

How to annihilate a nation?

Introduction

An essay for the New York Times written by the political analyst Tatiana Stanovaya in July 2022 ends with the following conclusion: "For the West to avoid a catastrophic clash, it needs to truly understand what it's really dealing with when it comes to Mr. Putin."¹⁾

A few days before the head of the British armed forces, Admiral Sir Tony Radakin, had given an interview to the BBC in which he assessed the impact the February invasion of Ukraine has had on the Russian military forces: "... and they (the Ukrainians) see a Russia that is struggling, a Russia that we assess has lost more than 30 per cent of its land combat effectiveness. What that actually means is 50,000 Russian soldiers that have either died or been injured in this conflict, nearly 1,700 Russian tanks destroyed, nearly 4,000 armoured fighting vehicles that belong to Russia destroyed."²⁾

Many other observers from the world's media comment in the same vain on military aspects of the invasion. They fail to understand that "the special operation" (as the Russians want it to be known) is about something much more profound with deep seated roots in the history of Eastern Europe, Ukraine and Russia in particular, and the way the people think of themselves and their identity.

One mr Vladislav Surkov until recently a well known quantity in Vladimir Putin's Kremlin. Dubbed the 'Grey Cardinal' and the Kremlin's main ideologist, he is commonly regarded as the mastermind of Putin's Ukraine policy which has plunged Moscow into open conflict with the West. In an interview published on 26. February, 2020 Surkov stated that "there is no Ukraine. There is Ukrainian-ness. That is, a specific disorder of the mind. An astonishing enthusiasm for ethnography, driven to the extreme." He went on to claim that Ukraine is "a muddle instead of a state; there is no nation. There is only a brochure, 'The Self-Styled Ukraine', but there is no Ukraine."³⁾

The notion that Ukraine is not a country, but a historical part of Russia, appears to be deeply ingrained in the minds of the Russian leadership. It is, however, also a widely held belief by the Russian population generally.

References:

¹⁾ Stanovaya, T: *Putin thinks he is winning*, New York Times, 18. July 2022.

²⁾ Report on BBC interview with the Admiral, Sunday morning the 17th of July 2022, by 'The Telegraph' foreign staff.

³⁾ Düben, B A, "*There is no Ukraine*": *Fact-Checking the Kremlin's version of Ukrainian history*, LSE International History, copied from Wikipedia, December 2021.

1. Russian-Ukrainian relations

In his famous article on the Russian-Ukrainian relations Putin stressed his – evidently sincerely held – belief that Russians and Ukrainians are one people – a single whole. And he finishes his article by stating that "I will say one thing – Russia has never been and will never be "anti-Ukraine". And what Ukraine will be – it is up to its citizens to decide."¹⁾

However, this seemingly amicable, uncontroversial statement does not rhyme with the "bewilderment" he had expressed previously. "He claimed that for reasons he could not understand, the Bolsheviks created the Soviet Ukrainian republic "in the 1920s" including the traditional territories of "New Russia," a tsarist-era name for southern and southeastern Ukraine dating from the 18th century."²⁾

This kind of attitude seems much more in tune with populist Russian ideas about the relationship which historically go back to tsarist Russia: The official ideology of the tsarist state considered the empire's Ukrainians merely a "Little Russian tribe" of the Russian people—they did not need their own language or culture, and would soon simply merge into the Russian ethnicity.

