroyed was often mentioned, along with battlefield video of the equipment being blown up. "Anti-Russian sanctions" from the West were also shown to be criticized by Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó.[xxii] While 1TV did show and discuss the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, they never showed scenes of destruction in Ukraine after Russian rocket attacks. A Russian viewer of 1TV might easily believe that the war in Ukraine is going swimmingly for Russia without drawing a comparison between the suffering in Gaza and the suffering in Ukraine.

As for NBC, many segments were partially tied to the ongoing conflict between Israel and occupied Palestine. One example is a segment on the five-year anniversary of the Tree of Life shooting in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, an anti-Semitic terrorist attack, which was the deadliest anti-Semitic attack in US history.[xxiii] The segment began by showing what the synagogue was doing to honour the victims and then interviewed a member whose father had been killed in the attack. Then, the segment discusses how Hamas' October 7 attacks brought back the feelings associated with the attack from five years earlier. The correspondent asks Jeff Finkelstein, the CEO of Pittsburgh's Jewish Federation, if he is ever afraid to be Jewish.[xxiv] NBC decontextialized the Pittsburgh attack by not mentioning the motive of the attacker: far-right, anti-immigration ideology.[xxv] By mixing the anniversary of the shooting with the Hamas attacks without discussing the political context, viewers might easily (and incorrectly) believe that the most serious threat to Jewish people in the US is Islamist — and not far-right — terrorism.

Taking the long-range view of flow into consideration brings attention to the game show on 1TV, 'I Love my Country' that immediately followed the January 3, 2024 evening news episode. The gameshow opened with the theme song, a live power-ballad duet containing the following lyrics: "The best in the world, my Russia. I value her, I belong to her, and I will proudly say 'I love my country.'" Musicians are shown on screen followed by shots of the crowd, dressed in traditional New Year garb and waving Russian flags. The host then comes on and presents a fun fact — Russia and Pluto are comparable in terms of square kilometres — and then introduces the band, the two competing teams, and explains the game. The celebrity teams compete to answer questions on topics such as Russian history, language, and film.[xxvi] In discussing long-range flow, Williams highlights how shows can be affected by the programming that precedes and follows.[xxvii] This can be applied to how the patriotism that *I Love my Country* tries to instill in viewers could certainly affect the way one might interpret the news one has just watched, especially as Russian government officials were featured prevalently.

The two hours preceding and following the nightly news on NBC and the hour following was dedicated to local news. Since local news is, by definition, not broadcast to the whole country, it would be difficult to conduct a representative analysis of long-range flow.

Gender:

1TV's coverage of women adhered to the summary laid out by Fröhlich. Much of 1TV's reporting was 'anonymous masses', and the only time women did play a visible role, was when their protection was used as justification for Israel not stopping the war. In discussing the October 7 attacks, a 1TV correspondent said, "1400 guilty-of-nothing Israelis killed, captive women, children, and the elderly, rockets falling every day on Israel don't allow for a step backwards."[xxviii] The video accompanying this audio shows a little Israeli girl screaming as a Hamas rocket explodes within earshot. Although the host for 1TV was a woman in two of the three episodes, the only interviewees who were shown speaking were men. Once, the host paraphrased a Lebanese representative to the UN who, as could be seen in the video, is a

woman.[xxix] All other paraphrases or quotes by the host were either from men or did not mention the speaker's gender.

The prevalence of human-interest segments in NBC's coverage allowed for the security of women to be highlighted more when compared with 1TV. One such example is an interview in the first episode with Abdula, a Palestinian American whose wife, daughter, and two sons were stuck in Gaza.[xxx] Building on Fröhlich's summary, women and children in this interview were shown in danger and not 'acting subjects'.[xxxi] The husband was shown as wanting to protect his family but unable to. The danger faced by the wife and daughter were not, however, used as justification for Palestinians to fight in the same way that Israeli women were shown as a reason for Israel to keep fighting in the aforementioned 1TV segment. Instead, the NBC correspondent "[hoped] someone steps up to bring his family and all the other Americans home."[xxxii]

The trope of women as peace-loving, as identified by Fröhlich, was subverted by an interview with a mother and father whose son, an Israeli soldier, was killed in battle. This was part of the aforementioned segment about Orthodox-Jewish Israeli soldiers. In this segment, men are shown as fighters and active participants, following the expectations laid out by Fröhlich.[xxxiii] The mother, however, is not shown as 'peace-loving', as she took an active role of 'sending' herson into battle. The mother said, "If you ask me if I would do it again, yeah, I would send him again because this is our land, and this is what we have to do."[xxxiv]

Although the correspondent notes that the parents live in Mitzpe Yericho "in the occupied West Bank," he does not explain for the viewers what that means, for example, that these settlements contravene international law.[xxxv] Nor does the correspondent, in the interview or via voiceover, push back against the mother's justification for fighting, "this is our land," when it in fact is not their land. The village was constructed for Israeli settlers on land seized from the indigenous Palestinian population (both Muslim and Bedouin) in the locality known as Nabi Musa outside of Jericho in the occupied West Bank.[xxxvi] A viewer who does not possess much background knowledge might reasonably agree with her justification for fighting when it is presented out of context and goes unchallenged, as NBC did.

Conclusion

News reporting on conflicts often ignores individual stories in favor of 'anonymous masses' and war strategy. 1TV's coverage conformed to this observation, presenting a quote from a private individual only once. Most sources on NBC were private individuals instead of official sources. By presenting quotes and paraphrases from pro-Israeli private individuals twice as often as pro-Palestinian private individuals, NBC humanized the Israeli side of the conflict more so than the Palestinian side. One other major difference in how the two channels framed sources is that 31% of quotes and paraphrases on 1TV were framed *anti-war*, whereas only 2% of quotes and paraphrases on NBC were framed in that way; in fact, NBC used the *pro-war* frame (11%) much more often. Both channels used the *responsibility* frame to criticize geopolitical rivals: 1TV against the 'West' and NBC against Iran.

1TV covered both the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, and in coverage of both employed rhetoric critical of the 'West'. The channel did highlight the humanitarian crisis caused by Israel's bombing and invasion of the Gaza Strip, but it never extended the same critical lens to the humanitarian crisis caused by Russia's bombing and invasion of Ukraine. On NBC, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was tied to other segments covering domestic issues, for example the segment on the five-year commemoration of those killed at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. NBC recontextualized the attack by not mentioning the far-right, anti-immigrant ideology of the attacker while also thematically connecting the Pittsburgh attack with Hamas' October 7 attack. Taking the longer view of 'flow' into account, the ultra-patriotic game show *I Love my Country* that followed the third news broadcast on 1TV would likely influence how viewers interpreted the news, and vice-versa.

1TV's depiction of gender conformed to general trends in conflict reporting described by Fröhlich. Stories involving women were rarely discussed, but when they were, the need to protect women was used as justification for Israel to continue fighting. For NBC, on the other hand, the frequent use of interviews of private individuals meant that many more stories

involved women. As with 1TV, NBC at times presented women in need of saving. Other times, however, NBC's depiction of women did not conform with trends described by Fröhlich. One example is when an Israeli mother is not shown as a passive peace-lover, but instead as actively having sent her son to the Israeli army.

Neither 1TV nor NBC provided the necessary context needed for quality coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. NBC's preferential treatment of pro-Israeli narratives reflects other analyses of print and TV news coverage in the US since October 7, 2023.[xxxvii] 1TV did provide a more equitable treatment of pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian narratives, but still failed to properly contextualize the conflict. The lack of airtime on 1TV dedicated to the conflict compared with NBC shows that the conflict was not considered as important to producers on 1TV.

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The Evolution of the Memorialization of Babyn Yar under the Soviet Union and Independent Ukraine

Sophie Sacilotto

Abstract

In the fall of 1941, the Babyn Yar ravine in Kyiv, Ukraine was the site of one of the first and most rapid massacres of the Holocaust. In two days over 34 000 Jews residing in Kyiv were systematically slaughtered and pushed into the ravine. Other "undesirables" including Roma people and communists were added to the bodies in the following months and prisoners of war were used to cover up the crimes committed. Despite significant documentation following the end of World War II, the Soviet Union repressed and ignored the events that took place at Babyn Yar until 1976. Of the over-87 memorials now standing in the park, only one, erected by the Soviet Union in 1976, is funded by the government. This memorial commemorates innocent Soviet citizens and "victims of fascism," making no mention of the predominately Jewish population amongst the dead.

Babyn Yar has been central in the public eye since Ukraine's independence and the subsequent erection of over 87 new monuments to different ethnic, social and political groups killed in the massacre with the new freedom the government provided. This article discusses Babyn Yar's significance as an example of the misuse of the memorialization of a tragedy. This site remains a vital example of this trend – one made even more poignant with Russia's allegations of Ukrainian neo-Nazism and its bombing of the Babyn Yar park (intended to hit a TV station). Memory is a strong tool that can be employed by governments, it is important however, to think critically about what message each memorial sends to those who survive.

Note on Translation

Babyn Yar – Ukrainian Name
Babyn – Old Woman or Woman*
*varies depending on the source
Yar – Ravine
Babi Yar – Russian Name

Introduction

On 19 September 1941, the Wehrmacht, German army, entered Kyiv, the capital of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and the largest Soviet city to fall under the Nazi occupation during World War II. Just ten days later, the Nazis began executing Jews at Babyn Yar, a deep, 150-meters-long, snaking ravine fifteen meters deep whose name roughly translates to "old woman ravine."[i] These executions would continue for the next two years, predominantly targeting Jews but also Roma, Communists, and partisans to name a few.[ii] Concrete statistics on the death tolls of each ethnic, social, and political group have never been established due to a lack of concrete data. However, between 34,000 and 100,000 are believed to have been killed at the ravine. Today the park around Babyn Yar is filled with over 88 monuments to those killed there; however, the first of those monuments did not appear until 1976. This article will outline the history of Babyn Yar and how it came to be so significant in Soviet memorial history and for today's ongoing conflict.

Crimes Committed at Babyn Yar

The German army's arrival in Kyiv on September 19, 1941 was greeted with a "grand reception" from the local anti-Soviet population.[iii] This reception was interrupted by explosions at the bell tower and Monastery of the Caves which killed forty Germans. On September 24, another set of bombs went off blowing up the Nazi headquarters and blowing out the windows of the buildings on Khreshchatyk and parallel streets.[iv] Retreating Soviet troops had placed these bombs to kill German officials once they took the city.[v] These explosions drastically escalated tensions in Kyiv. Mines would continue to detonate in the city centre on September 24 and 25 every few minutes, killing around 200 Germans in total.[vi] Both residents of Kyiv and Germans were outraged by the mine explosions, an opportunity exploited by the latter in the coming days to justify the killing of Kyiv's Jews, falsely rumoured to have been responsible for the explosions, and thereby used as scapegoats.[vii]

On September 28, the newly appointed Ukrainian militia posted two thousand copies of an unsigned order around Kyiv.[viii] The order in Russian, Ukrainian, and German was addressed to the Jews of the city demanding that they appear the next day before eight in the morning at an intersection near the Lukianivske Jewish Cemetery.[ix] They were to bring their documents, money, valuables, and warm clothing. Any "Yids [sic]" who disobeyed would be shot.[x] The next morning, thousands of Jews from Kyiv arrived at the intersection of Melnyk and Dehtiarivska street expecting deportation at the nearby train station.[xi] Instead, all queuing Jews' papers were checked and discarded before they were stripped of their clothing, beaten, and pushed to the edge of Babyn Yar where they were summarily shot.[xii] In total, between September 29 and 30, a minimum of 34 000 Jews and residents of Kyiv were shot and buried in the mass grave that is Babyn Yar.[xiii] This was one of the first massacres of Jews in the Holocaust by bullets and remains one of the largest massacres of Jewish people in a 24-hour period during the Holocaust.[xiv]

While it is believed that by the end of November 1941, 42,000 people, mostly Jews, were killed at Babyn Yar, this number is difficult to verify and is debated to range between 40,000 and 100,000 over the course of Nazi occupation.[xv] Of the estimated 42,000, 40,000 are believed to have been Jewish.[xvi]

The final phase of Babyn Yar would begin in 1943, when the Germans ordered the multi-ethnic prisoners of war (POWs) held in the neighbouring Syrets concentration camp to destroy the evidence of the mass executions at Babyn Yar.[xvii] Syrets, construction of which started in May 1942, was a three square kilometers Nazi camp in direct proximity to Babin Yar.[xviii] It held POWs, "racial enemies," partisans (most often members of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN, hereafter).[xix] It is estimated that approximately 10,000 prisoners were housed at Syrets.[xx] The most damaging work to take place at Syrets was the use of its prisoners to destroy the nearby Jewish and Christian cemetery, collect the materials, and use them to create pyres on which to burn the bodies of those executed at Babyn[xxi] The burning and spreading of ashes through the ravine was a tactic employed by the Nazis in an attempt to cover up the massacres that they had perpetrated at Babyn Yar before the return of the Red Army – however testimonies of surviving POWs interviewed immediately following liberation offer critical insight into the extent of the atrocities that took place, setting the number of cremated bodies at 70,000.[xxii]

The Red Army would arrive in Kyiv on November 3, 1943, reclaiming the city by November 13.

The Slow Memorialization of Babyn Yar

Following the Red Army's return to Kyiv in November 1943, Soviet control of Ukraine resumed and the memorialization of Babyn Yar developed privately amongst those who had lost loved ones in the massacres. It would be nearly twenty years until Yevgeny Yevtushenko's poem *Babyn Yar* and Anatoli A. Kuznetsov's memoir *Babi Yar: A Document in*

the Form of a Novel would be published under Nikita Khrushchev's Thaw, opening the door to public discussion of the tragedies that had taken place.

In September 1961, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, a famous Russian poet published the poem "Babi Yar" in the Soviet journal *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, opening discussion on what had taken place at Babyn Yar.[xxiii] His poem caused an uproar in the intelligentsia, bringing Babyn Yar to the centre of discussion about the Holocaust in Soviet territory in the Soviet Union. Public discussion of Babyn Yar and the Holocaust showed that much of the Russian-speaking Soviet population supported the Soviet universalist approach to victims of the Holocaust.[xxiv] It was preferred to remember those killed as pertaining to one homogenous group, rather than differentiated based on ethnicity as their perpetrators had.[xxv] The method of remembering holds particular significance in a multi-ethnic country such as the Soviet Union. Overlooking ethnic differences bolstered the state's official narrative of collective unity union-wide, thereby disregarding differences between its peoples. Despite this, 1961 became a landmark year for the recognition of Babyn Yar thanks to Yevtushenko's poem. The poem would become the first commemorative "monument" to those killed at Babyn Yar, although its reception by the leaders of Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (UkSSR) was less than favourable: the government of the UkSSR did not publicly address the poem, banning it in Kyiv for the next twenty-three years.[xxvi]

The serial publication of Anatoli A. Kuznetsov's memoir *Babi Yar: A Document in the Form of a Novel* in the Soviet Journal *Yunost* would bring even more attention and significance to Babyn Yar.[xxvii] Kuznetsov, an ethnic Ukrainian, had lived in Kyiv throughout World War II, often in hiding as residing in the city was emptied periodically throughout the war by both Nazis and the Red Army.[xxviii] Although large sections of the book were initially redacted, *Babi Yar* includes extensive quotations from several survivors of Kyiv's Nazi occupation, including Dina Pronicheva, one of the few survivors of the initial massacre.[xxix] These testimonies provide critical understanding of the brutality of the Babyn Yar massacres with context, while also providing an insightful account of the Soviet Union's deliberate erasure from memory.[xxx] In 1969, on a trip to London, England, Anatoli Kuznetsov sought political asylum and later published his book in full, un-redacted.[xxxi] In 2023, the Atlantic reported this book to be "The Masterpiece No One Wanted to Save," highlighting a poignant observation regarding the use of literature as a means of confronting historical truths, challenging prevailing narratives, and fostering empathy and understanding among Ukrainians and the broader international community.[xxxii]

It was these two publications that provided the impetus for a spontaneous gathering of young Kyivan Jews, including writers and filmmakers, at Babyn Yar on September 29, 1966 – marking the 25th anniversary of the massacre.[xxxiii] During this gathering, many uncensored speeches were made by notable attendees – some of which were recorded by the attending filmmakers for later distribution, but "whose celluloid film was destroyed on KGB orders."[xxxiv] This was the second commemorative gathering at Babyn Yar to take place that month, warranting a report on it in the archives of the Ukrainian Secret Police[xxxv] The number of attendees on September 29 is highly disputed, with the secret police documentation approximating 500 participants and witnesses such as Ivan Dziuba and Viktor Nekrasov counting thousands, a claim supported by a photograph of the event.[xxxvi]

When the Soviet Union Memorialized

Following Yevtushenko and Kuznetsov's publications in the Russian and Ukrainian Soviet Republics respectively, public interest in Babyn Yar continued to increase. The narratives asserted by the two authors encouraged those who were privately mourning the murder of their families for the past twenty years to begin doing so in public as a community. A change in leadership of the Soviet Union under Khrushchev was additionally encouraging, no longer needing to fear deportation or disappearance in the same manner as during Stalin's rule.

The Soviet government in Moscow accepted and took on some of Yevtushenko and Kuznetsov's ideas in relation to Babyn Yar in an attempt to maintain control over the

burgeoning memorialization movement. The leadership even went so far as to seize control of memorialization events taking place, which had been organized by those wanting to see Babyn Yar have a physical commemoration of its past. By the end of 1966, the government of the UkSSR erected a granite stone at the top of the ravine with an inscription calling for the establishment of a memorial at Babyn Yar dedicated to the memory of the "victims of fascism."[xxxvii] The choice to dedicate the monument to "victims of fascism" was influenced by the Soviet Union's conceptualization of "self-determination."

The Soviet Union's use of the term self-determination and its populations right to it, while sounding quite similar to Western perceptions, differs quite drastically.[xxxviii] Lauri Mälksoo describes the Soviet approach to people's rights, and Lenin and the Soviet Union's understanding of self-determination as different or "unusual" by Western European standards.[xxxix] Mälksoo quotes Soviet International Lawyer Grigory Tunkin saying "the Russian Communist Party struggled for unification on a voluntary basis, so that individual nations exercising their right to self-determination have expressed themselves freely for unification with other Soviet socialist republics."[xl] This universalist approach, critical to consider, argues that a nation, rather than be able to make an independent self-determined choice, can only exercise their "right to self-determination" so long as they are choosing to be a part of the Soviet Union and by extension follow the Soviet leaders. As such, no genuine right to self-determination or acknowledgement of one's nation was permitted as long as it opposed the dominant homogenous Soviet narrative.[xli] As a result, any distinct ethnic minority having been victimized by the Nazis at Babyn Yar was overlooked under the all-encompassing banner of "victims of fascism" on the monument erected under Soviet rule.

The granite stone at the edge of Babyn Yar would remain in its place for ten years, promising a monument to be erected. It would, however, not be until 1976 that a monument would take its place.

After three closed design competition winners were rejected by the Kyiv Municipal government, the Ukrainian Soviet Party finally commissioned the monument in 1972.[xlii] The unveiling of the statue occurred on July 2, 1976, with minimal publicity and the absence of any formal ceremony.[xliii] The monument was described as a memorial to the Soviet people designed to honour citizens, soldiers, and prisoners of war shot by the Nazis at Babyn Yar.[xliv] No ethnic or social groups were named on the plaque adorning the base of the monument, despite records indicating that not only Jews but Poles, Russians, Belarussians, Roma and Sinti, Red Army POWs, Communists and psychiatric patients had all been executed there during the Nazi occupation.[xlv]

In 1991, following Ukraine's independence, three additional plaques were added to the monument with inscriptions in Russian, Ukrainian, and Yiddish.[xlvi] The inscription reads:
In this place during 1942-1943 the German-Nazi occupiers shot one hundred thousand of Kyiv residents and POWs.