This perspective on Ukrainians also meant that the imperial government undertook no consistent effort to assimilate the Ukrainian peasantry, because for the tsarist leaders "Ukrainians" were in fact "Russian". Tsarist functionaries merely tried to prevent the ideas of modern nationalism from reaching the Ukrainian people who, they expected, would identify with the tsarist empire and its dominant ethnic group and struck a crushing blow against the miniscule, politically moderate, and nearly deracinated Ukrainian intelligentsia.³⁾

Both Russia and Ukraine became independent after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, but what was a new beginning for Ukraine was a loss of empire and great-power status for Russia. To accept Ukraine's nationhood is difficult for many Russians because it deprives them of their glorious past. The view is that "the Soviet Union was the reincarnation of the Russian empire, destined to take up its historic mantle as an anti-Western autocracy..."⁴⁾

The role of Ukraine in this anti-Western autocracy is set out by the philosopher Aleksandr Dugin in his book *'Foundations of Geopolitics, The Geopolitical Future of Russia'*:

- "Ukraine should be annexed by Russia because "Ukraine as a state has no geopolitical meaning, no particular cultural import or universal significance, no geographic uniqueness, no ethnic exclusiveness, its certain territorial ambitions represents an enormous danger for all of Eurasia and, without resolving the Ukrainian problem, it is in general senseless to speak about continental politics". Ukraine should not be allowed to remain independent, unless it is 'cordon sanitaire', which would be inadmissible."⁵⁾

Apparently Mr Dugin has expressed a crystal clear opinion of the Ukrainians in other less formal media: "We should clean up Ukraine from the idiots," he wrote on his Facebook. "The genocide of these cretins is due and inevitable... Ukrainians are

wonderful Slavonic people. And this is a race of bastards that emerged from the sewer manholes.”⁶⁾

He has been referred to as “Putin’s brain” and if indeed Mr Putin’s actions are inspired by the writings of Dugin there is little left to the imagination as to the destiny of Ukraine as a geographical territory and its population, a national, political, social entity. All the reports that have come out of Ukraine the last few weeks (the summer of 2022) seems to confirm that the Russian aim is no less than the total annihilation of anything and everything that have or have ever had even the slightest association with Ukraine and its historic past.

It will not be unreasonable to assume that the Russians will seek to establish a system of government known as “a managed democracy” (cf report of a meeting held on 18. October 2005 at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace on “The Essence of Putin’s Managed Democracy” with speaker Nikolay Petrov, of the Carnegie Moscow Center). Two of the main characteristics would be: 1) Control of the media and 2) Control of the electoral processes to ensure a pre-determined and desired outcome.

However, before such a system can be established the powers that be need to clear the subject nation of all opposition and potential support for the opposition. Other means can be employed, but it will most likely be through the use of the most brutal military force as summarised by Carlotta Gall: “His methods are brute force and terror: the bombing and besieging of cities, deliberate targeting of civilians, and the abduction and jailing of local leaders and journalists and their replacement by loyal quislings.”⁷⁾

It will be noted that Carlotta Gall is outlining a kind of hierarchy used as a framework for the systematic application of atrocities by the occupying power: The following description that is based on contemporary reports on the situation in Ukraine seeks to follow a similar synopsis.

References:

¹⁾ Putin, V, On the *Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians*, July 2021. Apparently widely published and distributed, but here cited from a Wikipedia version.

²⁾ Yekelchuk, Serhy, *The Ukrainian Crisis: In Russia’s Long Shadow*, ‘Origins’, April 2014.

³⁾ Ibid

⁴⁾ Neymeyer, Joy, *The discontent of Russia*, ‘aeon’, July 2022

⁵⁾ Dugin, Aleksandr, *Foundations of Geopolitics, The Geopolitical Future of Russia* published in Russian by Arktogeja, 1997. Here cited from Wikipedia.

⁶⁾ Riabchuk, Mykola, “Right” Ukrainians, *Aspen Review*, 25. March 2017. Here copied from Wiki Pedia

⁷⁾ Gall, C, *A Brutal Russian Playbook Reapplied in Ukraine*, *New York Times*, 30. March 2022.

Implementing the strategy – step by step

2. A large scale military attack by the Russian army in three phases aimed primarily to cut off supply lines to western Ukraine including Kyiv and secure Russian control of the northern coastline of the Black Sea which is synonymous with the southern Ukraine.