The monument has often been criticized for the inaccuracy of its design, focusing on Red Army POWs rather than the Jewish population that made up the majority of the death toll of the massacres.

Babyn Yar Post 1991

Since the erection of the first monument memorializing those murdered at Babyn Yar in 1976, what is today the Babyn Yar Park has continued to evolve and expand as a memorial space. The descendants of those killed by the Nazis have worked tirelessly throughout Ukraine's independence to commemorate all ethnic, social, and political groups killed at the ravine, with the number of monuments in the park now surpassing 88 in total. These monuments include a menorah for the Jewish population, a horse drawn cart for the Roma and Sinti population, and a child for those children killed, all of which have been privately funded and commissioned. The park has not been without controversy however, with contentious debates over the ethics of building of a museum, synagogue, as well as other large art projects on the site.

Unfortunately, the continued evolution and development of the memorial park has been halted by the Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine starting on February 22, 2022. The Babyn Yar Park has even suffered some damage to its grounds, although fortunately no monuments, when a Russian missile accidentally crashed in the park in the early days of the war. With the last photos of Babyn Yar released in 2022, little visual documentation of the current state of the park has made it to the West and as such it is difficult to determine what damage has been done by the missile.

Memorialization of the Holocaust in Ukraine is just as vital today, however, with the Kremlin employing a narrative of de-Nazification to justify their full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[xlvii] In the contemporary geopolitical landscape, there exists a pressing imperative to safeguard the integrity of historical truths surrounding the Babi Yar massacre, in order to counteract Russia's narrative depicting Ukraine as complicit with Nazi Germany both historically and in present discourse. Despite the intricacies characterizing Ukraine's historical relationship with the Third Reich, the atrocities perpetrated at Babi Yar unequivocally constitute genocide. Therefore, it remains paramount to uphold the memory and veracity of these events as a vital measure in combatting revisionist historical narratives.

Conclusion

At the end of World War II, the Soviet Union did not wish to memorialize the Jewish civilians who had died in massacres such as Babi Yar. Instead, the Soviet Union subsumed those Jews killed in what we now call the Holocaust into the category of peaceful Soviet citizens, a name much more suited to the Soviets ideas of self-determination. The Soviet leadership in Moscow did not take any steps to highlight that its Jewish population was treated by Nazis any differently than Russians or Ukrainians. By the 1970s, with an increasing number of Soviet Jews emigrating to Israel, the Soviet government began to see their Jewish citizens as less loyal than other ethnicities, leading to further alienation.[xlviii]

Although the granite stone erected by the UkSSR in 1966 at the edge of Babyn Yar would not be replaced by a monument for ten years, its presence was effective in allowing officials to take control of the narrative and lead the memorialization of Babyn Yar for a time. Ultimately, however, control of the memorialization of Babyn Yar would return to a free Ukraine Government and the people with the fall of the Soviet Union and Ukraine's independence in 1991. The subsequent erection of over 87 monuments by a variety of social, ethnic, and communities' groups who had lost members at the ravine visually demonstrated society's reclamation of the role of memorializing those they had lost. The Jewish monument in the form of a menorah has become a traditional stop for foreign dignitaries visit Kyiv and every year on 29 September, the anniversary of the deadliest day of the massacre, the President of Ukraine lays flowers at the base of the monument.

Babyn Yar is an example of how memorialization evolves over time and through generations. First being memorialized at home, in private by families who lost loved ones, then in Yevtushenko's poem and Kuznetsov's book, then in an inaccurate monument to a vague social collective, and finally back in the hands of the victim's families who have memorialized so many of the groups murdered at the ravine for their ethnicity, race, politics, resistance or other reason. Babyn Yar continues to constantly evolve, pausing only to resist Russian's invasion. One day, I am sure, flowers will again be laid at Babyn Yar.

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The Geopolitical Chessboard: the significance of "*Sviataia Rus*'[i]" in the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian Federation's approach in the conflict with Ukraine.

Amir Nassar

Abstract

Despite the vast body of literature on the invasion of Ukraine in 2014, which led to the full-scale invasion and war in 2022, the issue of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine's (OCU) autocephaly, and the role the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Federation in opposing it, is little-researched. The overall image that emerges from this study is that, in fact, the Russian state uses the Orthodox Church as an instrument of *soft power* to pull Ukraine back into its sphere of influence. Mihail Suslov finds that the prevalent yearning, among clergymen, politicians, and some Russians, for the unity of historic '*Holy Russia*' between Orthodox adherents, the Church, and the Russian state is nothing more than a geopolitical aspiration born out of Russian neocolonialism. Thus, the religious history of Ukraine is being used as a pawn in the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian state's coercive efforts to exercise influence over the Ukrainian state and the Ukrainian Church, and as a form of Russian soft power over the Eastern European region. The Russian Orthodox Church relies heavily on ancient texts, canonical law, and history to argue against the autocephaly of the OCU. Building on Mihail Suslov's argument, this article explores previous research on the Orthodox Church and its relationships with the Ukrainian and Russian states before and during the Russian conflict with and war against Ukraine. In doing so, it is part of an important body of research on Ukraine and Russia, exploring a little studied domain of Ukrainian and Russian studies – the theopolitical dynamics of global Orthodoxy.

Introduction

Parallel to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the intense war that followed, there is an ongoing religious-jurisdictional cold war between the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in Moscow (also known as the Moscow Patriarchate) and the Orthodox Church(es) in Ukraine (OCU). In this context, a dispute over the Ukrainian State-owned grounds of an Orthodox historic monastery, because of alleged loyalty to the Russian Orthodox Church and by extension Russia, could be a part of a larger crackdown on "Ukraine religious organizations affiliated with centers of influence in the Russian Federation."[ii]

The rift between the ROC and Ukrainian Churches, but also between the ROC and the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, has been widening for decades. In the 1990s, the Ecumenical Patriarchate recognized the exiled Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church, which the Moscow Patriarchate refused to acknowledge and subsequently withdrew from pan-Orthodox organizations in which the Estonian Church was also a part of.[iii] In 2019, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, supported by the synod, or council, of the Patriarchate, recognized the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, headed by Metropolitan Epiphanius I of Kiyv and all Ukraine.[iv] In the Eastern Orthodox Church, the 14 independent Orthodox churches, in communion with each other, consider the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople as *primus inter pares* (or first among equals*)* and the one with the authority to grant the autocephalous status to new churches.[v] This authority has been frequently disputed by the ROC, which has been trying to assume the Ecumenical role since as early as the 17th century, including during the Soviet period.[vi] The autocephalous status of a church simply means a church has self-government, and was historically granted during a country's "nation-building process."[vii] The possibility of this status being conferred on Ukraine deepened the tensions not only between the Patriarchate in Moscow and the Church in Ukraine, but also

between Moscow and other churches and Patriarchates.[viii] The autocephalous status in itself is not a doctrinal problem in the Eastern Orthodox Church, because the "polycentric" nature of the Eastern Orthodox Church means many churches are similarly independent, but the fixation on the rhetoric of historical unity between the two churches is the reason for Moscow's negative reaction to the recognition of the OCU's autocephalacy and in general for the prolongation and intensification of the religious-political conflict between Russia and Ukraine.[ix]

The tensions far precede Russia's unlawful invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the Ecumenical Patriarchate's 2019 granting of autocephaly to the OCU. The loyalty of the ROC, and particularly its current leader, Patriarch Kirill, to Putin and the Russian Federation has been a longstanding one: in 2012, the Patriarch called Putin's election a "'Miracle of God'," and he endorsed the 2022 "'peacekeeping operation'" in Ukraine because of the war's "'metaphysical significance'," underlining the religious-jurisdictional conflict also at play in the war.[x]

Therefore, I ask how does the Russian government frame the Orthodox Church in its approach to Ukraine since the latter's independence?

The rhetoric of 'Holy historic unity,' through the Orthodox Church, is a geopolitical tool masking Russia's neocolonialist ambitions in Ukrainian lands. This article contributes to Mihail Suslov's argument that the longing for such 'historic unity' of "'*Sviataia Rus'*"" ('Holy Russia') is nothing more than a "geopolitical utopia," as he puts it, which in fact serves to foster Russian neocolonial ambitions in Eastern Europe and Eurasia.[xi] After introducing the history of Orthodoxy in Russia, Ukraine and Eastern Europe, a brief description of the rift between the Church in Ukraine and in Russia follows. It will be argued that, considering Suslov's argument, the ROC's rhetoric surrounding Ukraine as 'Moscow's canonical land' is only a reality exploited for geopolitical, theopolitical, and neocolonialist aims. The ROC and the three Orthodox churches in Ukraine, namely the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP), and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP), are briefly brought into the discussion of the future of the church as an institution in Ukraine, to possibly show the precarious place the church finds itself in today.

Russian Orthodoxy and Eastern Europe

Cradle of Russian Orthodoxy

In her analysis of the religious nationalism that Russia adopted in the post-Soviet era, historian Mara Kozelsky describes how Ukraine, particularly Kyiv and Crimea, came to be seen and revered as the cradle of Russian Orthodoxy, but also the cradle of the Russian Empire and modern state. The *Chronicle of Nestor*, medival Kyivan chronicles recorded in detail by monks, compiled in approximately the 12th century, recounts Prince Volodymyr's conversion to Greek Christianity, also known as Eastern Orthodoxy, from paganism in 988, in a small town in Crimea and the conversion of his kingdom in Kyiv and the spread of Christianity from there.[xii] According to Ukrainian historians, this *Chronicle* is a "uniquely *Ukrainian* experience" and not Russian, "which … did not exist [then]"; on the other side, Russian historians see "the origins of the Russian state" springing out of the *Chronicle* and other chronicles of ancient and medieval Kyiv.[xiii] By contrast, Makarius Bulgakov, the Metropolitan of Moscow (1879-1882), described the medieval event as "'the most important event in the history of all *Russian* lands' [emphasis added]," in terms of both affairs of state and of religion; this was a change from the earlier Russian historian N.M. Karamzin who had noted that that although Prince Volodymyr's conversion to Orthodoxy consituted an important event, because he put Russians on the "'path of the true faith'," this was distinct from his prominent role and legacy in the "'affairs of state.'"[xiv] Nineteenth-century Russians also identified numerous religious figures and saints associated with Crimea and Kyiv, given that, for them, they "played foundational roles in Russia's religious national identity."[xv] The Apostle Saint Andrew the First-Called's mission and ministry in ancient Scythia was associated with modern-day southern Ukraine, particularly southern Crimea, and the proto-Slav populations on these lands were identified as the ancestors of modern Russians.[xvi]

These idenitifactions give the ROC authority over other churches, since they link the Church and the territory to Jesus Christ and his Apostles directly, evident in the efforts of Patriarch Aleksii II, Patriarch Kirill's predecessor, to "[encourage] Russian pilgrims to travel" to the Holy places in Ukraine, particularly Crimea.[xvii] Not only that, but contemporary Russians, especially President Putin and Patriarch Kirill, stress the conversion of Prince Volodymyr to Greek Orthodoxy, and the other historical events, as the "source" that transformed the Kyivan Rus' empire "into a unique country-civilization," and the modern Russian state is its direct descendant.[xviii] In his patriarchal visit to Ukraine in 2009, Patriarch Kirill highlighted Ukraine as "'the mother of all Rus'" and the place where "the Russian nation was baptised and Russian Orthodoxy conceived."[xix]

This religious nationalism associated with events purportedly taking place in Kyiv and Crimea as early as the first century not only gave Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church legitimacy in claiming Ukraine as part of 'Holy Russia', and also claiming the historic homelands of the Muslim Tatars. In addition, the ROC can claim "primacy over the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople," because of its alleged first-century links, through the Apostle Saint Andrew, which the Ecumenical Patriarch lacks.[xx] In other words, the historical links that Russian historians, clergy, and scholars draw upon from the first to the tenth centuries represented Ukraine as the birthplace of both the Orthodox Church and of the Russian state, fueling religious nationalism, an integral part of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict that ultimately turned into full-scale war.

Growing apart

Following the Euromaidan Protests of 2013-2014, a rift started to appear, with the Ukrainian state and the OCU on one side, and the Russian state and ROC on the other. Seven religious, cultural, and geopolitical factors can explain the Church in Ukraine's break away from the ROC, other than the usage of the ROC as Russian soft power. Political factors include: increased agency of the Ukrainian state in deciding national identity, continued Russian meddling in Ukrainian state affairs – and Church affairs as well – Ukraine's increasing pro-European outlook and foreign policy, and Russia's eastward policies of increased partnerships with China, Iran, and former USSR territories and anti-European/Western stances.[xxi] Religious/canonical factors revolve around the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople's pushback against the Patriarchate of Moscow and the Ukrainians' realization that their interests could be realized by or affiliated with other Orthodox churches, particularly the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the need to reform the global Eastern Orthodox Church's administration away from ancient and medieval administrational systems, the 2016 Pan-Orthodox Council's partial failure to agree on many Church matters, including autocephaly, because of ROC's last minute withdrawal, and President Poroshenko's efforts to facilitate the church's autocephaly by the Ecumenical Patriarch.[xxii]

Thus, the historical ever-growing separation of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine from the Russian Orthodox Church has been exacerbated by geopolitical factors but also by religious and canonical factors. Like the Russian Federation's meddling in Ukraine and other former Soviet states, the ROC's work in Ukraine was seen by many, laymen and clergy alike, as interference in Ukrainian Orthodox affairs.[xxiii] Collectively, these factors point to a growing dissatisfaction with the Orthodox Church and constitute reasons for growing calls for independence from the ROC. Thus, an autocephalous church in Ukraine would mean total independence from Russian interference in both church and state affairs, in a global Orthodox communion that is changing, allowing for a growing number of autocephalous churches in the Orthodox communion, which these factors helped envisage.

'Holy Russia'

According to Mihail Suslov, Patriarch Kirill and other church officials conceived of "'*Sviataia Rus'*"" as being "located on the 'canonical territory' of the ROC" and a "territory of exclusive jurisdiction of ROC," with the term 'canonical territory' referring to the modern-day

countries of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.[xxiv] Patriarch Kirill specifically emphasizes the territories of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and sometimes Moldova and Kazakhstan, in his concept of 'Holy Russia,' which he used from the very beginning of his patriarchal tenure – first appearing in "his programmatic enthronization speech" in 2009.[xxv]

Suslov concludes that the 'Holy Russia' concept that Patriarch Kirill led and promoted since day one of his patriarchate, is a "geopolitical utopia," which has several neocolonialist connotations, while simultaneously being framed to supposedly "stop [western] colonial practices [on culture and religion]."[xxvi] A geopolitical utopia in the sense that "highlight[s] [the ideas'] ability to 'estrange' reality" while striving to "break through the [...] dominant mythology."[xxvii] In that sense, it is a utopia only for its supporters, while being a geopolitical dystopia for many of its opponents, as the current war shows. Baar, Solik, Baarova, and Graf conclude that Russian church leaders, led by Patriarch Kirill, mirrors the mistakes of the Russian state led by President Putin: both still see Ukraine as a "temporarily rebellious province that must be subjugated by force to follow [both] Russian geopolitics and theopolitics."[xxviii] These neocolonialist tendencies are expressed towards the canonical ROC lands by conducting "the 'internal re-colonization' of the Russian population by 're-churchizing' it," but also by "claim[ing] to be the cultural center of the Western civilization."[xxix] Geopolotics has spilt over into church affairs. In the same way anti-Western rhetoric fuels Russian politics, the Moscow Patriarchate accused the Patriarchate of Constantinople of collaborating with the West, namely the United States, in support of Ukraine's quest for "ecclesiastical independence" to undermine Moscow and the Church.[xxx]

Ultimately, this imagined geopolitical utopia is fueled by theopolitical ends; the concept of 'Holy Russia' strives to unite politically divided and sovereign states into a union of shared values, centered around Orthodox Christian morality and scripture, irrespective of ethnicity and physical borders, and intends for Russia to become the "Third Rome" at the head of a religious world, and implied spiritual empire, in line with the first two Romes (Ancient Rome and Constantinople).[xxxi] It could be argued that, while the concept of 'Holy Russia' is refuting the 'Third Rome' narrative, ultimately both have the same ends; in essence, they are claiming a world beyond Russia's borders, both political and canonical, reinforced by Patriarch Kirill's claims that the narrative isn't about "geopolitical hegemony" but about Russia becoming a "Christian spiritual center."[xxxii] As Patriarch Kirill declared in 2014, "'Russia belongs to a civilisation that is larger than the Russian Federation. We call this civilisation the Russian world. This is not the world of the Russian Federation or the Russian Empire. The Russian world begins at the baptismal font of Kyiv'." 'Russian' thus in a way becomes a synonym of 'Christian,' where Orthodox Christian morality becomes supreme, while Russia itself becomes the Ecumenical See, the center of global Orthodox Christianity and spirituality, instead of Constantinople.[xxxiii]

Holy Russia and Spiritual Colonization

The concept of 'Holy Russia,' and the Russian World concept, or *Russkiy Mir*, entail neocolonialist inclinations on spiritual and cultural aspects in once-Russian-imperial and post-Soviet spaces, namely Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. The *Russkiy Mir* concept is a project that unifies the post-Soviet space into a "civilizational community," building on the "'common origin'" from the Kievan Rus' historical memory, centered around the Russian language, the Russian culture, and the Orthodox faith, values, and heritage.[xxxiv] As Suslov puts it, the 'Holy Russia' concept exists "where territorially bounded notion of 'canonical territory' and culturally bounded notion of the 'Russian world' overlap."[xxxv] As Natalia Naydenova elaborates, 'Holy Russia' strives "'to gather'" the scattered *Russkiy Mir* all over the world, argued to be mainly the post-Imperial and-post-Soviet space, and unite them into a "'national culture based on the spiritual and moral values of the Orthodox faith'," away from the corruptible values of "'globalization and secularization'."[xxxvi]

For Patriach Kirill and the proponents of the above-mentioned concepts, the post-Soviet space is divided politically but shares the same spiritual, historical, and cultural heritage, and

thus, naturally should be unified on the basis of the ROC's canonical jurisdiction, to best conserve and preserve *Russkiy Mir* and 'Holy Russia.'[xxxvii] This is evident in Patriarch Kirill's speech in the third Russian World Assembly in 2009, where he argued that the borders separating Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians and the Russian diaspora are "'a sin against historical truth'," and thus the Orthodox faithful in Eastern Europe are "united as 'children of the Russian Orthodox Church'."[xxxviii] Even more explicitly, President Putin's speech at the celebrations of the 1025th anniversary of the baptism of Kyivan Rus' in 2013 shows the imaginary unity between the three countries when he says "'Orthodoxy has become a spiritual buttress for the Russian state and for our national consciousness, uniting Russia, Ukraine and Belarus through strong bonds of brotherhood'."[xxxix] In addition, the celebrations shows the "spiritual colonisation of Ukraine" in the symbolic designation of Patriarch Kirill as the head of the committee and the ROC's assumed role as unifier of global Orthodoxy by inviting the heads of the 15 Orthodox Churches.[xl] The ROC and the Russian Federation have positioned themselves as the guardians not only of 'Holy Russia,' but also of Orthodoxy itself, meant "'to guarantee the spiritual cleanliness of the holy places'" in these countries, particularly Ukraine.[xli] As the heirs of 'Holy Russia' they present themselves as being tasked with preserving the lands – specifically the canonical lands, which they present as separate from the sovereign political lands - the historical legacies, and the spiritual and cultural heritage of these countries.

Ukraine was and still is at the forefront of this ideological re-interpretation of the post-Imperial, post-Soviet world. As the place of the baptism of Prince Volodymyr, Ukraine is "sacred in three interconnected ways."[xlii] First, Ukraine is seen, by clergymen and political leaders, as the birthplace of "Russian Orthodoxy, [Russian] statehood and religious enlightenment."[xliii] Ukraine is thought of as the place where the Russian Empire originated, as well as the birthplace of modern Russia; thus, and all such civilizational and historical heritage has been passed on to Moscow.[xliv] Second, Ukraine is argued to be the "spiritual center of 'Holy Russia'," although it is Moscow's geographical periphery.[xlv] In fact, despite being on the Russian World's geographical periphery and Moscow being its geographical centre, Ukraine and Crimea have been considered the "heart of Russian spiritual and political landscapes" since the first half of the nineteenth century.[xlvi] Third, Ukraine, being the ROC's spiritual centre, is considered a prime place for ascetism, devotion, and spirituality, comparable to Jerusalem.[xlvii] With its numerous monasteries, holy mountains, and sacred sites, especially the Monastery of the Caves in Kyiv and the baptismal font of St Volodymyr in Crimea, Ukraine has become, for Patriarch Kirill and many devout Russian Orthodox, where "asceticism and selfless devotion" are observed, and in which, Russian tsars and leaders have built an "elaborate network of shrines."[xlviii]

Because of this overemphasized notion of Ukraine as the centre of 'Holy united Russia' and the ancient birthplace of the modern Russian state and of the ROC in Russian propagandistic rhetoric, preserving it in the Russian sphere of influence became a priority. Patriarch Kirill's vision of the 'Holy Russia' is based on the idea of shared Christian morality, values and ideals, and thus emphasizing integration through the church and the strengthening of its teachings.[xlix] In other words, Kirill and the ROC believe 'Holy Russia' and the Russian World concept warrant a spiritual colonization and further integration into the ROC, which will supposedly preserve these above-mentioned sacred places and the spiritual and cultural heritage. This spiritual colonization will not only impinge on political borders and politics but will further absorb the holy Belarusian and Ukrainian landmarks into Russia's sphere of influence, because they are in need of "'re-churchizing'," since schismatics and dissidents, such as those calling for the autocephaly of the OCU, took over these holy places.[l] They say bringing the Ukrainian and Belarusian people into the orbit of the ROC would allow it to control and preserve its most sacred and holy places. However, one could argue that these 're-churchizing' efforts are in reality pretexts for leaders who want more power – whether political or canonical, most evident in the dispute over spiritual leadership of the Orthodox Church. The Moscow Patriarchate considers itself the rightful leader of the global Orthodox Church by virtue of being the largest Orthodox Church by number of adherents and has subsequently tried to undermine the Ecumenical Patriarchate's unofficial leadership of global Orthodoxy.[li] Ukraine

becoming an autocephalous Church would cut "one-third of ROC parishes" and thus undermine the ROC's ability to compete with the Ecumenical Patriarchate.[lii]

Canonical Inter-relations and Church Geopoliticization

Patriarch Kirill's first pastoral visit to Ukraine in summer 2009, which he framed in the 'Holy Russia' rhetoric and his "grand vision of the 'Russian World'," was part of a larger geopolitical context which featured Patriarch Kirill, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, former Patriarch Aleksi II, and the then-President of Ukraine Victor Yushchenko.[liii] In 2008, prior to Patriarch Kirill's first visit to Ukraine, his predecessor Patriarch Aleksi visited Ukraine on the occasion of the 1020th anniversary of Prince Volodymyr's baptism, to which Patriarch Bartholomew was also invited.[liv] This invitation was geopolitically significant as many supporters of Ukraine's autocephalous church wanted the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople to declare the OCU's autocephaly, "marking a second baptism of Rus'," including President Yushchenko, who personally and "ceremoniously [...] picked up" the Ecumenical Patriarch from the airport.[lv] This geopolitical maneuver was part of President Yushchenko's tactics to win the support of the Ecumenical Patriarch for the OCU's independence, although Patriarch Bartholomew only went to Ukraine as part of a solemn "pastoral visit" and to meet Patriarch Aleksi to discuss the situation of Ukraine.[lvi] By contrast, Patriarch Aleksi's visit did aim "to shore up Ukrainian support for Russia and the ROC," making it more evidently political.[lvii] A few months later, Patriarch Kirill's visit, which he also insisted was pastoral in nature, was themed around "the role of religion in contemporary life and the unification and strengthening of the ROC throughout the world," part of which he called a "'pilgrimage' to the 'mother of all Rus'," ending in Kyiv, or "'our common Jerusalem'," as he called the city.[lviii] In hindsight, after Patriarch Kirill's blessing of the unlawful full-scale invasion of Ukraine waged fourteen years after the visit, which he called 'a holy war,' this rhetoric represents a fragment of a larger geopolitical context in which President Putin and Patriarch Kirill appear to want this sacred site under direct Russian control, rather than simply part of a symbolic union. And thus, this grand vision's alleged political independence might have been just a charade, because, in retrospect, the current war uses this rhetoric, while completely destroying the political independence of Ukraine.

The war in Ukraine since 2014, namely the conflict in Donbas and the annexation of Crimea, was seen distinctly by different churches, because of the divergent geopolitical positions they support or are affiliated with. For instance, while publicly declaring loyalty to Ukraine, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) saw the war as "'first and foremost an internal issue of Ukraine'," i.e. a "'civil war'," which then brings into question the UOC-MP's loyalty to Ukraine.[lix] On the other hand, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP) sees the war as Russian and foreign aggression against Ukrainian sovereignty, a stance it takes in hopes of "[confirming] the patriotic nature of [its] church in the eyes of the general public," and also undermining to UOC-MP.[lx] The UOC-MP's leaders assertion that the separatist forces in Eastern Ukraine are "genuine social movement[s]," not merely pawns in the disposal of external powers, whose right to self-determination should be respected, made it seen as a church controlled by the ROC and the Russian state.[lxi] The UOC-KP discussed separatism through the rhetoric of a 'victim Ukraine,' in which direct foreign aggression or foreign interference pushes "'Ukrainian citizens [to] fight against Ukrainians'." Secessionists, therefore, are depicted as a façade for Russian interference, a successful stance in undermining its competitor, the UOC-MP, and in increasing Ukrainian support for the UOC-KP.[lxii] Both the UOC-MP and the UOC-KP have their own geopolitical interests and agendas in the larger theopolitical context in Ukraine, and thus are bound to act by them.

The geopoliticization of the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church was part of a larger context: changing Ukrainian national security concerns due to Russian aggression, and international calls for pluralization by Russia and the ROC. For Ukraine, especially under President Petro Poroshenko (2014-2019), the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine was framed as a "necessary condition for defeating the military aggression of Russia in East

Ukraine and as a final blow to [Russian] foreign policy ambitions." The 'Holy Russia' concept of reuniting the canonical lands of the ROC should be considered as Russian territorial claims, which constitute a direct threat to Ukrainian sovereignty and statehood.[lxiii] In hindsight, President Poroshenko appears to have been proven correct in these considerations. For Russia and the Moscow Patriarchate, the claims against Ukrainian autocephaly were framed in anti-pluralistic ambitions, in the context of calling for religious pluralism, since they saw the OCU's actions as "unwarranted hegemonic ambitions of one particular Orthodox church," in line with Russia's desire for the development of a multipolar world in the international geopolotical arena, "as an alternative to the hegemony of one country or bloc," namely the United States and the West.[lxiv] Russia and the ROC even accused the US State Department of concocting the idea of Ukrainian autocephaly with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople as a way to break up the Orthodox presence in Europe, splitting the Russian people from the Ukrainian people, and thus not only "'[attacking] Orthodox Christianity'" and weakening Russian influence, but also allegedly limiting religious freedoms in Ukraine.[lxv]

The Future of the Church in Ukraine

The conflict between the ROC and the Russian state on one side and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and the Ukrainian state on the other, which turned into full-scale invasion and war, has left the Orthodox Church hanging in the balance, and its future in Ukraine uncertain. Andrii Krawchuk, who studied public and church officials' response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, found that many affiliated with Moscow did try to distance themselves from the ROC, but he still concludes that the outcome of the war, as well as the future conduct of the ROC itself, will determine the future of the church in Ukraine.[lxvi] This is because the ROC has alienated itself from the world and from other Orthodox Churches. The autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) will prosper, and the ROC will become "a black sheep," if Ukraine recovers its former territories, or 'wins' the war, though it will still be protected in the EU under religious freedom laws.[lxvii] Alternatively, in the case that Russia gains more territory, the ROC will prosper alongside an extremely diminished UOC, and any other "'schisms'" will be either suppressed or absorbed into the ROC.[lxviii] As we have seen in recent months, the tensions between loyalty to the Ukrainian state and canonical solidarity with the Moscow Patriarchate have resulted in the eviction of the Ukrainian Orthodox monks from the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, despite their continued insistence on their independence from the Moscow Patriarchate and their loyalty to Ukraine.[lxix] Therefore it can be argued that the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, not only the UOC-MP, is also hanging in the balance despite continuous efforts to 'prove' their loyalty to Ukraine rather than the aggressor state. Along this line of analysis, it can be argued that the affiliation demonstrated between Moscow and the Russian Orthodox church will ultimately decide the future of the Church in Ukraine regardless of the outcome of the present war. The example of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra disputes, in which the church was undermined before any resolution to the war occurred, testifies to this challenge.

Conclusion

Historically, parts of Ukraine were part of Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union, dominated by Russia, and canonically, Ukraine is (or rather was) part of Russian Orthodox territories, but these historical facts are mobilized as tools for neocolonialist aspirations, both in Orthodox Church and geopolitical affairs.

Russian historians, clergy, and scholars identified Ukraine, particularly Kyiv and Crimea, as the cradle of Russian Orthodoxy and of the modern state.[lxx] They justified their claims and the war waged against Ukraine by relying upon medieval texts establishing Prince Volodymyr's acceptance of Christianity and converting his people and describing the travels of other historic religious figures in modern-day Ukraine. Yet many factors facilitated the calls for autocephaly and independence of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine from the ROC, including Russian meddling in post-Soviet state affairs, the ROC's domination of the Orthodox Church's affairs in Ukraine, Russia's growing eastward policies, Ukraine's increasingly pro-European

foreign policy outlook, and the Ecumenical Patriarchate's re-emergence as viable leadership option instead of the Moscow Patriarchate.

The ROC and the Russian Federation positioned themselves as the heirs of 'Holy Russia' and guardians of the 'Russian World,' tasked with preserving the canonical lands, the historical, spiritual and cultural heritage of Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia. Allowing Ukraine's Orthodox Church autocephaly would mean cutting Russia's spheres of influence and outreach, and thus power, by one-third. In this context, even Patriarch Kirill's visit to Ukraine in 2009 was drenched in geopolitical controversies. Division and controversy have only grown since the start of the war on Ukraine in 2014, as Ukraine has increasingly geopoliticized the OCU's autocephaly claims, alleging their importance as part of Ukrainian national security.

The future institutional Orthodoxy in Ukraine is currently uncertain due to Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Only at the end of the war will we know which branch of the church will survive, depending on which side 'wins' and what happens to the reputation of the Moscow Patriarchate, which is currently tarnished in Ukraine and around the world as a result of its support of the full-scale invasion.[lxxi]

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[viii] Leustean and Samokhvalov, "The Ukrainian National Church, Religious Diplomacy, and the Conflict in Donbas," 216-219.
[ix] Baar et al., "Theopolitics of the Orthodox World," 116.
[x] Niko Vorobyov, "Patriarch Kirill: Putin ally faces backlash after 'blessing' war," *AlJazeera*, March 28, 2022, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/28/patriarch-kirill-putin-ally-faces-backlash
[xi] Suslov, "The Utopia of 'Holy Russia' in Today's Geopolitical Imagination," 83-84
[xii] Mara Kozelsky, "Religion and the Crisis in Ukraine," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 14, no. 3 (2014): 221-222. https://doi.org/10.1080/1474225X.2014.957635.
[xiii] Kozelsky, "Religion and the Crisis in Ukraine," 222.
[xiv] Metropolitan Makarii was also known as Makarii Bulgakov. He was Metropolitan of Moscow, from 1879 until his death in 1882. See Kozelsky, "Religion and the Crisis in Ukraine," 223.
[xv] Kozelsky, "Religion and the Crisis in Ukraine," 223.
[xvi] Kozelsky, "Religion and the Crisis in Ukraine," 223-224.
[xvii] Kozelsky, "Religion and the Crisis in Ukraine," 229.
[xviii] Natalia Naydenova, "Holy Rus: (Re)Construction of Russia's Civilizational Identity," *Slavonica* 21, no. 1–2 (2016): 42.
[xix] Lydia S. Tonoyan and Daniel P. Payne, "The Visit of Patriarch Kirill to Ukraine in 2009 and Its Significance in Ukraine's Political and Religious Life," *Religion, State & Society* 38, no. 3 (2010): 257. https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2010.499283.
[xx] Kozelsky, "Religion and the Crisis in Ukraine," 224.
[xxi] Jerry G Pankhurst, "History, Ecclesiology, Canonicity, and Power: Ukrainian and Russian Orthodoxy after the Euromaidan," *Religion During the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict*, ed. E.A. Clark and D. Vovk (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 161-162. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429288463-10.
[xxii] Pankhurst, "History, Ecclesiology, Canonicity, and Power" 163-164, 174.
[xxiii] Pankhurst, "History, Ecclesiology, Canonicity, and Power," 162.
[xxiv] In these lands, Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeev explained, other confessions were permissible, but any missions "should be considered hostile proselytism if not overt imperialistic hegemony." See Suslov, "The Utopia of 'Holy Russia' in Today's Geopolitical Imagination, 86.
[xxv] Suslov, "The Utopia of 'Holy Russia' in Today's Geopolitical Imagination," 84-85.
[xxvi] Suslov, "The Utopia of 'Holy Russia' in Today's Geopolitical Imagination," 97.
[xxvii] Suslov, "The Utopia of 'Holy Russia' in Today's Geopolitical Imagination," 84
[xxviii] 'Theopolitics' here refers to a religious aspect of geopolitics. See Baar et al., "Theopolitics of the Orthodox World," *Religions* 13, no. 2 (2022): 129-130.
[xxix] Suslov, "The Utopia of 'Holy Russia' in Today's Geopolitical Imagination," 97.
[xxx] Baar et al., "Theopolitics of the Orthodox World," 128.

[xxxi] Suslov, "The Utopia of 'Holy Russia' in Today's Geopolitical Imagination," 87-89.
[xxxii] Suslov, "The Utopia of 'Holy Russia' in Today's Geopolitical Imagination," 89.
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[xxxiv] Michał Wawrzonek, "Ukraine in the 'Gray Zone': Between the 'Russkiy Mir' and Europe," *East European Politics and Societies* 28, no. 4 (2014): 760-761.
[xxxv] Suslov, "The Utopia of 'Holy Russia' in Today's Geopolitical Imagination," 86-87.
[xxxvi] Naydenova, "Holy Rus: (Re)Construction of Russia's Civilizational Identity," 41-42.
[xxxvii] Kozelsky, "Religion and the Crisis in Ukraine," 230-231.
[xxxviii] Kozelsky, "Religion and the Crisis in Ukraine," 230-231.
[xxxix] Kozelsky, "Religion and the Crisis in Ukraine," 232.
[xl] Kozelsky, "Religion and the Crisis in Ukraine," 232.
[xli] Joan E.Taylor, *Christians and the holy places : the myth of Jewish-Christian Origins* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press; 1993) quoted in Kozelsky, "Religion and the Crisis in Ukraine," 226.
[xlii] Suslov, "The Utopia of 'Holy Russia' in Today's Geopolitical Imagination," 96.
[xliii] Suslov, "The Utopia of 'Holy Russia' in Today's Geopolitical Imagination of the Russian Orthodox Church: a Case Study of Patriarch Kirill," 96; Naydenova, "Holy Rus: (Re)Construction of Russia's Civilizational Identity," 42-43.
[xliv] Naydenova, "Holy Rus: (Re)Construction of Russia's Civilizational Identity," 42.
[xlv] Suslov, "The Utopia of 'Holy Russia' in Today's Geopolitical Imagination," 96.
[xlvi] Kozelsky, "Religion and the Crisis in Ukraine," 223.
[xlvii] Suslov, "The Utopia of 'Holy Russia' in Today's Geopolitical Imagination," 95-96.
[xlviii] Kozelsky, "Religion and the Crisis in Ukraine," 223, 227; Suslov, "The Utopia of 'Holy Russia' in Today's Geopolitical Imagination," 95-96.
[xlix] Suslov, "The Utopia of 'Holy Russia' in Today's Geopolitical Imagination," 87-88.
[l] Suslov, "The Utopia of 'Holy Russia' in Today's Geopolitical Imagination," 97.
[li] Pankhurst, "History, Ecclesiology, Canonicity, and Power," 160.
[lii] Pankhurst, "History, Ecclesiology, Canonicity, and Power," 163-164.
[liii] Tonoyan and Payne, "The Visit of Patriarch Kirill to Ukraine in 2009," 259, 261-262.
[liv] Tonoyan and Payne, "The Visit of Patriarch Kirill to Ukraine in 2009," 256.
[lv] Tonoyan and Payne, "The Visit of Patriarch Kirill to Ukraine in 2009," 256.
[lvi] Tonoyan and Payne, "The Visit of Patriarch Kirill to Ukraine in 2009," 256.
[lvii] Tonoyan and Payne, "The Visit of Patriarch Kirill to Ukraine in 2009," 257.
[lviii] Tonoyan and Payne, "The Visit of Patriarch Kirill to Ukraine in 2009," 257.
[lix] Denys Shestopalets, "The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, The State and The Russian-Ukrainian Crisis, 2014-2018," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 20, no. 1 (2019): 47. https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2018.1554482.
[lx] Shestopalets, "The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate," 51-52.
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[lxiii] Denys Shestopalets, "Religious Freedom, Conspiracies, and Faith: The Geopolitics of Ukrainian Autocephaly," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 18, no. 3 (2020): 28. https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2020.1795441.
[lxiv] Shestopalets, "Religious Freedom, Conspiracies, and Faith: The Geopolitics of Ukrainian Autocephaly," 29.
[lxv] This is purely Russia and the ROC's arguments, which with the benefit of hindsight are problematic to say the least, because they also constitute the reasoning for the present war on Ukraine. See Shestopalets, "Religious Freedom, Conspiracies, and Faith: The Geopolitics of Ukrainian Autocephaly," 29-30.
[lxvi] Andrii Krawchuck, "Narrating the War Theologically: Does Russian Orthodoxy Have a Future in Ukraine?" *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 64, no. 2-3 (2022): 185-186. https://doi.org/10.1080/00085006.2022.2107836
[lxvii] Krawchuck, "Narrating the War Theologically: Does Russian Orthodoxy Have a Future in Ukraine?", 185.

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[lxix] Hanna Arhirova,"Tensions on the rise at revered Kyiv monastery complex."
[lxx] Kozelsky, "Religion and the Crisis in Ukraine," 222-224.
[lxxi] Krawchuck, "Narrating the War Theologically: Does Russian Orthodoxy Have a Future in Ukraine?", 186.

Finnish Immigration and the Administration of the Ukraine Refugee Crisis

Erlin Trifoni

Abstract

Finland's response to the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis has been peculiarly proactive in welcoming and integrating refugees coming from Ukraine. The multifaceted response of Helsinki to the crisis—which was caused by Russian aggression—spans from providing accommodation to ensuring the economic and social integration of refugees. However, further efforts are needed in the field of social-services provisions and labour-market integration. Concurrently, the war in Ukraine has promoted the migration of Russian conscripts to Finland and other EU Member States. In dissecting the phenomenon, this paper argues that Finland could consider enhancing its dialogue with the European Union (EU) to find a common solution to Russian citizens seeking asylum in the Nordic country—one similar to the shared strategy that EU Member States adopted during the initial stage of the war with the EU Temporary Protection Program. However, such efforts must unfold by continuing to consider potential national security and foreign policy ramifications.