Reference:

Cooke, M, *Russia war plans exposed: 175,000 troops to strike EU's border in three phases*, Daily Express, 4th December, 2021.

3. Bombardment and encirclement of large cities. “In Ukraine’s capital, Kyiv, amid the deadly rumble of heavy Russian artillery, there is much that feels familiar. Not least a terrible feeling of dread.” “The besieging of cities, the deliberate targeting of civilians — they are the tactics Russia used before, in Grozny. I saw it first-hand.”¹⁾

Chechnya’s experience is worth recalling since it was the first time we saw Vladimir V. Putin develop his game plan to reassert Russian dominion wherever he wanted.”¹⁰⁾ His methods are brute force and terror as described above.

“A retired American general, Mark Hertling, notes that Russia now has seized its preferred war tactics. “The Russian goal is to kill, to create confusion, to inflict chaos, and open the way forward for their armoured vehicles and foot soldiers,” is his analysis.”³⁾

References:

¹⁾ Gall, Carlotta, *A Brutal Russian Playbook Reapplied in Ukraine*, 29. March 2022.

²⁾ Ibid

³⁾ Report by Denmark’s Radio, April 2022.

4. Destroying the physical infra structure, hospitals, universities, theatres etc. People in Western Europe and North America with a generally liberal democratic outlook will have difficulty accepting and finding any clear logic behind Russia’s behaviour towards Ukraine. However, actions soon after the 24th of February at the start of the conflict may have helped in this regard.

Reports reached Western media of the bombardment of a children’s hospital and maternity unit: “On 9 March 2022, the Russian Air Force bombed *Maternity Hospital No 3*, a hospital complex functioning both as a children’s hospital and maternity ward

in Mariupol, Ukraine, during the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, killing at least four people and injuring at least sixteen, and leading to at least one stillbirth.¹⁾

“Ukrainian president, the European Union head of Foreign Affairs, and British armed forces minister described the bombing as a war crime. On 10 March, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence claimed that bombing of the hospital was justified by the supposed presence of Ukrainian armed forces at Mariupol *Maternity Hospital No 1*, as stated by Russian UN representative Vasily Nebenzya earlier, on 7 March. Several media organizations dismissed the Russian claims as false.²⁾

What might be the intended target: the people just present, hiding or sheltering, or the actual physical facility?

On the 5th of May Sky News issued a lengthy report which stated: “..... attacks are part of a Russian campaign of "terror bombing" against Ukrainian hospitals which almost certainly violate international law. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has recorded 186 of these attacks since the invasion began.

“The attacks have included the bombing of at least four maternity hospitals, four children's hospitals, and have killed at least 73 workers and patients, according to data from research group Insecurity Insight and the WHO.

“Some tell-tale signs, including the munitions and the timing of the attacks, suggest the bombings are consistent with a deliberate tactic aimed at terrorising the Ukrainians into submission.³⁾

Less than a week later more news reports suggested that cultural and leisure facilities were being bombed by the Russians: “Ukrainian officials have accused Russian forces of further atrocities in the besieged city of Mariupol, including an airstrike on a theatre where hundreds of displaced people were believed to have been sheltering and a strike on a swimming pool where pregnant women and young children had gathered.⁴⁾

In this case children were using the facilities which were attacked despite being clearly marked: “(L)ocal authorities in Mariupol posted an image of the city’s theatre showing heavy damage Russian forces had “purposefully and cynically destroyed the Drama Theater in the heart of Mariupol”, it said. Moscow denies targeting civilians and Russia’s defence ministry said its forces had not struck the building, RIA news agency said. A satellite photograph from 14 March 2022 by Maxar Technologies showed the word “children” in large Russian script painted on the ground outside the red-roofed theatre building.

References:

¹⁾ Copied from Wikipedia.

³⁾ Ibid

³⁾ Devine K et al, *Ukraine war: Russia accused of targeting hospitals in 'terror bombing' campaign*, Sky News, 5th May 2022

⁴⁾ Tondo, L et al, *Mariupol: Russia accused of bombing theatre and swimming pool sheltering civilians*, The Guardian, 17th of March 2022.