Introduction

What does the administration of the refugee crisis in Finland tell us about the strengths and weaknesses of its immigration and integration system? How does the governance of the phenomenon intersect with the foreign policy of Helsinki? This report—which relies on anonymous interviews with two government officials from the Ministry of Interior (MoI), three academics and an expert from Cultura Foundation (a Finnish organization that seeks to promote the integration and inclusion of the Russian-speaking population in Finland)—aims to analyze Finland's response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis in order to further understand the strengths and limits in the administration and governance of the phenomenon. Concurrently, this investigation looks at the foreign policy ramifications embedded in the management of the refugee crisis.

Finnish authorities and political elites have shown remarkable dynamism in responding to regional geopolitical changes, such as the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the formal participation in the European Project through European Union (EU) membership. They have remarked on this peculiar feature of Finnish foreign policy by rapidly changing their stance towards North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) membership when Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The substantial influx of Ukrainian refugees escaping the war and Russian citizens escaping the forced mobilization imposed by Putin's regime have raised questions about how the Finnish state should govern this phenomenon from an immigration perspective as well as security perspective. This paper argues that the response of Finland's immigration policy to the Russian invasion of Ukraine should be centred on the sustainable integration of Ukrainian refugees into the economic and social dynamics of the country by capitalizing on favourable labour needs and positive public sentiments surrounding Ukrainian refugees. Furthermore, the Finnish government should press for a common EU strategy to solve the issue of Russian citizens escaping conscription. At the same time, the development of a humanitarian visa program for such migrants might play an important role in reducing consolidated negative attitudes towards russophones while providing a boost in the ability of the government to successfully integrate newcomers and already-present Russian-speaking immigrants in Finland. Concurrently, in making a decision about whether or not to grant refugee status to Russian citizens who are avoiding being drafted into the war, Finland must also consider domestic frictions that the closed interactions between Russian and Ukrainian citizens may produce as a consequence of the ongoing conflict; it must also consider the scars

that will be left in the years following the termination of the war, whenever that might be. Lastly, this report analyzes the administration of services for Ukrainian refugees and subsequently claims that deficiencies in service provisions indicate a need to strengthen the engagement between the public sector and private entities in order to pave the way for the bridging of the gap between limited state capacity and high demand for access to social services.

Ukrainian Immigrants in Finland

One of the most pressing, long-term developments that the Finnish government has to address is the establishment of a suitable, permanent settlement plan for those Ukrainian refugees intending to remain in the Nordic country. According to a public survey of 2,136 participants commissioned by the Finnish MoI regarding the situation of Ukrainian refugees residing in Finland, about 27% had no plans to move back to Ukraine, and roughly 40% of those surveyed remained open about all prospects.[i] The proactiveness of the Finnish government in supporting Ukrainian refugees and the language used in MoI press releases regarding employment patterns of these refugees reveal a preliminary intention to allow permanent settlement for those Ukrainian refugees intending to stay even after the conclusion of the war, although no formal decision has been made. For instance, the MoI has explicitly stated that Ukrainians will form a large immigrant group in the country regardless of how and when the war ends. Hence, rather than constructing an argument in favour of a potential exploration of permanent settlement venues for them—as such a determination seems to have already been informally made by the Finnish Government—the focus of this section revolves around identifying ways to facilitate the labour and social integration of Ukrainian citizens in the Nordic country. This is an aspect that remains critical due to domestic market challenges and the need to rapidly integrate a conspicuous number of immigrants in order to avoid long-term social spending and rapidly stimulate their economic participation.

Moreover, the immigration policy of Finland in response to the exodus of Ukrainian refugees and Russian migrants should be developed while taking into account labour market dynamics, domestic demographic features, and public sentiment. The successful formulation of valid immigration policies requires, above all, an insulation of the process from populist discourses. However, immigration policy is often the product of a compromise between what should be done and what can be done; a process that is also highly susceptible to public opinion variations, all of which suggests that policymaking based on strictly pragmatic considerations of the phenomenon remains difficult, albeit desirable, to achieve.

Hence, it remains imperative to take into account the general public's reception of migration policies. In this realm, the attitudes of Finns towards immigration changed positively, mainly in response to the openness of the Finnish government in welcoming refugees arriving from the former Yugoslavia and war-torn Somalia during the 90s. This influx of refugees into the Nordic country was the most rapid increase of any EU Member State at the time. However, during the recession of 1993, the general perception about immigrants among the native population deteriorated substantially, suggesting that public support towards immigration also correlates with domestic economic performances.[ii] The differences in terms of wages and unemployment rate for immigrants from the former Yugoslavia, stabilized at 52-58%. At the same time, that of refugees from Iraq, Somalia, Iran, was considerably lower at 20-26%.[iii] Hence, it is possible to argue that Ukrainians and Russians would predictably enjoy higher long-term labour market integration rates, in line with those from the former Yugoslavia who settled in the country at the end of the 90s.

Additionally, a recent survey from the Finnish Business Forum (EVA) on attitudes and values revealed that, for the first time ever, the majority of Finns (55%) hold a favourable view regarding the facilitation of migration as a response to the aging of the population and labour shortages. Even 60% of those voting for the far-right party "True Finns" believed that highly skilled immigrants are beneficial to the Finnish economy.[iv] What this new and unprecedented data on public sentiment about immigration reveals is a generalized support of the phenomenon

and a relatively strong understanding of its benefits. Such revelations could also explain the 72% employment rate among immigrants—an increase of 8% from 2020—which is the highest rate ever recorded in the country.[v] An enhanced awareness of the benefits of immigration may facilitate the integration of immigrants into the domestic job market. However, this preliminary conclusion requires further monitoring and data gathering, as it is not sufficiently clear if such changes in employment among the immigrant population are the result of temporary or permanent trends. Nevertheless, the data provided are an encouraging manifestation of the current condition of the Finnish job market and of the propensity of the native population to facilitate the incorporation of foreign workers into domestic labour dynamics. This may indicate that the integration of Ukrainian and Russian immigrants could be facilitated by favourable labour and societal conditions, should the government capitalize on them.

Furthermore, the issue of low-skilled labourers must also be discussed in more detail, as it seems to have been neglected in the domestic political discourse despite representing another sector of the Finnish labour market that is lacking workers. In particular, low-skilled workers should be contextualized within a more comprehensive immigration strategy that takes into account the maximization of their human capital through a more proper distribution across the national territory. For instance, such labourers continue to be in greater need in certain regions, such as Satakunta. Conversely, in the Kymenlaakso region, these workers would most likely represent a surplus. Consequently, the fact that only a small percentage of Ukrainian citizens have chosen to reside in large cities will benefit the long-term economic performances of certain areas. In addition, the current relocation trend of Ukrainian refugees might promote the repopulation of such territories as well, considering that they have been plagued by internal mobility patterns prevalent towards metropolitan centres. The current internal mobility patterns within the Finnish territory among Ukrainian refugees could favour the retention rate of such workers, bearing in mind that one of the primary reasons immigrants move out of Finland is the difficulty in finding appropriate employment. At the same time, as an interview with a migration expert at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA) suggested, the integration of low-skilled immigrants must be accompanied with more robust labour-protection laws, as this group of workers remains highly susceptible to exploitation in the domestic labour market due to imbalances currently present in worker-protection laws that remain peculiarly weaker for workers employed in the low-skilled sector.[vi]

In another interview with a government official from the Finnish Ministry of Interior, it emerged that guest-worker experiences of many Ukrainians in Finland before the war greatly contributed to having them move to regions where they previously worked.[vii] Therefore, the movement of many Ukrainian refugees in Finland has been influenced by previous connections in the form of work-relationships with various employers across the Finnish territory. This may partially explain why less than 13% of Ukrainian refugees have chosen to settle in the Helsinki metropolitan area, instead favouring regions known to welcome a conspicuous number of guest-workers every year.[viii] Such a relocation trend has prevented an overwhelming scenario in which most Ukrainian refugees would have established themselves in densely populated areas. At the same time, the mobility behavior of Ukrainian refugees has promoted faster economic integration and strengthened social connections with the native population through previous and current work relationships, as many Finnish employees—especially from rural regions—have also provided accommodation for those in need.

However, one of the most important questions that continues to pervade the discourse on Ukrainian refugees in Finland is whether or not this group will be allowed to eventually settle permanently in the Nordic country after the conclusion of the war. The preliminary intention of Finland is to settle Ukrainians permanently if they wish to remain when the war ends was confirmed during an interview with a high-ranking Finnish Government Official working on immigration in the Ministry of Interior. During the conversation it was also affirmed that Finland intends to achieve this objective in an organized manner after March 2025, at the conclusion of the 3-year extension limit for the EU-Temporary Protection Program.[ix]

The statements made by the government official during the interview could also signal a preliminary intention of the European Union to settle Ukrainian refugees permanently in Member States through the creation of a common permanent settlement program similar to the EU Temporary Protection program. In this way, the governance of Ukrainian refugees would be in line with the type of harmonization witnessed with the enactment of the Temporary Protection Scheme. Such a prospect should also be discussed by the Finnish government at the EU level if it has not already been done. An EU-sponsored permanent settlement scheme after 2025 for Ukrainian refugees is more desirable because it would effectively end the Ukrainian refugee crisis in a homogenous manner across the board. Conversely, if a common solution is not found at the EU-level, Member States will resort to formulating individual legislation to resolve the issue. However, unilateral solutions may promote the continuation of the crisis even after the termination of the war, as the heterogeneity of national legislation regarding permanent settlement of Ukrainian refugees could produce weaker or stronger provisions, depending on the Member State. It would not be inconceivable to suspect that the manifestation of this scenario could result in further internal migration of Ukrainian refugees from Member States with precarious settlement schemes to states with more robust ones. The interviewed official from the MoI confirmed that Finland is in favour of finding a common EU solution to permanently settle Ukrainian Refugees beyond March 2025, as having individual legislations could lead to secondary movements of Ukrainians across the European Union.[x]

Service Provision for Ukrainian Refugees

Another dimension in which there are still wide margins of improvement remains the administration of services to Ukrainian refugees. Specifically, the teaching of government officials about the vulnerabilities of Ukrainian refugees continues to be of high importance when trying to provide services to as many refugees as possible. Such training is critical, as it offers a comprehensive understanding of the motivations behind certain requests made by refugees. In fact, experts at Cultura Foundation have especially emphasized the need for better training of Finnish officials working with Ukrainian refugees. An example that was provided pertains to the assigning of Russian-speaking translators to Ukrainian citizens from russophone regions. Despite their fluency in Russian, there have been instances where Ukrainian refugees have explicitly requested Ukrainian-speaking translators; a demand that is viewed by the interviewed member from Cultura Foundation as a further rejection of Russia's occupation that extends not only territorially within the context of the invasion of Ukraine, but even within the daily lives of refugees.[xi] Such requests were also common among refugees from Chechnya when they first arrived in Finland during the early 2000s, indicating a desire to liberate themselves from protracted language impositions which continue to represent an extension of Russia's imperialistic foreign policy. Currently, these demands have been met with mild frustration from some Finnish officials, according to the Cultura Foundation official interviewed. However, since both the outcome of the service provided and the desire to access such services are the product of a trust-based relationship between government officials and Ukrainian refugees, striving to accommodate language requests may facilitate the administration of certain services by strengthening perceptions of trust and reliance.

One issue that could arise from the need to adapt to such requests is that, in the practical impossibility of fully meeting the demand for Ukrainian translators, the Government could increase its reliance on private companies that operate such services through the usage of outsourcing. In an interview with an expert from the Aleksanteri Institute who studies service provisions to Ukrainian refugees, the expert explained, "outsourcing implies cost-effectiveness as the main principle, resulting in time-based service provision. This may lead to insufficient comprehension of the needs and, subsequently, an inaccurate provision of the type of service certain refugees might require, especially when it comes to mental health assessments and support."[xii]

Another impending problem for the services provided to Ukrainian refugees resides in the methodology adopted to assign which entity is entitled to provide the service. So far,

Finland has relied on the support of private companies and non-governmental organizations for the administration of numerous services dedicated to helping Ukrainians. However, the selection of providers mainly takes into account the costs that municipalities and the government have to sustain. Therefore, it is often the case that providers offering the lowest price will gain the right to administer the services. Interviewed experts from Cultura Foundation, the Migration Institute of Finland, and the Aleksanteri Institute have all concluded that the excessive emphasis on the costs of services subsequently neglects assessments regarding their quality. Furthermore, it also promotes disparities among municipalities, as the same service can be of a higher quality depending on the financial resources of the municipality in which it is provided.

Additionally, in their concluding remarks, the academic from the Aleksanteri Institute stated that, at the moment, Finland is struggling to comprehend the limits of its capacity to provide services. No contemporary government can meet the demand for services by simply relying on its own resources.[xiii] As the recent refugee crisis has demonstrated, cooperation with non-profits and private companies is essential in order to manage the crisis. There is a space for strengthening the ability of all three sectors so that the provision of social and healthcare services to Ukrainian refugees are harmonized. Therefore, the Finnish government should strengthen its reliance on both private and non-governmental organizations to maximize its capacity to offer the highest quality of services to Ukrainian refugees.

However, another critical limitation of the current management and administration of service provisions is seen in the constant changes made by the government, notably through private actors called to administer and manage the provision of services. The expert from the Migration Institute of Finland argued that the Red Cross has been pushed out of almost all regions, leaving because the organization thought that lowering the cost of their services would have severely compromised the quality. The private entity that won in South Ostrobothnia was Kotokunta Oy, which also won in many other places. In South Ostrobothnia, the new service provider took the old Red Cross's reception centre and only some of the staff, firing others to make way for the lowered maintenance costs, which did not positively impact the quality-of-service provisions. Furthermore, the expert conveyed the Red Cross's belief that once there is another major crisis in Finland, Migri will require their services again due to the fact that no other actor has such a vast network of trained volunteers in Finland.[xiv] Hence, lowering costs should be considered in a context where such actions are possible, for example when the culmination of the crisis has already passed. If another crisis manifests, the Red Cross will be involved again, as they are the only entity capable of managing the peak intensity of emergencies. The current migration crisis at Finland's eastern border demonstrates the accuracy of such statements, as the Red Cross has been involved again to support the operations of governmental agencies.[xv]

Additionally, the expert from the Migration Institute of Finland reiterated during the interview that the private entity that won the bid for the administration of social services to Ukrainian Refugees in South Ostrobothnia will be forced to close, as another provider with lower service rates has been chosen for the region.[xvi] A further implication of a system that is excessively centred on market-based dynamics is the rapidity of changing service-providers, which, in turn, threatens continuity and culminates in a poor quality of services offered. Continuity is a key factor affecting the quality of service because, as explained at the beginning of this section, the provision of services is also the product of a trust-based relationship among multiple actors. Hence, it becomes extremely difficult to establish a consolidated principle of trust between service providers and refugees if the former are frequently substituted.

However, as Rachel Augustine Potter eloquently puts it, modern governance is shared governance.[xvii] Therefore, Finland's outsourcing of services to the private sector must be viewed within the context of contemporary political approaches to public and social policies in the face of an increased awareness of the limits associated with the exclusive usage of their services. However, the crux of the criticism resides in the excessive reliance on outsourcing combined with a lack of formal recognition and therefore harmonization of outsourcing of social services for refugees with public service provisions. Acknowledging the need of non-

public entities is critical, as it establishes a clear point of departure for the development of potential frameworks of consolidated cooperation between the government and non-state actors in many areas of service provisions. On the other hand, a game of "inclusion and exclusion" of non-governmental entities is not beneficial for the long-term objectives of Finland in this realm because it contradicts the clear need of constant support from non-governmental actors.

Russian Migrants and the Case for a Humanitarian Visa Program

The emerging issue of Russians citizens attempting to escape conscription by relocating to Finland and seeking protection has fostered a discussion about balanced approaches that would not weaken the security of the country and, at the same time, guarantee that the outcomes of such asylum applications are based exclusively on their individual merits. Therefore, when it comes to analyzing the case of Russian migrants coming into Finnish society, it is imperative to consider the foreign policy posture of the Nordic country in relation to its Russian neighbor. This is because the governance of migration flows of russophone groups immigrating to and assimilating in Finland has been, and will continue to be, susceptible to Helsinki's external relations with the Russian Federation and the maintenance of strong diplomatic ties with EU Member States and other international partners. The cautious approach of the Nordic country to the recent flow of Russian citizens escaping conscription is a manifestation of the political considerations which surround the administration of this immigration phenomenon. The main junctures of this phenomenon that are discussed in this report are the impact of the security implications concerning the integration of russophones and the capacity of the Finnish Government to shield its Russian-speaking population from the negative narrative they face as a product of the tensions between Helsinki and Moscow.

Russian speakers in Finland have historically been a highly educated group, with education levels similar to those of the native population. Concurrently, a peculiar feature of these immigrants is their insufficient labour market integration compared to the native population, which worsens if we take gender into consideration.[xviii] Specifically, Russian-speaking women residing in Finland have an employment rate of 47.1%, as opposed to the 70.9% of the same gender group of the Finnish-speaking population.[xix] On the other hand, the employment rate of Russian-speaking men was 14.2% lower than that of Finnish speaking men (52.7% against 66.9%). Although slightly better than other immigrant groups, the employment dynamics displayed by the Russian-speaking population are similar to those of other immigrant groups residing in Finland, demonstrating a generalized difficulty on the part of the Finnish immigration system to appropriately integrate third-country nationals into the domestic labour market.

The largest portion of russophone immigrants to Finland is constituted by Ingrian Finns—an ethnically Finnish group from Russia. Ingrian Finns were relocated to Finland after the dissolution of the Soviet Union under the Law of Return: a special immigration program that allowed indigenous Finns residing in Russia to obtain residence in the Nordic country. The special immigration program contained in Section 48 of the Aliens Act was permanently closed in 2011, and applications were accepted until 2016.[xx] Despite justifying the end of the program as a way to expedite the submission of applications of Ingrian Finns still living in the Russian Federation, it is known that Finland encountered difficulties in sufficiently integrating Ingrians both socially and economically. This was because the vast majority of them only communicated in Russian, causing their integration outcomes to resemble similar performances faced by other russophone immigrant groups.

Further reasons for the immigration of Russian speakers to Finland mainly include family ties, employment, and study. Although the russophone population in Finland constitutes the majority of third country (non-EU) nationals residing in the Nordic country, Helsinki's migration policy pertaining to russophone immigrants has shown proactiveness only in the dimension of Ingrian-Finns. Despite cultural ties, employment dynamics, and cross-border interactions, the Finnish immigration policy towards Russian speakers seems to have been characterized by a passive tolerance of the phenomenon rather than an active governance of it

through specific legislation that would have facilitated a better jurisdictional control. This could be explained by the security prism from which the Finnish-Russian relationship has been taking place.

The diffidence and precariousness of Finnish foreign policy has a spillover effect on other national policy dimensions, intersecting the relationship of Finland with its Russian neighbor. Finland's avoidance of irritating Russia in the foreign policy sphere is mirrored by Finland's avoidance of excessively restricting immigration from Russia. Concurrently, Finland has refrained from publicly recognizing the value of Russian immigration because such movements could produce negative political implications, given the unfavourable public opinion about this immigrant group. Therefore, the Nordic country has implicitly accepted the value of Russian citizens in its society without officially recognizing it in its immigration policy. Paradoxically, the statement made by former Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto to develop a humanitarian visa program that could address the influx of Russian citizens escaping mobilization would represent, if materialized, the first instance of an immigration policy that directly involves Russian citizens from a non-ethnically Finnish background.

So far, domestic integration policies have been characterized by a universal and homogeneous approach, and they ignore the fact that their integration requires a targeted strategy. Russian immigrants have been incorporated into similar third-group dynamics even though scrutiny of them remains higher due to their migratory aspects being systematically susceptible to the security and geopolitical relations between Finland and Russia. The spillover effect of the security implications is also reflected in their labour-market integration. The relatively low labour market participation of Russian-speaking residents is also attributable to prejudices and discrimination from the native population, who, due to the historically-tumultuous Finno-Russian relationship, view these immigrants with more heightened suspicion compared to other non-native groups.[xxi] It is reasonable to suspect that the illegal invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation may hinder integration patterns of the russophone population in the Nordic country by enhancing already-present general perceptions of distrust towards them. In this regard, the Finnish Government has already intervened by announcing that discrimination against Russian speakers will not be tolerated.

Furthermore, a field experiment on recruitment conducted by Renvik, Jasinskaja-Lahti, and Varjonen revealed that applicants with Russian names had to send twice as many job applications as those with a Finnish name to receive a job interview invitation.[xxii] Although the relationship between foreign last names and low incidence of job interviews is a consolidated problem of the Finnish labour market irrespective of the national origin of immigrants, developing useful policies aimed at fixing the problem requires, above all, understanding the underlying reasons behind these forms of discrimination—which may vary based on the immigrant group in question. For instance, a potential cause of discrimination towards russophone names is the fact that they are viewed with suspicion due to the tense relationship that Finland has with Russia (which is expected to progressively deteriorate in the long-term).

Hence, since the integration of the russophone population has been sensitive to the complicated Finnish-Russian relationship, it would be desirable to formulate a counterstrategy to prevent a further decay of public opinion towards them through appropriate policymaking. The development of a humanitarian visa for Russian citizens escaping conscription could potentially contribute to changes in the way the russophone population is perceived by the general population, as such a visa policy would establish and emphasize a principle of vulnerability. This might spark a distinction between Russian immigrants residing in Finland and the acts of aggression perpetrated by the regime of their country of origin, thereby promoting better social and labour-market integration.

Moreover, improved integration outcomes of the russophone population would insulate Finland from some potential security risks that might arise from the perceived condition of marginality by certain segments of its population. From a national security perspective, promoting policies aimed at increasing the sense of belonging for the russophone population would mitigate their risk of alienation. The field experiment conducted by Renvik, Jasinskaja-Lahti, and Varjonen also showed a positive relationship between high perceptions of

ethnic discrimination and a low sense of belonging to the majority group, both of which correlated with an enhanced likelihood of engaging in hostile acts to tackle perceived injustices.[xxiii] With the increase of hostile tactics from the Russian Federation against Finland as a consequence of its newly acquired NATO membership, it is necessary for the Finnish government to not allow the vulnerable position of the russophone population in the country to be taken advantage of by Russian propaganda.

Therefore, the humanitarian visa program could present the opportunity to indirectly tackle consolidated domestic issues and promote better integration of the russophone population by changing the narrative about Russian speakers in Finland. The foreign policy trajectory of the Nordic country has constantly been careful not to project hostile messages to its Russian neighbor. However, its new security posture—dictated by the recent NATO membership—represents an opportunity to enjoy more mobility within the realm of foreign and security policy. Developing a humanitarian visa policy would, therefore, not signify separating migration policy from foreign policy, but would instead signify a foreign policy that is not excessively conditioned by the perceptions of the Russian Federation. In essence, the humanitarian visa policy of Finland should also be conceived as a ramification of a contemporary Finnish foreign policy rather than a way to diverge the respective paths of foreign and immigration dimensions.

Consequently, Finland will continue to peg segments of its foreign policy to its immigration policy, specifically within the realm of its relationship with the Russian Federation. Dividing it would not be feasible due to historical and contemporary dynamics that will continue to bind these two areas together until the Finnish-Russian relationship ceases to unfold in an environment of reciprocal suspicion and unilaterally hostile behaviors; that is, until the Russian Federation ceases to maintain its imperialistic and Western-phobic posture. The main issue for the Finnish government has been, therefore, not the lack of separation between policies, but a struggle to develop a point of equilibrium whereby the political insulation of the russophone population residing in Finland would take place in concomitance to the implementation of necessary and pragmatic security maneuvers by Helsinki.

Counter Arguments for the Development of a Humanitarian Visa Program

As the interviewed expert from Cultura Foundation explained, the ability of the government to integrate someone depends strictly on the willingness of the person to actually become an integral part of Finnish society and respect its values.[xxiv] Therefore, even when potentially superlative policies are developed and implemented, the results may vary across individuals depending on their desire to proactively become full members of Finnish society. Another aspect that may affect the integration outcomes of Ukrainian refugees and Russian citizens is the structural difference of those two groups. Due to the exit-ban imposed by the Ukrainian Government on male citizens between the ages of 18 and 60, refugees from the war-torn country are mostly women and children. By participating in Finnish school programs, Ukrainian children have already started picking up language skills, thereby enhancing their social integration process, facilitated by their ability to communicate and close interactions with their native peers. Conversely, according to the expert from Cultura Foundation, Russian citizens escaping conscription are predominantly young male adults who are not necessarily looking for long-term settlement, rather for a place to shield themselves from being drafted into the war.[xxv]

Additionally, the interviewed expert at Cultura expressed skepticism towards the development of a humanitarian visa program for Russian citizens escaping conscription for a variety of reasons. Firstly, such individuals have more financial possibilities to move abroad if they wish to do so. This aspect places them in a position of privilege compared to Ukrainian refugees, who have escaped from the war with just a suitcase in most instances. Thus, the first concern remains whether the distribution of similar benefits between Ukrainian refugees and Russian citizens would be based on a principle of inequity. Secondly, not wanting to be drafted into the war does not necessarily mean being against the war in Ukraine; in a study conducted

of over 1600 Russian citizens already residing in Finland, it was found that more than 18% of them expressed favourable views of the invasion of Ukraine by their country.[xxvi] Although Russian citizens living in Finland and those escaping from conscription represent two different immigrant groups, speculative arguments suggest that the latter group might display similar views in line with the former. This could constitute a critical component in the opposition towards a humanitarian visa program as it could increase the risk of domestic tensions between Russians and Ukrainians.

On the other hand, reports have suggested that those being drafted into war are from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds and/or naturalized Russian citizens.[xxvii] Hence, the debate about a humanitarian visa program for Russian citizens requires a cost-benefit analysis for Finland, as factors in favour and against it are equally valid and will certainly be part of the decision-making process. Nevertheless, it is necessary to intervene in this area with a strong reliance on pragmatism, which Helsinki has already demonstrated to be capable of during the key decision of joining NATO.

The Role of the European Union

The legal status of Ukrainian citizens in the European Union is governed by the EU Temporary Protection Program, which was developed in 2001 as a response to the conflicts in former Yugoslavia and was first implemented for Ukrainians escaping the Russian invasion of their country. It allows beneficiaries to access education, medical care, social welfare, accommodation, family reunification, employment, banking services, and free movement within the EU before and after the issuance of a residence permit.[xxviii]

This paper identifies the role of the European Union as focal in creating the right environment for the aforementioned desirable changes, which would, in turn, allow for the development of a more balanced and less politically charged approach to the issue of Russians immigrating to Finland to escape conscription. The actions of the European Union in the Ukrainian refugee crisis have already been consequential and unprecedented, as they represent the first case of comprehensive responses to a migration crisis. The deployment of the EU Temporary Protection Program demonstrates that Member States have the capacity to tackle immigration challenges pragmatically and virtuously through unified action.

Nevertheless, the program remains characterized by blurry boundaries because the termination of its benefits is surrounded by uncertain ramifications, which continue to be subject to domestic immigration policy variations across EU Member States. In the case of Finland, the proposed actions of the Government have aimed at merging the EU mechanism of temporary protection into the national immigration circuit by, for example, allowing those Ukrainians who have obtained a job to transition to a Finnish residence permit for work purposes, if they desire to do so.

On the other hand, Russian citizens migrating to the EU to avoid being drafted remain constrained by the limited options they have, as those looking for safety have to search for it through other, inappropriate migration venues, such as in the form of other types of visas unrelated to their actual conscription reasons. Once they reach an EU Member State, they either apply for asylum, which is rarely granted, or overstay their visas. For the specific case of Finland, it is possible to argue that the condition of Russians who have sought asylum in the Nordic country is, in most cases, characterized by a *suspended status* (i.e., some asylum applications from Russian citizens have received neither a positive nor a negative decision.) During the interview with an official from the Ministry of Interior, it was reiterated that Finland, in coordination with its Nordic partners, will make a decision regarding Russian citizens escaping conscription only when an updated version of the guidelines is produced by the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA).[xxix]

In a May 2023 interview for *YLE,* a Finnish public broadcasting agency, the Director of Development and Steering at the Ministry of Interior, Ms. Sanna Sutter, stated that the government is awaiting "EU-guidance" to solve the issue of Russian citizens applying for asylum in Finland to avoid conscription.[xxx] The response offers a glimpse into the trajectory that

the Finnish Government intends to take in appropriately responding to the matter. Rather than a logistically-difficulty accommodation of 1,100 individuals—along with others that will arrive in the incoming months—the Finnish Government faces the more serious challenge of calibrating the need to provide them with a form of protection while avoiding the straining of diplomatic relationships with some EU Member States who have voiced their reluctance to offer any form of protection to this group of asylum seekers.

Therefore, the term "EU guidance" might signal an intention to refrain from unilaterally dealing with a politically sensitive issue, which further highlights an enhanced need for the European Union to embody the role of a cohesive actor through its policy-guidance with regard to the refugee influx caused by the war in Ukraine. Such a posture by the EU would promote the development of additional tools that could facilitate the diffusion of excessive state-centralization of political responsibilities.

Furthermore, it is worth noting, that during an interview carried out with a government official from the Ministry of Interior for the compilation of this report, it was confirmed that "EU-Guidance" implies an intention by the government to formulate a policy response based on the direction of the EU; Finnish immigration policy is not independent, but rather, it strictly abides by EU Directives as well as international humanitarian and refugee laws. Additionally, it was reiterated that asylum cases concerning Russian citizens escaping conscription were free from any political considerations and were analyzed solely on their merits. The official also added that the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) has, at the moment, suspended making decisions on asylum applications coming from Russian conscripts. This is due to the fact that Migri is still waiting for the guidelines from the European Agency for Asylum (EUAA) to ensure that decisions made in different Member States are based on similar grounds to minimize secondary movements of applicants looking for more favourable conditions in other EU countries.[xxxi]

Conclusion

Finland's response to the migration crisis following the start of the war in Ukraine remains overall positive due to its proactiveness in welcoming Ukrainian refugees logistically and politically. Nevertheless, this paper assesses that the Finnish Government should place enhanced emphasis on integration policies to improve social and economic integration outcomes for Ukrainians and to minimize phenomena of social marginalization previously displayed among the russophone population residing in the Nordic country. Public opinion polls towards Ukrainian refugees have reflected a positive attitude towards this group by the native population. At the same time, the positive attitude of Finnish citizens towards Ukrainian refugees and the affirmed need of the country for foreign labour indicate that there is an opportunity to swiftly integrate this new group of refugees.

This article has also covered service provisions in relation to the needs of Ukrainian refugees in Finland. Although the response of the Finnish government has been overall positive, some of the specificities reside in the excessive focus on the costs, which shifts the focus of their assignment on purely market-based dynamics rather than on an assessment of their qualities. The Finnish government could consider further integrating its capacity to provide services with that of private entities and NGOs because such collaboration could enhance the ability of Finland to meet the demand of those Ukrainian refugees in need of accessing social services.

The last dimension investigated in this report concerns the politically sensitive topic of the development of a humanitarian visa program that was first discussed by former Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto in August 2022. The focus of the report's discussion resides in the potential benefits of using visa policy to shape public perception towards Russian-speaking immigrants through the establishment of a principle of vulnerability that could potentially mitigate discrimination in the social and work sphere, thereby improving social and economic integration. Secondly, the creation of a protection scheme is contingent upon Finland's foreign policy considerations, which has limited the political elbow room for a

solution regarding Russian immigrants. However, those arguing against the creation of an immigration scheme for Russian citizens escaping conscription have done so based on potential domestic frictions between Ukrainians and Russian citizens that could lead to national security ramifications. The principles of inequity in the homogeneous distribution of benefits represent another major counterargument in the assignment of refugee status for Russian citizens escaping conscription when considering their financial possibilities compared with those of Ukrainian refugees.

The intention of Finland to coordinate with the EU regarding the issue of Russian citizens escaping conscription shows the necessity to provide a solution to the matter without centering excessive political responsibility on the Finnish Government. The European Union should aim to prioritize the unity of the bloc by displaying willingness to channel responsibility itself in these politically sensitive matters. Adopting a passive behaviour would only undermine the principle of cohesion in the governance of the refugee crisis caused by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

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Identity Politics Inside Out: National Identity Contestation and Foreign Policy in Turkey

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Hintz, Lisel. (2018). *Identity Politics Inside Out: National Identity Contestation and Foreign Policy in Turkey*. Oxford University Press.

One of the most significant variables to deploy for examining foreign policy are domestic politics. Lisel Hintz's book, *Identity Politics Inside Out: National Identity Contestation and Foreign Policy in Turkey*, explores the complex relationship between national identity contestation and foreign policy in Turkey. Hintz emphasizes the significant role of domestic factors in shaping foreign policy decisions. She argues that foreign policy is not driven solely by national interests in terms of geopolitical or material power, as realists often suggest. Instead, she shows how foreign policy can be used as a tool to achieve specific political goals within a country. Internal factors, such as identity and its political actors, can represent a wide range of institutions. These include the military, courts, the education system, language institutions, legal document (i.e., the Constitution), and the media. These elements play a crucial role in shaping a nation's foreign policy decisions.

The book has an excellent academic design which clearly describes the methodology, theoretical framework, and its relevancy. As sources, the book utilized archives, surveys, social media, and television programs. Its chapters are coherently structured, each outlined carefully in the introduction, and effectively interconnected. Although the book is thorough, its detailed structure, with clues in each chapter to remind the reader the important concepts, allows for easy navigation and reading of any chapter without the need to refer to others. However, we can note the issue of repetition, which creates a problem for the readers who would like to read the book from beginning to end. Although repetition can be a common feature of academic writing, it can detract from the reader's experience.

It is also worth underlining that despite being a relatively short volume, the book diligently reflects the historical context of Turkish politics. It deploys a constructivist framework, therefore making the context a crucial component of the analysis. The composition of a state's identity is depended on its construction of culture, norms, ideas, and their meanings. Accordingly, Hintz puts emphasis on the malleable nature of identity while providing the required information for those who are not familiar with Turkey's political history.

Identity Politics Inside Out is an attempt to turn "the concept of identity politics inside out." In other words, the author develops a *theory of inside-out identity contestation*. The inside-out identity contestation theory posits that when actors face challenges to their identity efforts within their own country, they will turn to the international stage to promote a specific identity agenda. This theory emphasizes the importance of international actors in shaping domestic identity politics. In her book, Hintz uses Turkey as a case study to demonstrate the broad applicability of her theoretical framework. In the penultimate chapter, she briefly mentions other cases such as Israel and South Africa to illustrate how her framework can be used to analyze national identity contestation and foreign policy in various contexts.[i] The application of the theory to other cases is minimally useful because, unlike the detailed examination of the Turkish context, these cases are only evaluated with a limited number of examples. This approach creates confusion rather than clarifying the theory, as it lacks depth and thorough analysis. To enhance clarity and applicability of the theory, the author could have provided more detailed case studies or comparative analyses that delve deeper into the specific contexts of each case. Indeed, the author could apply the theory in another study, focusing specifically on the cases mentioned (Israel, South Africa, etc.), to provide a more comprehensive analysis and demonstrate the theory's applicability across various contexts. This

would clarify the theory and strengthen its validity by showcasing its effectiveness in diverse settings.

The book extracts four main identity proposals with an intertextual approach and makes use of interviews, surveys conducted with students, social media material, government archives, novels, television programs, and many other types of texts. These four main identities are: Ottoman Islamism, Republican Nationalism, Western Liberalism, and Pan-Turkic Nationalism. They do not correspond to specific political parties and are not fixed in nature. For example, a politician from the Republican People's Party (CHP) may carry a Western Liberalist identity. CHP has a historical association with the establishment of the Republic of Turkey and the promotion of secularism, nationalism, and modernization. These principles were central to the vision of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, who sought to redefine Turkey's national identity and its relationship with foreign powers after World War I. However, it is important to note that supporters of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) typically adhere exclusively to Ottoman Islamism, at least publicly, contrasting with followers of the CHP who may have different identities. There are also some overlapping aspects among identities. For instance, a movement may embody similar norms of membership and behavior but hold contradictory cognitive worldviews. Hintz proposes a general framework with her approach, rather than claiming that these proposals capture reality perfectly. This framework aims to provide a theoretical lens for understanding the various identity proposals that exist. She utilizes a method from Rawi Abdelal's *Measuring Identity* to distill these identity proposals. According to this method, constitutive norms, relational meanings, social purposes, and cognitive worldviews shape identity.[ii] She puts her rich sources into context by applying these criteria. Diverse examples, from television shows to historical facts, make it easier to understand and visualize the specificity of each identity proposals. For example, to reflect the constitutive norms of Ottoman Islamism, she points to cooking shows. In these shows, people act like alcohol does not even exist. Since television is regulated by Ottoman Islamists, it reflects their constitutive norms. However, novel and film examples are not as adequate as they claim to be. The book analyzes hit films and lesser-known works, such as Selam (Greetings of Peace) and Filinta, with a superficial approach that lacks genuine film or novel analysis.

There are numerous scholarly sources that examine identities in Turkey. The book does not use these existing identity categories, and rather creates its own framework. Extracting these four identities rather than simply relying on previous academic literature makes it easier to contextualize their meaning for Turkish conditions. Thus, it serves as a very useful guide to understand what the book refers to when it mentions Republican Nationalist or Ottoman Islamist.

The book introduces the concept of "red lines," which are proposals made up of components that are mutually intolerable, leading to intense contestation and intolerance. Red lines serve to sharply divide various identity proposals and oppose unacceptable proposals from other identities. For example, a red line for a Pan-Turkic Nationalist is the recognition of Kurdish identity. The red lines do not only create ideational obstacles but also put practical barriers against alternative proposals (for example, institutions, education systems, or media).

The contest among these proposals take place with the purpose of each identity creating their own identity hegemony. The struggle is not just to implement the foreign or domestic policies according to a particular identity (with a rational perspective) but also the passion and desires or "ontological needs" are the drivers to pursue hegemony. The author describes identity hegemony as a spectrum, ranging from the sense of security gained when one's own understanding of identity is acknowledged as correct by others, to the strategic benefits derived from controlling institutions that shape beliefs about identity, such as the media and education system. Such an analytical approach is imperative because it serves to grasp the hidden tendencies behind foreign policy decisions rather than simply deploying a rational choice cost-benefit analysis.

The main idea of the book is that supporters of these distinct identity proposals take their fight "outside" which refers to the international arena. For example, in pursuit of Ottoman Islamist identity hegemony, the AKP utilizes European Union democratization reforms. International organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), diaspora communities, or

other international means serve as tools to become hegemon "inside." For instance, the democratization reforms mandated by the EU allowed the AKP to reduce the political influence of the military and alter the composition of the Constitutional Court. The author uses process tracing to map the mechanisms in which these contestations take place.

She starts the story from the very beginning with the Republican Nationalist struggle for identity hegemony. The author gives the historical background for the new Republic and shows how Republican Nationalists have initiated the construction of their own visions, grounded in secularism, modernism, and nationalism. It is unclear whether they also used foreign policy to establish internal hegemony, with the aim of disseminating their own proposal for national identity throughout the population. However, the author provides a comprehensive historical backdrop for understanding the evolution of Republican Nationalist identity by brilliantly summarizing a wide variety of events from the Turkish Independence War to the Surname Law.

Another important date she delves into is the military coup of 1980. She emphasizes the increase of the contestation between Republican Nationalism and Ottoman Islamism after the coup. Turkish-Islamist synthesis was a project to diminish the effects of the left and marked a violation or a concession of Republican Nationalist red lines. After the end of Cold War, Turkey tried to build closer ties with Turkic states in the Caucasus and Central Asia. This foreign policy stemmed from Pan-Turkic Nationalism's relational meaning. Again, a red line of retaining Western orientation was overstepped. Western Liberalists were also actively working to influence others in issues like Kurdish question or human rights issues.