5. Migrants, refugees and deportees. Since the invasion by Russia into Ukraine on the morning of 24th of February this year (2022) 10.3 million people have left Ukraine according to the international consultants 'Statista'¹⁾

Of these the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimate that 6.3 million have been refugee migrants fleeing the violence of war that has destroyed their residences and laid to waste large tracts of residential areas and also in order to escape persecution. This is close to a quarter of an original population of approximately 44 million and migration of such magnitude will have severe consequences for the demographic, social and economic structure and the governance of the country as described by Gilchrist and Grey.

The people who migrate 'voluntarily' will in the first instance be young or middle aged, middle class, independent people with some resources behind them with which to start a new life. You are reminded of the heavy traffic on roads leading out of the main cities in the early days of the crisis. The people who are left behind will be people with limited resources, young with young children and the elderly who rely on the authorities to bring them out of danger and thereafter attend to their social and medical needs.^{2) 3)}

As if this was not enough added to this maelstrom comes the suspicion that refugees are used as instruments of war, they are being 'weaponized'⁴⁾.

More than 6.3 million Ukrainians have fled the country since the invasion and the European Union has welcomed these refugees, allowing them to enter its 27 member countries without visas and live and work there for up to three years.

Ordinary Europeans have also opened their doors – and pockets – to host the refugees and help them find day care and other services.

“But there is still an uncomfortable reality: Ukrainian refugees are also Russian President Vladimir Putin’s political pawns, intended to politically destabilize the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Many Poles, for example, initially offered to help Ukrainians. But now, more than two months after the war began, there are signs that public compassion is fading.”⁵⁾

It may also be part of the plan to drive out critical and therefore unwanted elements of the population. Some of the most resourceful people fleeing Ukraine will be well educated, professional and highly skilled individuals harbouring valid criticisms against the regime and able to cause problems for them. The Russian regime will be only too happy to see such people leaving the country.

References:

¹)www.statista.com

²) Gilchrist, K, *A second wave of Russians is fleeing Putin's regime*, CNBC, 14. July 2022

³) Grey, Mark A, *The big exodus of Ukrainian refugees isn't an accident – it's part of Putin's plan to destabilize Europe*, 'The Conversation', 24. May 2022

⁴)**Wikipedia: ““Weapon of Mass Migration”** is a term used to describe a hostile government organizing, or threatening to organize, a sudden influx of refugees into another country with the intent of overwhelming its borders or causing political discomfort. It often exploits the targeted country's humanitarian obligations to take in refugees and hear their asylum claims. The responsible country (or sometimes a non-state actor) usually seeks to extract concessions from the targeted country and achieve some political, military, and/or economic objective.

The instrumental manipulation of population movements as political and military weapons of war, is the "refugee as weapon," has entered the world's arsenals.

Human migration is becoming a viable weapon in the arsenal of many state and non-state actors pursuing non-conventional means to increase regional influence and to achieve objectives.

⁵)Grey M A, *The big exodus of Ukrainian refugees isn't an accident – it's part of Putin's plan to destabilize Europe*, 'The Conversion', 24. May 2022.

6. Breaking social, cultural, religious and political cohesion – ethnic engineering or genocide?^{1*})

It is not Putin's first attempt to use mass migration to advance his political ambitions in Europe. This kind of tactic dates back to a Soviet-era practice of “ethnic engineering”, which means trying to exacerbate political tensions based on people's different religious, ethnic or linguistic backgrounds.

Keeping in line with this tradition and Russia's previous tactics in Chechnya and during the Syrian war, the Russian military is again targeting and attacking civilians in Ukraine – pushing millions to flee their homes and country.²)

“There are already signs of such methods in Ukraine: the arrest and disappearance of local officials, detentions and threats against local journalists and the reported mass evacuation of civilians to Russia.”³)

A rapport appear to suggest that the National Guard have concentrating on tracking down what they called ‘nationalists’ or “suspected members of Ukrainian nationalist groups”. 50 such people had been detained.⁴)

References:

¹)Craw, Victoria, *Teachers in Ukraine race to save a generation of children being brainwashed by Russian propaganda*, (i) newspaper, 27. July 2022.

²) Grey M A, *The big exodus of Ukrainian refugees isn't an accident – it's part of Putin's plan to destabilize Europe*, 'The Conversion', 24. May 2022.

³⁾ Gall, Carlotta, *A Brutal Russian Playbook Reapplied in Ukraine*, 29. March 2022

⁴⁾Johnson, Jamie, *Ukraine war: Russia detains 50 Ukrainian 'nationalists' in effort to crush underground resistance*, Daily Telegraph, 14. August 2022.

7. Teachers, education and children

Teachers are a group of professionals subjected to particular strong pressure from the occupying power. An interviewee told the *i* newspaper in a recent report: ““We know that some teachers have stayed. They had an opportunity to leave and decided to remain with the children to safeguard them to protect them from the Russian propaganda. But I think their ability to do so will be quite limited because what is happening in the occupied territories is just a complete rule of terror – you either agree, flee or die.”¹⁾)

Teachers in occupied areas face an unenviable choice: resist and risk punishment, try to flee, or work with the Russian authorities and face accusations of being collaborators.

What the occupying power is seeking to achieve: “Russia [and Ukraine] have both recently outlined their plans for the future of areas such as Mariupol, Kherson and Melitopol. Russia intends to annex and absorb them into the Russian state.”

Taking over the education system and focusing on the school system has the potential to be the most effective yet. It is a very good way of brainwashing children,” says psychologist Dr Alexandra Stein. “Especially if you’re going to be glorifying Russia and talking about the evils of Ukraine. You set up this polarisation – that’s a key part of the brainwashing process.”

“They’re destroying books, they’re destroying libraries, they’re burning our textbooks”, a former member of parliament told *i*. “They’re trying to destroy all traces of Ukrainian identity in this country as soon as possible.”²⁾

The re-fashioning of the Ukrainian education system and education practice (some would call it ‘reform’, others would say it is ‘abuse’) to suit the particular world view held by the occupying power seems cruel, callous and heavy handed at every political, cultural and social level. However, it pales in comparison with the way the occupying power seems to deal with **children** who have become orphaned or otherwise separated from their parents in the maelstrom of the war.

In June of 2024 and earlier reports were emerging that children are being sent from war-torn Ukraine and being forcibly deported to [Russia](#) where they are offered for adoption. These reports included children who were ‘taken from orphanages and subsequently offered for adoption in Russia,’ said the UN’s High Commissioner for Human Rights. The commissioner could not confirm the allegations, nor the number of children involved. But she told the council: ‘We are concerned about the alleged plans of the Russian authorities to allow the movement of children from Ukraine to families in the Russian Federation, which do not appear to include steps for family reunification or respect the best interest of the child.’³⁾

Several thousand young people are believed to have been moved to Russia since Moscow launched its full-scale invasion on February 24.

The UN began raising concern in March about the risk of forced adoption of Ukrainian children, especially around 91,000 who were living in institutions or boarding schools at the beginning of the war, many of them located in the country's embattled east.

The Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign affairs is accusing the Russians of being behind the kidnapping of more than 1,000 children allegedly from children's institutions in the areas they occupy. The practice of continuing kidnapping of children from Ukrainian territory and arranging of illegal adoption with Russian citizens continue, says the Ministry.

The accusation has been verified by the American think tank Institute for the Study of War. They report that the Russian authorities have confirmed the Ukrainian accusation at a local children's office where it was said that more than 1,000 children from Mariupol had been moved to Russian families in several Siberian cities.⁴⁾

From the point of view of the Russian families there would not seem to be anything on towards in this practice. From their perspective they are just helping children without parents.