Another crucial period is 1990s. Republican Nationalism has been the biggest obstacle for Ottoman Islamism because it has already institutionalized red lines. Hintz puts emphasis on three important institutions in this sense: Turkish Armed Forces (TSK), the Constitutional Court and university rectorship. She underlines the efforts of the Welfare Party (RP) to spread its identity hegemony but being blocked by these aforementioned institutions. She especially gives examples from the incidents of the February 28, 1997 process which were a reaction against the Erbakan government. She gives these examples as important challenges to Republican Nationalist hegemony. In this process, TSK interfered with Ottoman Islamist RP with directives, after which the Constitutional Court closed the party. Finally, with this push, university rectors with Islamist tendencies were removed.

Successor of the 1990s Ottoman Islamists, Justice and Development Party (AKP) came into power in 2002. Since AKP's politicians learned from previous experiences, they did not try to implement their own agenda. Instead, they focused on overcoming the institutional obstacles first. AKP showed its willingness to join the European Union (EU) in order to overcome these red lines of TSK, Constitutional Court and university rectorships. This foreign policy orientation became a legitimization tool for domestic reforms in the military and judiciary sector, among others. Democratization was an excuse to reduce the dominance of military with cases like Ergenekon and Balyoz.[iii] Furthermore, it was a reason to change the composition of the Constitutional Court. The proposal was to increase the number of regular justices from eleven to seventeen, which appears to be in line with EU norms that limit justices' terms to twelve years. This maneuver enabled the AKP to replace justices appointed by the previous Republican Nationalist president Sezer with those who are more aligned with the AKP's views.

Finally, AKP was successful in winning the contest against the red lines of the status quo with its international efforts during the 2000s. In the 2010s came the time for the initiation of Ottoman Islamist hegemony. New domestic and foreign policies became more oriented toward Ottoman legacies. This new identity hegemony permeated all realms of daily life: Islamic symbols became dominant in the public sphere; foreign policy reoriented toward Muslim countries and their leaders; the West became the new enemy and closer relations developed with former Ottoman territories; and the media began being controlled by the Ottoman Islamists.

As a result of their external challenges and contests, Ottoman Islamists were subsequently able to initiate the implementation of their substantive policies. Now they are institutionalizing their own red lines like the norms of Sunni Islam. Hintz, however, puts emphasis on the previous success of Republican Nationalist hegemony, which has been

overcome by the AKP. She argues that their hegemony has become more influential than others and, to support her argument, gives the example of Gezi Park protests as a hybrid identity proposal, demonstrating that Ottoman Islamist hegemony is a fragile one.

The potential bias of the narrative may be more pronounced if it were developed by a researcher residing in Turkey. However, the author's American nationality is a distinct advantage of the book. Her outsider status lends a unique objectivity to her work, providing a valuable perspective that offers a clearer and more insightful account of the internal dynamics within Turkey.

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[i] Lisel Hintz, *Taking the Theory "Outside": State and Non-State Actors' Use of Inside-Out Identity Contestation*, Identity Politics Inside Out: National Identity Contestation and Foreign Policy in Turkey (New York: Oxford 2018), 132-133, 137-139.

[ii] Rawi Abdelal, *Measuring Identity: A Guide for Social Scientists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[iii] The series of investigations and trials known as the Ergenekon and Balyoz trials, which occurred from 2008 to 2012, stand out as significant episodes in recent Turkish history. These trials involved the prosecution of hundreds of individuals, including military personnel, journalists, and politicians. They were accused of belonging to a covert secularist organization allegedly planning to overthrow the AKP government by inciting terror in society. The cases centered on the concept of a "deep state" organization plotting to sow chaos through bombings and assassinations to justify a military coup against the democratically elected government. Initially, the Ergenekon and Balyoz trials were seen as a step towards democratization by prosecuting high-ranking figures like Kenan Evren. However, later on, they appeared to target powerful individuals and undermine the credibility of institutions opposed to the AKP. The trials' fairness was called into question due to the use of illegally obtained or fabricated evidence, including incriminating CDs written in a font released after the alleged events. Furthermore, the significant number of Gülen movement members in influential positions within the police and judiciary who were responsible for handling the cases raised concerns about potential hidden agendas behind the trials.

Risks to Democratic Consolidation in Ukraine: Strategic Stagnation by NATO and the EU, and the Cautionary Tale of Georgia

Thomas Law

Abstract

Ukraine and Georgia have long desired closer relations with NATO and the European Union, the practical manifestation of post-Soviet Euro-Atlantic aspirations. There has been notable progress in democratizing societies and government institutions, particularly in comparison to other former Soviet Republics. Despite this, the intervening three decades have been characterized by NATO and EU failure to offer meaningful, realistic, and detailed pathways to membership. This is not only a strategic mistake that emboldens Russia, but one that has acted as a break on further democratization and even contributed to democratic backsliding in recent years. This is particularly so in Georgia, where despite the overwhelming pro-European sentiment of its population, the ruling Georgian Dream party has eroded previously established democratic norms and moved closer to the illiberal modes that characterize governance in Hungary, Türkiye, and Russia. This offers a precursory warning to what could befall Ukraine if NATO and the EU fail to sufficiently guarantee that democratic consolidation and hitting membership criteria will result in admission. The inconsistency with which these institutions uphold democratic credentials as membership preconditions, or indeed the undemocratic nature of many current members, only serves to exacerbate Ukrainian and Georgian frustration with the process. This is not a call for the EU and NATO to abandon all democratic conditionality and wider strategic thinking about tensions with Russia, but rather to clearly communicate that, if conditions are met, then they will find a way to welcome aspirant members into the club.

Introduction

> NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO . . . We welcome the democratic reforms in Ukraine and Georgia.

So read the declaration following the April 2008 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (hereafter, NATO) Summit in Bucharest. These platitudes were devoid of meaningful detail, rendering them not only geopolitically meaningless but also counterproductive. There were no accompanying concrete proposals, no meaningful pathways spelled out, and no prerequisite criteria to meet. All that was offered was "a period of intensive engagement […] at a high political level to address the questions still outstanding," with a first assessment to be published in December.[i]

Just four months later, Russian forces exploited ongoing tensions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia as a flimsy justification to occupy a fifth of Georgia's internationally recognized territory. NATO's vague offer of future membership, without a timeframe or meaningful intervening support, provided an incentive for Russia to invade.[ii] It was a similar story in 2014, when Russia invaded another imperfect but identifiably democratic former Soviet Republic – Ukraine, after the Euromaidan Revolution. The protests followed President Viktor Yanukovych's abandonment of the European Union Association Agreement under Russian pressure. The instability and "strategic ambiguity" that followed his ousting was exploited by the Kremlin as an excuse to send their 'little green men' to seize Crimea and foment trouble and 'separatism' in the Donbas.[iii]

Despite this blatant militaristic aggression in Europe, it provoked very little counter-response from Western states that had championed the democratic progress and Euro-Atlantic aspirations of Ukraine and Georgia. The response by Europeans and the North American states – weak rebuttals, minimal sanctions, and heel-dragging on military support – has not deterred Russia from intensifying its activities. On the contrary, this appeasement encouraged further Russian aggression, including actions against existing European Union (hereafter, EU) and NATO members. This has included, but is by no means limited to, cyber attacks, "weaponizing immigration" and a chemical weapons attack in the UK that killed a British citizen.[iv] Nevertheless, Russia's reinvigorated revisionism has had the greatest impact on the aforementioned aspiring states – Georgia and, above all, Ukraine. In concert with a historically skittish, non-committal stance by NATO and the EU that failed to provide meaningful pan-societal incentives for reform, I contend that this has had a stalling effect on democratic consolidation. Most directly, Russia's militarism has placed large territories under Moscow's direct or indirect control, therefore making it impossible for them to comply with the "essential prerequisites to democratization" of territorial integrity and secure borders.[v] Elsewhere in temporarily unoccupied territory, it has necessitated a societal adjustment and clampdown in the name of national security that is not conducive to healthy civil developments and flourishing democratic freedoms.[vi] Democracy is more than the holding of periodic free and fair elections, incorporating judicial independence, a free media, meaningful legislative scrutiny, robust anti-corruption and anti-oligarchic regimes, freedom of assembly, a healthy and active civil society, and general freedom of choice in politics and life.[vii]

This article opens with an analysis of the 33 years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the remarkable progress made by Ukraine and Georgia in democratizing their societies. They overcame the legacies of decades of communist repression and centuries of imperialist rule to establish functioning democracies that, even if characterized as 'hybrid regimes', have demonstrated a remarkable ability to evolve in a democratic direction.[viii] Whilst both countries had experienced remarkably similar histories and developments, I then look into Georgia's recent democratic backsliding. The progress made on democratization was achieved not due to, but in spite of the EU and NATO's geopolitical stance, and is now going into reverse in Georgia, and at risk of doing so in Ukraine. The failure to offer meaningful, detailed, conditional plans for reforms that would secure membership has left these countries in limbo, vulnerable to both an external Russian threat and internal anti-democratic tendencies. I then contend that Georgia offers a warning as to what could befall Ukraine if it fails to advance its Euro-Atlantic aspiration (or rather, if NATO and the EU fail to accommodate Ukrainian efforts). The West, and indeed the Ukrainians, should learn from the Georgian experience, whilst not giving up on Tbilisi's democratic hopes of realising its European dream.

There is an acute dilemma when it comes to interactions with these "grey zone" democracies: on the one hand, the requirement to uphold democratic standards can act as an incentive for further development, on the other – the risk of alienating these countries and leaving them vulnerable to further Russian influence and democratic backsliding.[ix] There is also a wider Russia's strategic threat to consider. Despite these considerations to maintain, I contend that membership is not only possible, perhaps on a 'West German' basis, but urgent. Russia's ongoing aggression should not be used as an excuse, but rather should necessitate faster accession talks to not only guarantee peace and prosperity, but to avoid undermining domestic democratic progress.

History Boys

When the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, there was much scepticism regarding the former Republics' ability to transition into market economies and democratic societies. Indeed, they were viewed as possible sources of instability, nuclear in the case of Ukraine, and ethnic with Georgia and its South Abkhazian and Ossetian questions.[x] Despite this, there was noticeable democratic progress, if not quite at the same pace as other former communist states. A pivot away from decades of subjugation by Moscow manifested itself with a desire to 'turn to

Europe', officially embracing concepts like democracy whilst collaborating closer with institutions that could offer peace (NATO) and prosperity (the EU).[xi]

From Communism to the Continent

This was not a smooth process. Whilst talking about democracy and liberty, the leaders of the 1990s, the majority of whom cut their teeth in Soviet politics, were far more autocratic than often acknowledged in the West. The 'colour' revolutions (the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia and 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine), however, were "visibly recognized in the West as a major democratic advance" by ousting Presidents Eduard Shevardnadze and that "obdurate anti-democrat" Leonid Kuchma.[xii] This process of democratic progress was accompanied by increasing pro-European and Euro-Atlantic sentiment, often as a rebuttal to pervasive Russian influence.[xiii] Georgian protestors, ostensibly seeking democratic reforms and the removal of an autocratic president, took to the streets waving EU, United States (hereafter, US) and NATO flags in a clear rebuttal to closer association with Russia. In the years following, a popular vote showed more than 70 percent of the population wanted to join NATO.[xiv] Ukraine experienced similar events, with protestors expressing pro-European views in 2004 during anti-Kuchma demonstrations, and even more so in 2014, where over a hundred protestors "sacrificed their lives for the dream of Europe."[xv]

These developments were primarily locally driven, with widescale mobilization of society against authoritarian leaders.[xvi] Funding and support from Non-Governmental Organizations (hereafter, NGOs) was important, but its impact is often overstated – including by none other than President Vladimir Putin in his monolithic, adversarial worldview.[xvii] Ascribing too much importance to external funding and support for civil society groups diminishes the local agency and pro-democratic spirit prevailing since the fall of the Soviet Union. It ignores the fact that "substantive democracy stems from the grassroots" or else it is merely "a paternalistic form of governance."[xviii] It overexaggerates the role of the EU and the fact that these states "were well on their way to democracy" before the EU's incentives for political liberalization.[xix] The habit of overlooking such local perspectives to shoehorn these countries' democratic developments as but a minor subset in the grander story of relations with Russia leads to ignorance of their perspectives. As a result of this approach, any talk of accession went on the backburner following the Colour Revolutions, with EU-Ukrainian cooperation slowing in the late 2000s and Georgia's calls for a NATO Membership Action Plan rebutted following the 2008 invasion.

The modern day 'Non'

At the time that both countries underwent significant democratic progress, the EU in particular was keen to distance itself from offering future membership. It had an important mediatory role during the Orange Revolution, but the main actor most trusted by Kyiv turned out to be President Aleksander Kwasniewski of Poland, not an official EU figure.[xx] The EU was driven by a desire for a stable and peaceful outcome, and indeed one that focused too much on Russian sensitivities. The fear of escalating tensions with Moscow was at the forefront of the Euro-Atlantic agenda. The prospect of Ukrainian and Georgian membership in these organizations was minimized, and in many cases ridiculed. To give one example from 2003, Romano Prodi, the then-European Commission Chair suggested that "Ukraine was as plausible a candidate for EU membership as New Zealand" and grouped the country in the EU's Neighbourhood Policy alongside Morocco and Tunisia – countries considered geographically unqualified for EU entry.[xxi]

Ukraine and Georgia have never been perfect democracies, and for a long time flirted with autocracy. They have shown signs of democratic evolution, thriving civil societies, and institution building, despite never truly being appreciated or cultivated by Western states. Neither the US nor the EU were particularly active when it came to promoting democracy in Ukraine and Georgia, with neither using political conditionality to pressure incumbent leaders,

instead relying on funding and low-level cooperation agreements.[xxii] Democratization also cannot be viewed in isolation from wider society and the challenges it faces; Western intransigence to the growing Russian threat and unwillingness to extend sufficient economic and security support meant that the laborious process of reform became of secondary importance, sacrificed in the name of national security, or ignored in the absence of hope for meaningful change and acceptance into the Euro-Atlantic club.

This historic failure to countenance Ukrainian and Georgian membership provided the conditions to undermine democratic progress made to date. Without long-term external guarantees, with the potential for Russia to act as a destabilizing force, any short-term progress could never be certain to affect long-lasting, permanent societal change. The preoccupation in Washington and European capitals was on strategic balance with Russia, or indeed self-interested concerns about budgets and pooled support rather than the aspiration of the Ukrainian and Georgian people.

In the end, this proved to be a strategic mistake; the 2008 NATO declaration, whilst failing to provide meaningful security guarantees, incentivized Russian expansion by refuelling the paranoia about Western encirclement and enabling the invasions due to the lack of short-term protection on offer. Following President Yanukovych's election in 2010, Ukraine saw a decrease in democratic freedoms, including the harassment of the opposition and independent media, as well as the political prosecution of former Prime Minister, Yulia Tymoshenko.[xxiii] Yanukovych's rule would ultimately oversee the end of Ukraine's post-Soviet modus operandi of balancing the West and Russia, the "multivector foreign policy" first utilized by Kuchma. Yanukovych's original plans to withdraw from the prospective EU Association Agreement would have ended any ability for Ukraine to 'balance' with the West. The resulting Maidan Revolution, toppling of Yanukovych, annexation of Crimea, war in Donbas, and finally the 2022 full-scale invasion, have ensured that any ties with Russia have been severed for the foreseeable future.[xxiv]

The Ongoing Appeal

Naturally, the continued Russian threat has heightened the appeal of NATO and the EU, and their Euro-Atlantic notions of democracy. An October 2022 poll found that 83 percent of Ukrainians want to join NATO.[xxv] Despite ongoing threats and occupation, Ukraine achieved meaningful democratic progress, scoring 5.9 (on a 0-10 scale) in the 2019 Economist Democracy Index, up from 5.42 in 2014.[xxvi] To put it in more qualitative terms, it is a "centrist democracy with a division of powers" and a "rapidly modernizing and politically literate civil society." [xxvii]

Such enthusiasm, without countervailing reciprocation from the objects of their desire, in an increasingly securitized society, can only carry progress so far. There have been understandable setbacks since the invasion, and obvious thorny issues about legitimacy and the renewal of popular mandates considering the effect of martial law (barring elections that would have been scheduled for 2024). Although Ukraine's most recent Economist democracy rating fell to 5.42, the lowest since first publication in 2006, this is in large part explained by the practicalities of war and martial law – the need to centralize power and decision-making, the restriction on judicial and legislative reform necessitated by the constitution under war, the impossibility of publishing and broadcasting parliamentary sessions owing to safety concerns, and the fact that all main channels broadcast from the same government-run United News Telemarathon.[xxviii] There is a risk that failure by the EU and NATO to advance membership talks could see democratic stagnation or even regression. This is no idle threat, nor one that will dissipate once the war ends. Mayor of Kyiv Vitali Klitschko said the country was becoming increasingly autocratic under President Zelenskyy whilst those daily television broadcasts have become a "marathon of propaganda" according to the Zaborona editor.[xxix] The EU itself highlighted reduced access to pluralistic media and the need to ensure post-war structures for media regulation, "including the long-term outlook of the public broadcaster and independence

of the national regulator."[xxx] Indeed, one only needs to look to Georgia to see how years in the waiting room can negatively impact democratic development.

Georgian Dream, or nightmare?

For decades, Georgia has been in geopolitical purgatory. Despite continued and strong displays of Euro-Atlantic aspirations, NATO and the EU have failed to make *meaningful* overtures welcoming Georgian progression domestically and in its foreign policy choices. When it comes to Ukraine, these institutions, as well as domestic actors, must be wary of repeating the same mistakes that have allowed for a recent undoing of Georgia's democratic progress.

Both Georgia and Ukraine experienced a post-Soviet desire to 'turn to Europe', but the former's Euro-Atlantic aspirations have historically been far stronger. Article 78 of the Georgian Constitution, ratified in 1995, calls on constitutional bodies to take all measures possible "to ensure the full integration" of Georgia into the EU and NATO.[xxxi] Georgia formally applied to join NATO in 2006 and the EU in the weeks following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Ukraine nailed its colours to the mast far later, only officially applying in February 2022. Both Georgia and Ukraine have undergone analogous if not exact democratization and accession projections for NATO and the EU, and each have lessons for the other and offer possible predilections for the future. Ukraine shows the risks to Georgia of failure to resolve low-lying conflicts with Russia and the possibility of a full-scale invasion years down the line. As regards democracy, Georgia's recent regression is a cautionary tale of what can happen if foreign policy objectives are not reciprocated.