From the point of view of the Russian authorities the practice has at least three advantages:

1. According to the laws of war-fare the occupying power has an obligation to make sure the civil population including children is well cared for.
2. The Russian authorities will seek to get orphanaged children to Russia so that they are not given to Ukrainians who may seek to bring them up as anti-russians and therefore a potential danger.
3. The deported children may in due course bring new strength to Russia with a declining population.⁵⁾

References:

¹⁾ Craw, Victoria, *Teachers in Ukraine race to save a generation of children being brainwashed by Russian propaganda* *Teachers in Ukraine race to save a generation of children being brainwashed by Russian propaganda*, (i) newspaper, 27. July 2022.

²⁾ Ibid

³⁾ Bachelet, Michelle, *UN probes claims Ukrainian children are being 'forcibly deported' by Putin's forces and then offered up for adoption in Russia*, MAILONLINE, 15. June 2022.

⁴⁾ Nielsen, Silas Bay, *Rusland anklages for at bortadoptere mindst 1.000 ukrainske børn til familier i Sibirien*, translated from report in Danmarks Radio, 25. August 2022

⁵⁾ Ibid

8. Individual members, civilians – citizens of the society.

Reading – and for my part writing – the previous pages we have dealt with the main structure of the strategic pyramid that step by step set the framework for how a victorious geopolitical power may subordinate progressively smaller, but more numerous sections of the conquered society and we have now reached the bottom (or if you like the top) of the pyramid, **individual members, civilians – citizens** of the society.

“Russia is conducting a vicious crackdown on ordinary Ukrainians by routinely abducting and torturing individuals in order to deter growing resistance and partisan attacks in occupied parts of the country, according to local and Western sources.”

“The Russian state news agency TASS ... confirmed the latest attacks, in which an education official survived a car bombing ... and another administrator overseeing “family and youth” work in Kherson was killed in another vehicle bombing ... ¹⁾

¹⁾Cahal, Milmo, *Putin accused of ‘Nazi-style’ campaign of abduction, torture and ransom demands in occupied Ukraine*, The (i) newspaper, 27. June 2022.

“However, another reason for this policy seems just as important: “The Ukrainian military’s Southern Operational Command claimed that Kremlin forces in Kherson and the nearby city of Mykolaiv have also begun abducting the relatives of Ukrainian soldiers and other military personnel as part of a strategy of harassment and intimidation.”²⁾

²⁾ Ibid.

A vivid description of how this policy works in praxis has recently been provided by ‘The Independent’:

“Both Ukrainian and Russian officials estimate that nearly 2 million Ukrainians have been moved to Russia since the start of the war. Russia claims this is part of an evacuation effort to save lives. Ukrainian officials speaking to *The Independent*, along with countries including the United States, have accused Moscow of forcibly deporting civilians.

“Russia has repeatedly denied committing any crimes in Ukraine, since President Putin launched his invasion in February. The Russian embassy in London did not respond to requests for comment about these particular allegations, or the testimonies gathered.

“But as part of a months-long investigation into the tens of thousands of Ukrainians who have gone missing since the war began, *The Independent* has found fresh evidence of probable violations of international law and of possible war crimes, including the widespread illegal transfer of civilians and the forcible disappearance of them into prisons in Russia, as well as hostage-taking.”³⁾

³⁾ Trew, Bel, *‘A country of missing people’: How Russia is vanishing thousands of Ukrainians*, The Independent, 4. September 2022.

“Ukrainians fleeing areas like the devastated Mariupol have unknowingly arrived in so-called ‘**filtration camps**’, the first reports of which emerged quickly after the invasion began, with the destruction of their home being only the beginning of their troubles.