Post-Rose Predicament

The democratic progress in Georgia continued for some time after the Rose Revolution, with the country going from an Economist scoring of 4.62 following Russia's 2008 invasion to 5.93 in 2017.[xxxii] That journey was not smooth, and was characterized by a number of infringements on democracy. The post-revolution reform process ended up concentrating power in the hands of the executive in a move that was given insufficient scrutiny by the legislature, the wider public, and Georgia's western allies. TV programs critical to the government were either removed or watered down, resulting in the country's media becoming less free and pluralistic overall.[xxxiii]

Nonetheless, significant overall progress could be observed, but after years in the waiting room, in the absence of an external motivation for political unity and hope that institution-building would advance membership talks, recent Georgian politics has been characterized by drama and uncertainty. Protests in 2019 calling for electoral reform and the resignation of key political figures were repressed, and the 2020 parliamentary elections were marred by allegations of fraud that led to opposition parties boycotting and renouncing their seats, and the arrest of Nika Melia, chair of the opposition United National Movement (UNM) party. More mass protests were seen in 2023 in response to the government's planned Russian-style "foreign agents" law (subsequently retracted from parliamentary hearings) that threatened to take the country on a more authoritarian path.[xxxiv]

Recent years of rule by the Georgian Dream party, particularly under former Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili have seen widespread democratic backsliding that has gone hand in hand with a closer alignment with illiberal political modes (that have more in common with domestic politics in Türkiye, Hungary, and Russia) and a diminution of practical steps being taken to achieve Euro-Atlantic ambitions. The ruling party even attempted to impeach President Salome Zurabishvili for travelling to Europe without prime ministerial approval (ironically to drum up support for Georgian membership of NATO and the EU). It has extended control of the judiciary and cultural institutions, expanded control over the security forces and media, committed electoral malpractice, failed to crack down on oligarchism, corruption, and overzealous policing, as well as imprisoned former President Mikhail Saakashvili over alleged

corruption.[xxxv] Georgian Dream's founder and primary funder, billionaire oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, who will make his return to Georgian politics in 2024, amassed his fortunes in Russia.[xxxvi] Amidst ongoing Russian occupation and moves to expand its military presence in illegally occupied Abkhazia, Georgian politics and society have undergone a worrying deterioration of previously established democratic norms.[xxxvii] A new Prime Minister, Irakli Kobakhidze, was appointed in February 2024 following Gharibashvili's unexpected resignation, and he is expected to continue this trend of growing authoritarian moves at home with criticisms of the West.[xxxviii]

Many of the conditionalities attached by the EU and NATO have only served to polarize debate and push much of Georgian Dream's target audience away from Euro-Atlantic ideals. The party appears to have followed the Viktor Orbán/Recep Tayyip Erdoğan playbook in inserting wedge issues into the political discourse, including around LGBT+ rights.[xxxix] To expand on this as a case study, these were prerequisites of deeper EU integration as outlined in the Association Agreement, and an anti-discrimination bill was passed by the Georgian parliament in 2014. It, in effect, led the government to pick between "civilized Europe" or in a Russian direction "where it is possible to expel people whom you dislike from a city" in the words of then-speaker Davit Usupashvili.[xl] Linking these issues of foreign policy and national identity with such issues risks further undermining support for closer Euro-Atlantic ties, leaving space for Russia and Russia-linked (if not Russia-supporting) political forces to capitalize on.

International Relations

This is not a case of Georgian Dream being in thrall to the Kremlin, nor of Russian interference subverting a pro-European population into a vassal state. Instead, it represents an Orbán-style turn to 'illiberal democracy' that by definition shifts it further away from the conventions and practicalities of the very Euro-Atlantic institutions it purportedly wishes to join, and closer to an autocratic type of governance. Its increasingly anti-democratic bent at home, domestic policies similar to Russia's, and alignment with Moscow's interests are being tied up with a diminishing zeal for NATO and EU membership. NATO and the EU must take some blame for allowing this shift to happen, and in some instances pushing Georgia in such a direction.

This 'push' is evident from NATO/EU's failure to offer security guarantees, dismissing local efforts at civil society improvement, and dragging their feet on membership talks. By the time Georgia had ratified and implemented the EU Association Agreement ("the basis for implementation of the accession process") the EU was preoccupied with the exit of one of its largest members and financial contributors, the United Kingdom.[xli] In 2018 French President Emmanuel Macron refused to even countenance beginning negotiations with any applicant state.[xlii] When Georgia applied in 2022, whilst Moldova and Ukraine (comprising the frontrunning 'accession trio') that were granted immediate candidate status, Georgia was instead presented with twelve priorities to tackle, and only granted candidate status in December 2023 (at the same time the EU announced it would begin accession negotiations with Moldova and Ukraine). NATO has been no better: Georgia's attempts to draw closer have been "hitting the glass door" in the words of parliamentarian Shalva Papuashvili, whilst Kornely Kakachia, Director of the Georgian Institute of Politics, said that the lack of concrete time frame has led to "NATO fatigue."[xliii]

When push came to shove and Georgia faced Russian military aggression (and ongoing threats), "the West failed to provide sufficient support."[xliv] Under such circumstances, it is understandable that much of the population has been willing to countenance a party that has not been unequivocally anti-Russian, and to overlook some of its more anti-democratic tendencies. The question of when pragmatism with Russia becomes coziness of its status and mode of governance is key to understanding the interplay of Georgia's domestic and foreign politics. Georgia has abided by Western sanctions but has not imposed sanctions of its own. It resumed direct flights to Russia in May 2023 and has visa-free entry for Russians.[xlv] Georgian Dream seeks to portray itself as a 'Party of Peace' that would prevent the country from being

"dragged into the war", in contrast to the UNM-led opposition portrayed as a 'war party'.[xlvi] In the aftermath of the Rose Revolution, having attempted to blur the lines between party and state to heighten the "threat of one-party hegemony," President Saakashvili would paint those opposed to him as "pro-Russian."[xlvii] Now Georgian Dream is exploiting ongoing geopolitical tensions to paint the opposition as pro-war, and anyone against the current leadership as a threat to national security.

Even in 2015, during Garibashvili's first stint as Prime Minister, he greeted the opening of a NATO training centre in Georgia by stipulating that it "is in no way directed against Russia," attempting to justify this by claiming that: "We are called upon to maintain a pragmatic approach in our relations with Russia."[xlviii] The fact that he blamed Russia's invasion of Ukraine on NATO spoke volumes of his strategic thinking and the party's turn to Moscow under the influence of its billionaire benefactor, Bidzina Ivanishvili.[xlix] Amidst inflationary pressures, in no small part caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as well as hundreds of thousands of newly arrived Russians, 55 percent of surveyed Georgians want to maintain or increase economic activity with Russia.[l]

Looking to the Future

Yet, that same poll found that a similar number wanted closer economic ties with the EU, that figure doubling since the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Georgia's population is not necessarily abandoning its Euro-Atlantic aspirations because of clamours for peaceful coexistence with Russia. Instead, failure to better implement democratic values and failure by NATO and the EU to better incentivize and nurture such development has allowed the space for an increasingly autocratic party to 'illiberalize' Georgian society and politics. This by default pushes it closer to Moscow's world view, making it susceptible to the Kremlin's influence and talking points. This is not to say that Georgia is 'lost', but rather that Western powers must learn lessons from their strategic mistakes these past decades.

The Georgian experience demonstrates the potential for democratic backsliding if the West fails to provide meaningful economic and security guarantees, both in the present day through military and economic assistance and cooperation, but also in the future. Failure to provide a realistic prospect of accession to bodies that would guarantee security and (greater) prosperity created the domestically unstable conditions that allowed for a more authoritarian party like Georgian Dream to ascend to power. It is paramount that these mistakes are not compounded further in Georgia, pushing it even further away, but also that they are not repeated in Ukraine.

Ukrainian Lessons

Ukraine has to date suffered hundreds of thousands of civilian and military casualties, countless war crimes, billions of dollars worth of damage, and attempts at eradication of nationhood. This ensures that there is little to no prospect of a politician succeeding by parroting even the equivocal takes of Georgian Dream vis-à-vis Russia. As with Tbilisi, the threat is not that a future Ukrainian government chooses to align with Moscow outright, but rather that Kyiv sees an unwilling and insufficiently assistive NATO and EU, with consequent democratic backsliding that enables the rise of forces more aligned with the illiberal political worldview of Orbán, Erdoğan, and Putin.

Ukraine and Georgia's accession into NATO and the EU would be difficult today even without Russia's wars. A certain degree of 'expansion fatigue' has afflicted European nations, whilst both countries have particular issues beyond their democratic credentials that would create all manner of difficult (but not insurmountable) political headaches: Ukrainian agriculture in the case of the EU, and Georgia's poorly equipped and outdated armed forces in the case of NATO. However, Russia's ongoing threat makes the situation all the more urgent, requiring a realistic but detailed timeline and plan that offers hope and incentive for societal reform, with the ultimate prize of eventual acceptance into Euro-Atlantic structures. If

Georgia's recent backsliding shows the consequences of not doing so, how can meaningful hope of accession be used as an incentive for improvement, whilst not undermining key standards and requirements around basic democratic and security tenets? There are different points of contention being raised by various existing members to act as a contemporary block on accession, but these can be overcome by political will and interpretation, firm messaging on conditionality, and deft statesmanship.

NATO Necessity

With NATO, it is not, or at least should not be, the insufficiently democratic nature of these countries' societies that prevents accession. Ever since NATO's foundation in 1949, it has had a history of welcoming less than fully democratic member states: founding member Portugal was a dictatorship until the 1970s, whilst Türkiye has undergone three coups d'état (and one "postmodern" coup") since joining in 1952. The increasingly autocratic nature of Erdoğan's rule means that the country scores even lower on the Economist Democracy Index today than both Georgia and Ukraine.[li] Given that NATO and its members' leaders have consistently championed the generally democratic nature of these countries, satisfying such criteria should not be something that existing members should be overly exercised about. Justifying NATO's reluctance to offer membership by the basis of insufficient democracy would only serve to further alienate Ukrainian democratization efforts. Militarily, Ukraine has also demonstrated its capabilities in defending itself against Russia. That should go a long way to reassuring Member States about Ukraine's capability to align with the preexisting NATO standards, as well as its fighting capabilities and overall ability to contribute militarily to the alliance, and not act as a drain on collective resources.

It is instead the strategic complexities of Russian occupation and active hostilities that are primarily driving reluctance by some NATO members to expedite the membership application process to welcome a warring country. Following the 2023 summit in Vilnius, the leaders' communiqué ultimately reflected those fears, prompting President Zelenskyy to note that there was "no readiness" by members to invite Ukraine to join, or indeed to offer a timeframe.[lii] There have been suggestions that, short of NATO membership, Ukraine should be offered a series of bilateral security guarantees, or be sufficiently armed to act as a 'porcupine' that would make it militarily impossible for Russia to ingest.[liii] But the Ukrainians, and several other Central and Eastern European states, have made it clear that only NATO membership would guarantee meaningful security.[liv] Recent bilateral agreements, such as that between the UK and Ukraine, are helpful but insufficient to deter Russia or change the nature of the current war.[lv] Of course, there is a strategic need to consider how any actions may be perceived by Russia, as well as the need to safeguard against further escalation. This should, however, not come at the expense of Ukraine's wishes for closer Euro-Atlantic integration. Failure to progress membership talks will ultimately harm not only wider security in the region, but also Ukraine's chances of successfully emerging as an independent country, let alone as a thriving democratic society.

The West German Model

The conventional standpoint is that states cannot join when they are either in conflict or have active territorial disputes, for fear of other members being dragged into war. Doing so, however, overlooks a long history of creative ambiguity, best exemplified by the 'West German model'. Six years after its and NATO's foundation, the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) was admitted into the Western security alliance. This provoked much consternation in Moscow, but little by way of practical action. With allied forces stationed in West Germany, the Soviet Union could not militarily prevent accession without risking a wider conflict. West Germany always maintained territorial claims over both 'Germanies'; even so, the decision to create the Federal Republic, sans control of claimed eastern territories, integrate into NATO and co-found the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) meant that hopes of German

reunification were, by accepting the de facto reality of Moscow-aligned rule in the East, dashed in the short- to medium-term. It was a conscious choice by West Germany's first Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, to 'sacrifice' hopes of a unified Germany and instead consolidate and guarantee West German democracy, security, and prosperity with the eventual goal of reunification.[lvi]

A similar model has been suggested for Georgia.[lvii] It has never given up its territorial claims to Abkhazia and South Ossetia but, like 1950s West Germany, is not in a position to militarily force the issue; more to the point, NATO members were not willing to provide sufficient support to do so.[lviii] In this scenario, there must be an acceptance, if not official diplomatic recognition, of the facts on the ground – and it must not be used as an excuse by Western powers to prevaricate on NATO membership. In 2019, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov held that if NATO accepted Georgian membership that only extended as far as its controlled territory, then Russia "will not start a war." [lix] He added that it would "undermine our relations with NATO" but of course the entire raison d'être of NATO is to navigate relations with a prickly Russia.

This model could equally be applicable to Ukraine. That is complicated by ongoing conflict and the fact that, unlike Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia's territorial ambitions are ambiguous. According to Moscow's sham referenda in September 2022, the four provinces of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia are all now officially part of the Russian Federation, despite the fact that the cities of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia are controlled by Ukraine. Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations being invoked to justify the 'special military operation' also leads to some nerves in Western capitals about embracing Ukraine too closely. Unlike Georgia, Putin's warped history views Russians and Ukrainians as 'brotherly people', and he fears a free, democratic Ukraine acting as an inspiration for those in Russian society desiring such an outcome.[lx]

When the war ends, Ukraine will need security guarantees. "Russia already sees Ukraine as a 'de facto' NATO member" anyway, according to Kennedy School fellow Kevin Ryan, and a post-war scenario short of NATO guarantees will not create the stability for economic growth and democratic development.[lxi] Insufficient security guarantees short of NATO membership harms the very functioning of Ukrainian society. In a state of perpetual tension with its Eastern neighbour and frozen out of the West, it may succumb to populist forces with an authoritarian bent similar to the Georgian Dream. War conditions have necessitated a temporary diminution of democratic rights, and a war-weary society could be susceptible to anti-democratic forces.

Reaching for the Stars

Regarding the EU, there has been some progress made, and indications are present that Brussels has learned lessons. It upgraded Ukraine to an official candidate, and, in December 2023, the European Council agreed to open accession negotiations. This was only ratified thanks to the creative art of negotiations that saw Hungary's Viktor Orbán leave the room for 'coffee' during the unanimity-requiring vote.[lxii] That does, however, reflect the strength of feeling from the rest of the European leaders and the lengths they are now willing to go to in order to draw Ukraine in closer. Yet, the Orbán challenge remains a thorn that Ukraine and the rest of the EU will have to face up to in the coming years, as well as an indication of the risks for the EU if it is to lapse.

The EU has two main issues to overcome: the first will be to navigate complaints from members unrelated to Ukrainian democracy about the country's potential accession. Hungary is not the only member whose concerns need assuaging, but issues around agriculture, economic disparities and subsequent financial support, and migration are not insurmountable. Nonetheless, it is Orbán's deeply held opposition to Ukraine that poses the greatest challenge: he called Ukraine "one of the most corrupt countries in the world" (despite Hungary's own corruption problem), referred to Russia's invasion in Putinesque terms as a 'military operation', and consistently raises ethnic Hungarians in Ukraine and supposed marginalization as points of

contention.[lxiii] Whilst acquiescing in December 2023, Orbán called the decision "completely senseless, irrational and wrong" and has threatened to veto further advancements in the coming years.[lxiv] To prove this is no idle threat, he blocked €50 billion in funding the next day. The EU, to its credit, has begun looking at workarounds to the Hungarian blockage, including a €20 billion package that would circumvent its own rules on unanimity.[lxv] The EU must make full use of its legal powers, the weight of the majority of its members, official and unofficial channels, and more of the creative thinking that has been deployed in recent years to safeguard legitimate Ukrainian membership aspirations.

The second is providing enough realistic incentive to accentuate democratic progress. This means that the process cannot be lapse, and in doing so acquiesce to institutional and societal set-ups that would allow for democratic backsliding in the future. The trouble that Hungary consistently causes the EU has heightened sensitivities around the risk of democratic backsliding of new members. Nor, however, should the admissions process be so overwhelmingly rigorous and legalistically onerous as to make Ukraine's entry impossible. There is a middle ground in which negotiations give the EU more leverage over domestic reform, but this will only be the case if it is willing to use the full weight of its bargaining position, whilst never wavering from its goal of accession, stressing the goal of domestic democratic consolidation being undertaken as a partnership. There is also the option of unlocking the benefits of EU membership in a piecemeal manner, with closer cooperation granted in stages on condition of democratic improvements. These would show the benefits of progressing democratization and EU association, minimizing the risks of derailment through bundling all the benefits as a binary 'in/out' package, but also providing leverage to rescind certain benefits in response to any backsliding.

Euro-Atlantic aspirations have not yet perished

The aforementioned options are merely hypotheticals as to how the current internal obstacles to NATO and EU enlargement can be overcome. What matters more in the short term for Ukrainian democracy is the indication from the EU and NATO that consolidated democratization efforts will be rewarded through the genuine prospect of eventual membership. The price of failure to square this tricky situation, where members have concerns about being dragged into a wider conflict with Russia via the admittance of another less-than-fully democratic member, means that Ukraine's aspirations could be denied indefinitely. That could drive political elites into a more 'Georgian' mindset (in the realm of contemporary political elites, at least), one of dual tolerance of Russia's active presence in the neighbourhood and increasing authoritarianism.

Unless there is a drastic deterioration on the battlefield, Ukraine will not slide into some form of vassal state. buses, occupation, physical and psychological damage means such an outcome cannot eventuate. Instead, the risk from NATO and the EU's failure to make progress on Ukrainian membership aspiration comes in the form of some local version of Orbánization or Erdoğan-like rule. By definition, authoritarian-nationalist rulers have very little time for warm ties with other states, but the nature of such regimes inevitably links their thinking closer to that of Moscow and Budapest than Brussels and Washington. Under such a government, the West risks 'losing' these countries geopolitically but also abandoning the civil society reformers, democratic advocates, and Euro-Atlanticist aspirations. Throwing these populations under the bus of *realpolitik* would be a contradiction of the supposedly universalist nature of Western democratic values being fought for, undermining the intellectual foundations of Euro-Atlantic solidarity.

Where next?

In May 2023, NATO Secretary General Jen Stoltenberg held that "It is important that Georgia lives up to the democratic values we all believe in."[lxvi] Following the Vilnius summit a few months later, the joint communiqué said Member States would only "extend an invitation to

Ukraine" when certain "democratic and security sector reforms" were complete.[lxvii] If these statements are anything to go by, it appears that NATO's prevarication is once again repeating the mistakes of yesteryear, by affording Russia a strategic opportunity to expose lukewarm Western security guarantees and further destabilize societies in its 'sphere of interest'.

Finding the balancing act will not be easy; Georgia shows the pitfalls of delaying talks without a timeframe, but its subsequent experience with demagoguery, along with Hungary and Türkiye, demonstrates the need to maintain rigorous accession standards. With Ukraine, conditionality and its security predicament provide the groundwork to incentivize domestic reforms, but also shows the importance of not making accession burdens too high. Change must be domestically led and voluntary in nature, particularly if long-term security and prosperity guarantees involve some form of 'West German' trade-off. Whilst this is often seen as handing Putin a victory by in effect recognising his de facto hold of Ukrainian territory, with the right conditions and messaging, it could also be portrayed as a victory. With a genuine desire to bring a democratic Ukraine and Georgia into the fold, it would represent the Euro-Atlantic collective belatedly learning from its past missteps to help preserve sovereignty and democracy.

Georgia has undergone significantly more democratic backsliding than Ukraine has in recent years, and in doing so offers a cautionary tale for Ukraine (or rather, for NATO and the EU regarding Ukraine's membership). But that is not to say that Georgia is a lost cause. Slow to non-existent advances in accession talks have allowed the conditions for more authoritarian actors to dominate politics, but also show what can be done to remedy anti-democratic forces. This does not mean extending a blank cheque that guarantees membership regardless of the state of democracy, but rather that conditionality should be selectively deployed to ensure genuine progress on democracy is aligned with progress on membership talks. Just as Ukraine can avoid such a fate through a change in course, so too Georgia can be brought back on the Euro-Atlantic path.

Among all of the geopolitical ramifications and analysis, the internal changes in Ukrainian and Georgian societies in this era of 'high politics' and the manner in which foreign policy has interacted with these evolutions have often been overlooked. Democratization is its own reward, and there is no shortage of citizens seeking to advance it. Amidst ongoing external and domestic threats, domestic development needs support and the incentive for cross-political and country-wide cooperation to ensure its survival. The EU and NATO must realize that, for all the warm words and cooperation programmes, it is only the real, tangible prospect of membership that can sufficiently spark and eventuate such reform at all levels required. Failure to do so out of misguided strategic security concerns or an unrealistically strict approach to democratic progress risks making the perfect the enemy of the good. It could end up turning away those countries that have the potential to become fully fledged Euro-Atlantic states, thus making them vulnerable to Russian interference, illiberal backsliding, and the prospect of territorial losses.

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Navigating Queer Lives: Stories of Migration in Istanbul

Ayberk Dizdarlar

1. Introduction

Istanbul, with a population exceeding 16 million, is renowned as one of the world's most vibrant cities, spanning Europe and Asia and featuring a rich array of attractions. Locals have become accustomed to welcoming tourists from all corners of the globe. Over the past decade, catalyzed by events like the Arab Spring, Turkey has evolved into a sought-after destination for migration. Fueled by its extensive border with Syria, the Syrian Civil War led to a substantial influx of Syrians seeking refuge in Turkey. Initially regarded as a transit point en route to Europe, the landscape shifted in 2016 with Turkey and the European Union (hereafter, EU) signing an agreement to repatriate all new irregular migrants as of March 20, 2016.[i] This pivotal deal has reshaped Turkey's role in migration, transitioning it from a mere transit hub to a destination for migrants.

Amid Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine since February 24, 2022, both Ukrainians and Russians have turned to migration, with Turkey becoming a primary destination. Ukrainian refugees numbered up to 145.000 then rapidly declined to 46.000.[ii] Russians, facing limited choices to escape the war, particularly those opposing the conflict, Putin's regime, or facing discrimination, have sought refuge in Turkey since early 2022.This continuous influx has positioned Turkey as the country hosting the highest number of refugees as of the last nine years.[iii]

Having spent my entire life in Istanbul amidst its ever-changing environment and multicultural crowds, I embarked on a journey to explore the city from a fresh perspective. During my studies in the University of Toronto, where I am currently pursuing a master's degree, I returned home to Istanbul with the intent of conducting interviews with queer individuals who are not locals to see the city from their perspectives.

To gain diverse insights, I connected with queer individuals in Istanbul and conducted three interviews with people from different backgrounds. The first interviewee, J, a 23-year-old Jordanian, identifies as a lesbian woman and resides in Istanbul with her partner. The second interview was with G, a 26-year-old Syrian non-binary individual, is awaiting immigration approval to Germany. Lastly, I interviewed M, a 33-year-old Russian pansexual fashion designer.

These interviews aim to provide a nuanced perspective on life in Istanbul for these individuals, exploring how they navigate survival and wound up in the city. The inquiries delve into their interactions with family, national communities, and the queer community.

2. Background

A. Brief overview of the queer diaspora in Istanbul

To explain the queer diaspora in Istanbul we have to delve into the current Turkish political sphere. It has been known that Turkey has been going through a political Islamist conservative rule under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan for about 20 years. Under this rule, there have been instances when the political approach to migration has been somehow positive. Compared to other Middle Eastern countries being a queer person in Turkey is relatively safe.[iv] There is a strong political queer movement within Turkey, especially in Istanbul, several LGBTQ+ Non-Governmental Organizations (hereafter, NGOs) operate, and their headquarters are there. Until 2015 pride was celebrated in the most crowded place in Istanbul.

We should also recognize that being part of the LGBTQ+ community is not necessarily politically accepted in Turkey as it is the second most restrictive country on LGBTQ+ rights just after Azerbaijan.[v] In this paper, I specifically conducted interviews with queer individuals from the Middle East and Russia. Hence, it is important to note that my focus is not on comparing the queer community in Istanbul to European or North American queer communities, but rather to consider them on their own terms, acknowledging local and national specificities. Life as a queer person is difficult but also possible in Istanbul.

3. Methodology

A. Research design

For this paper, I chose a qualitative research approach. Factors like the number of interviewees, the sensitivity of the community, and the unreliable data from the Turkish government played a crucial role in this decision. Emphasising on individual stories, I conducted interviews with carefully selected members of the queer community, ensuring not to influence their responses toward specific questions or hypotheses by not engaging with personal opinions, not commenting on the answers, and not reacting strongly to any of the experiences that were told by these individuals.

B. Data collection

The interviews aimed to investigate the lives of the queer refugees in Istanbul. The chosen questions were the same for all the participants since they have different backgrounds and I wanted to have a comparison, as much as possible, so the questions were designed to be constant and in same order. Therefore, the questions were not designed to confirm a preconceived narrative, rather, to collect insights into how individuals articulate their own experiences and perspectives about themselves and society. It was structured to be more of a conversational interview rather than a question-and-answer period.
The questions were in the following order:

1. What is your background and your journey to Istanbul?
2. What is your identity? How do you identify yourself?
3. What challenges are you facing in Istanbul, Turkey?
4. How do you cope with these challenges?
5. Are there any support groups you have? If yes, who are they and could you tell me about them?
6. How do you compare yourself with other migrants, refugees from other countries, other ethnicities, and other personal backgrounds?
7. What are the positive sides of being in Istanbul for you?
8. What are the integration processes that you have been through, if any?
9. What are your future plans? Do you plan to stay in Turkey or go somewhere else?

C. Data analysis

The sample was three participants, and the interviews were more casual than formal. Questions were skipped if they were answered in the previous questions. At an investigative level, the gathered data was processed comparatively for all the participants through the lens of an observer who is aware of these individuals' background differences. Answers to the questions were gathered to make a final point, but the results have not proved or disproved any claims on how all the queer people live in Istanbul, rather they helped me to see the city from a broader perspective.

D. Ethical considerations

It is essential to recognize that all three individuals who agreed to these interviews are part of the high-risk LGBTQ+ community. High state officials such as the Former Interior Minister of Turkey, Süleyman Soylu, and the President of Turkey, Erdoğan, even called members of the LGBTQ+ community terrorists.[vi] Additionally, these individuals' legal immigrant status in Turkey is not mentioned for their safety. Their country of origin—Syria, Russia, and Jordan—are very high-risk for queer people. The three participants declared that sharing the paper is permitted, but for precautionary measures, I opted to preserve their anonymity as much as possible and have decided to address the interviewees by the initials of their names instead of names. The letters G, M and J represent the three respondents.

4. Interviews

A. Finding the queer migrants in Istanbul

The queer community in Istanbul is remarkably bigger than people would anticipate. As part of the community myself, I started to contact all the people I knew there when I decided to work on this project. The connections I have helped me find individuals with backgrounds from the Middle East and Russia. Finding queer migrants and building mutual trust has been the most difficult part of this project. I knew M prior to the interviews, so it was easy to reach out to her and explain what I was doing and why she might find an interest in participating.

I used to volunteer at an NGO in Istanbul, Istanbul&I, established to help migrants integrate into the city. My connections from Istanbul&I helped me meet G and build a sense of mutual trust to ensure to them that this interview would be held in a secure and respectful environment.

J is a colleague of a queer friend of mine. My friend helped me contact her to discuss this project. J was more than happy to help me with it, and she wanted me to tell her story to whoever would be reading this piece.

Being a queer person, having reliable connections and being clear on the aim of these interviews helped me immensely to overcome possible shyness and reservations about discussing their background.

B. Interviewing J (she/her, 23 years old, Jordanian)

On December 14, 2023, I visited a mutual friend of J's and mine, where J (she/her) and I agreed to meet and have the interview. We were in a private room to talk about being queer and a migrant in Istanbul, which are not subjects to a public debate. She walked in with a coffee for both of us and after greetings, I explained to her how her privacy is important to me and if she feels uncomfortable, we can stop the interview at any point. She almost did not listen to me when I was explaining the conditions to her. She was more than happy for me to share all the information about herself, and I felt though she was not hiding anything. It was an interesting interaction because had I interviewed a queer Turkish person, the interviewee would have demanded some secrecy and if conditions for anonymity had not been fulfilled, then no interview would have been held.

The initial question is designed not to lead people to explain a narrative. I asked about her background and her journey to Turkey from Jordan. She answered that she is 23 years old, and she came to live in Istanbul when she was 17 as soon as she was done with high school. Watching Turkish TV shows helped her to decide to come here and she was disappointed because it was not similar to the shows she had seen. She went to Tunisia to study, and the French language was too difficult for her, so she came back to Istanbul again to live with her brother. They did not get along well but luckily for her, her brother returned to Jordan, and she remained in Istanbul after their father passed away.

Already with the second question, the tone of the interview changed to more of a conversation between friends. She explained her sexual identity and how unsafe it was for a queer person to even exist in Jordan. As a lesbian woman in Istanbul, she compared the

conditions where she was not even allowed to think about being attracted to a woman in Jordan to being sexualized by men in Turkey. Her biggest struggle revolved around her queer identity and homophobia from her cultural background. Yet, she sought to surround herself with queer people from her country and queer-friendly people. When I asked her how she compares herself as a queer migrant to other migrants in the city she explained to me that being here is a "privilege" for her. The conditions back in Jordan are not comparable to those in Istanbul. In her home country, her worry remains whether she will be killed. As a foreigner in Turkey, she feels that she has the privilege to not face the fear of being killed.

Ironically, at the end of our conversation, she explained to me that she aims to pursue a university education and eventually leave Turkey. Among the options available to queer Jordanians, choosing Istanbul is considered the safest. This may seem contradictory, but it exemplifies the importance of understanding the specificities of each kind of struggles queer people face in different locations. For J, she came to be in a location where she is allowed to live as a lesbian woman, and she is grateful for that opportunity. It is natural for her to plan a better future for herself when she does not need to worry about her life, so economic and social conditions have now become her priority.

C. Interviewing G (they/them, 25, Syrian)

G (they/them) is from Syria, and I met them on December 20 in a residential part of the city. Meeting in a residential area was odd. The queer people, just like other people in Istanbul, have residential areas where they live, but they hang out mostly in downtown areas that can be deemed safe, and so, I was expecting to meet them in downtown. But as soon as we met, they explained to me that the financial crisis hit them hard, and their family was struggling. Knowing the Middle Eastern culture, they would refuse if I offered to get them coffee, so, I just got them a coffee saying they can get the next round.

The economic crisis in Turkey, especially in Istanbul, is recognizable everywhere you go and this interaction with G made me realize that refugees suffer from this probably worse than the nationals. They explained their background as a Syrian. When G was 2 years old, their father decided to move for work to Saudi Arabia where the family lived for 13 years. After the Syrian Civil War, they were "asked" to leave the country. They were deported and they could not find any help, so they decided to go to Turkey. First, they reached Mersin, a city located in the south, where they stayed for a year and a half, after which they moved to Istanbul. Their family has been in Turkey for 10 years now. They graduated high school in a special school for Syrians and undertook an education in university as a computer engineer.

They are Syrian but they do not feel any belonging to their nationality and rather embrace a non-binary queer identity. They do not face racism daily, but they have to live with queerphobia for their looks. In Istanbul, they are doing a lot better than anywhere else in the Middle East. Growing up in Saudi Arabia, they did not have any chance to explore their sexual identity, so they are happy to perform their sexuality despite the queerphobia they face. Luckily, they have a great family as a support group, and do not feel alienated. They also have a queer community to help cope with racism and queerphobia. G, similarly to J, also used the word "privilege" to describe their opportunity to come to Istanbul. However, when comparing themselves as Middle Eastern to Russians, they feel like Russians are more welcome to express their feelings, identities, etc. "No envy there, I am happy for them," they added. They cherish the diversity in Istanbul, and they feel like they belong to this city. Since life in Istanbul is not perfect economically, culturally, or politically they have plans to immigrate to Germany with their family. They hope to join a pride march without violence.

D. Interviewing M

As previous interviews were with people from the Middle East, I was eager to meet M (she/her), who is from Russia, to have another perspective on queer life in Istanbul. I met M in the winter of 2022 when I was at a private party. We ran into each other several times back

when I was living in Istanbul in art events, bars, and on streets where many Turkish people go, noting a difference to the other people I met as M was involved in the vibrant life that Istanbul offers its residents. She invited me to a house in a beautiful part of the city, Kuzguncuk. Istanbul is overcrowded with buildings so when I arrived in the neighborhood I was surprised with the green woods and the silence there. While she does not live in that part of the city, she has friends who do. She offered me a coffee and we sat on a surprisingly warm and sunny day on December 27.

She is from Yakutia in Eastern Russia. She has her own language and culture. She was living in Moscow until the full-scale invasion of Ukraine began on February 22, 2024, and she did not want to be part of "this," so she used her connections to move to Istanbul. She is a fashion designer. She is struggling to find work as a freelancer due to Turkey's poor economy and is currently suffering from rising prices in Istanbul. In the last year and a half, she has been comparing the outrageous price changes in Istanbul and is increasingly realizing that she is not doing well financially. As a Yakuts, she faced objectification back in Moscow and so she feels that in this regard, it is relatively better for her in Istanbul. She is able to connect with the local culture better than her Russian friends.

Things that she enjoys in Istanbul are the climate, sea, culture, and people. She can meet with her friends from all around the globe, can find fabrics for her business, and can go to the south of Turkey for two months with accommodation she can use, just like higher-middle class citizens in Istanbul. She is planning to live part-time in Istanbul and part-time on the Mediterranean coast. She is very "grateful" for being there and is feeling good in her current situation. She talked about her Russian friends who are using Istanbul as a "thinking ground," thinking about what to do and where to go next with their lives. M, believes that people who come to Istanbul should be humble and grateful for being there. Rather than complain, they should learn something new here.

5. Results

A. Presentation of findings

All the participants have given enough information to understand why they are in Istanbul. They all experienced a severe risk for their lives or well-being in their country of origin, largely due to social stigma and discrimination. All three mentioned how safe it is to be a queer person in Istanbul that compared to where they are from. Yet, they still deem insufficiently safe to plan a life there. They all have their respective communities. G and J, with their Middle Eastern backgrounds, ended up both suggesting going to Istanbul is a great step for embracing their queer identity. They both mentioned how dangerous it is to exist as a queer person in the Middle East. M talked about how Moscow used to be a great place to live as a queer person and how Istanbul lacks the events for queer people.

B. Quotes and anecdotes

I would like to mention that the quotes are edited to clarify the language with consideration for the respondents' original meaning.

Ayberk: what is your background and your journey to Istanbul?

G: I was born in Syria, and then two years in my parents moved to Saudi because of finances. It was easier to earn money there, so people did it often. We stayed in Saudi for about 13 years. It's a very religious place, so it was a little hard to practice my freedom and self-discovery. But, when I hit the age of 15, in 2013, we were asked to leave the country. So, we were basically deported. Reasons were not given. We contacted the government. Nothing was provided. So, we needed to find somewhere else to go. Around that time, it was the conflict in Syria. We couldn't go back and Turkey was a very viable option. Around 2013, we came to

Turkey. I have been here for about ten years. About one year or half a year in Mersin. And then I came to Istanbul [with my family]. I have three other siblings. We all kind of continued education here. For me, I was in high school, so I finished 10th, 11th, and 12th grade here in a Syrian school and then went to university in an English program and graduated as a computer engineer.

J: So, I'm 23 years old now. I first came to live here when I was 17, right after I finished high school. For me, it was the Turkish dream, following the Turkish TV shows that I watched as a kid. Okay. And when I came here, at first it was a bit disappointing because it has nothing to do with that. And when I came here, it was like way before I came out. I lived with my brother; we didn't get along, so I was like, okay, I'm getting out of here. I went to live in Tunisia and I lived there for a year and a half. I studied physiotherapy, then French got a bit too difficult for me. Then I decided to come back here [Istanbul]. At first, I lived with my brother. We were on good terms. Then my father passed away and my brother went back to Jordan. I stayed here, I came out as bisexual, I think in 2020.

M: I'm 33 years old. I'm from Russia, but I'm from Yakutia. It's in the eastern part of Russia. So, I have my own language, my own culture, besides Russian. And I used to live in Moscow, half of my life. And now I moved to Istanbul, one year and nine months ago. After the war began, I decided that I didn't want to deal with this. I don't want to be part of this. So, I decided to move here because I had some friends. We work here and it was the best solution for me, and now I, I feel happy.

Ayberk: What challenges do you face in Istanbul?

G: Being Syrian, being an Arab, I always have to. I kind of mask it and pretend that I belong here so that I don't get treated with any racism… But aside from the casual racism I may face, which isn't like on a daily basis, to me at least there's some queer phobia that I sometimes see. Weird looks. Some people like making sounds when they see me walking by and see my piercings or how I dress if I'm ever wearing any makeup or whatever. But, in Istanbul, it's a lot better than anywhere I could be in the Middle East. So I'm happy about that.

J: Oh, how does society look at me as a human being… I'm ashamed. I felt like, I'm homophobic towards myself. But right now, I just really don't care. Because why? Being straight is normal, but being gay is not okay.

M: I don't know, I feel like inflation and work issues. Finding some good projects because I always used to be a freelancer. So, for me, finding projects is what I do or like, do orders and stuff. But I feel this difference in currencies after living in Moscow. And after one and a half years, I feel the prices got so high and then I compare prices from Turkish lira to USD and it's kind of the same. But it's like I, even I [as a] foreigner, feel this effect on myself.

Ayberk: What are your future plans?

G: Well, I have tried my best to integrate in Turkey, and I feel like I'm kind of a local. And people, especially Turkish people, do accept me as a local because we do the same things. We eat the same food, we go to the same concerts. It's just that I don't speak fluent Turkish. That's the one thing that parts us, separates us. But since life here isn't really perfect [economically or culturally and politically]. Yeah, with two underlines. I do have plans to leave to Germany. Yeah. I have participated in two Pride marches and they were both met with violence. So, it is one of my dreams to be able to participate in a peaceful one. And my family is already going there. They have their visa set. I have two siblings who are already there and are doctors. So, it is our future to move to Germany, I feel like.

J: Here's the thing, as long I'm not going to lie, living here is a privilege for me. Because if we're going to say that it's not safe, it's not. No, no no, no, it's nothing compared to where I'm from. Nothing compared. So, for me here, no, I have the privilege at least to be myself without being worried, like, oh, I might get killed. But for them [non-queer Arabs] they are, they have the privilege of things being easier for them, especially how people look at you. It changes everything how people look at you there. I really want to graduate. Get out of here as well. Go somewhere totally new. Not Turkey, not Jordan, not any Arab country.

M: Uh, I'm not sure. But at this point of my life, I feel happy. And, right now, I stayed two months in Göcek in the south of Turkey, and I'm planning to return there. So, I will be in between these two places. And I feel so grateful being here. And I know, like for most of my friends who also came, it's kind of like thinking spot. They think what I want from my life, etc., etc. but still I enjoy it. Maybe I will move somewhere else, but at right now I feel good here.

6. Discussion

The queer people I have met in Istanbul from different backgrounds have shown me some of the perks and cons of being a queer person in Istanbul. If they are from a Middle Eastern background, they believe that Istanbul is a great location to be a queer person, they constantly compare it to the life-threatening aspects in their own respective countries. Interviewing M for this part has been crucial in having a different opinion on the same issues. She believes that life in Istanbul as a queer person is not as “liberating” as the other two. She is the only one who misses her life before moving to Istanbul.

7. Conclusion

Qualitative research through interviews does not seek to support a preconceived understanding of the issue at hand. For this research, the interviews were meant to provide insights into the lived experiences of individuals with queer identities from very different backgrounds who ended up in Istanbul. Reaching out to the queer community in Istanbul is challenging; without personal connections, it would not be possible to contact and interview these individuals.

Participants G, M, and J have all been extremely helpful in providing insights into the life of queer people in Istanbul. Their experiences in a metropolis like Istanbul offer an opportunity to see the city through a different lens. Regardless of their origins, the results are clear - being a queer individual in a foreign land pushes members of the queer community to build a diaspora if they desire to do so. They all experience life in Istanbul differently. I had the opportunity to experience and witness their lives for a brief interview with all of them. I thank them for giving me the opportunity to experience their daily lives.

When the interviews ended, I found myself thinking about the G’s words when they were talking about how Russians and Westerners are treated differently. They all have been through unfortunate situations but hearing M’s story was more of an “expat” story even though she is not going to be able to return to Russia, whilst both J and G have to deal with a lot of issues in Istanbul. J and G both enjoy their partial freedom as queer people alongside with racism within the queer community. They are preparing for their next steps to live a better life and M is building a more comfortable life in Turkey.

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