Many of these camps are in the east of Ukraine, but are designed to filter the captured Ukrainians into Russia. Testimonies have emerged from refugees who have been put through these camps, of which there are at least 13 in operation as of early June, according to Human Rights Watch. Tanya Lokshina, their Europe and Central Asia associate director said: “Males, especially in places like Mariupol, are literally rounded up and sent for filtration.”⁴⁾

⁴⁾Higham, Alice, *Inside Russian filtration camps - where Ukrainians are 'rounded up' against their will*, Daily Express, 24. June 2022.

“Researchers at Yale University say they have uncovered 21 “filtration” sites in the Russian-controlled territory of Donetsk in eastern Ukraine. The researchers say these sites are used by Russian forces and their allies to process, register, interrogate and detain Ukrainians trying to leave Russian-occupied territory. Those detained can include civilians and prisoners of war.

“According to the report, there is evidence suggesting they were set up even before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine began and grew following the capture of Mariupol in April.”⁵⁾

⁵⁾Hauser, Jennifer, *At least 21 'filtration' sites identified in Russian-controlled territory, say Yale researchers*, CNN, 26. August 2022.

A number of Ukrainians who had been through “filtration” described facing threats and humiliation during the process. They said they were asked about their politics, future plans and views on the war. Some of these people said they knew of others who had been picked up by Russian troops or separatist soldiers and disappeared without a trace.⁶⁾

⁶⁾ Ibid

The Russian Embassy in Washington told the Yale researchers that the system “is about checkpoints for civilians leaving the active combat zone. In order to avoid sabotage operations by the Ukrainian nationalists, Russian soldiers carefully inspect vehicles heading to safe regions.” It adds that it will “detain bandits and fascists” adding that the Russian military does not create barriers for civilians but helps them by providing food and medicine.⁷⁾

⁷⁾ Ibid

However, of all the tools at the disposal of the oppressor the most cunning is probably the **forced conscription into the Russian army** of Ukrainian men who thereby face the prospect of having to kill fellow countrymen or being killed themselves. Many witnesses have come forward to testify how the conscription is carried out.

Many men could be drafted to fight for the Russian army. Russian soldiers are already going house to house writing down the names of male residents, locals say. They claim soldiers have told them to be ready for a call-up after the referendum⁹⁹Men aged 18-35 are reportedly not allowed to leave the occupied territories any more.⁸⁾

⁸⁾BBC News report, *Ukrainians told to 'be ready to fight for Russia'*, BBC 28. September 2022.

A report by the Danish Radio reported in these terms:

There have already been several messages about how men who have been visited by the local election administrators have been handed a summons.

It applies to the Kherson and Zaporizjzja regions from where several witnesses have told how Russian soldiers have forced Ukrainians both to vote in the referendum but also forced the men to report for duty or warned that it would happen.

According to The New York Times several Ukrainian officials in the regions have said that men aged between 18 and 35 have been ordered not to leave the area as they will be enrolled into the army.⁹⁾

⁹⁾ Christiansen, Rasmus, *Ukrainske mænd i tusindvis risikerer en indkaldelse til den russiske hær*, Danmarks Radio, 29. September 2022

References:

¹⁾Cahal, Milmo, *Putin accused of 'Nazi-style' campaign of abduction, torture and ransom demands in occupied Ukraine*, The (i) newspaper, 27. June 2022.

²⁾ Ibid

³⁾ Trew, Bel, *'A country of missing people': How Russia is vanishing thousands of Ukrainians*, The Independent, 4. September 2022.

⁴⁾ Higham, Alice, *Inside Russian filtration camps - where Ukrainians are 'rounded up' against their will*, Daily Express, 24. June 2022.

⁵⁾ Hauser, Jennifer, *At least 21 'filtration' sites identified in Russian-controlled territory, say Yale researchers*, CNN, 26. August 2022.

⁶⁾ Ibid

⁷⁾ Ibid

⁸⁾BBC News report, *Ukrainians told to 'be ready to fight for Russia'*, BBC 28. September 2022.

⁹⁾ Christiansen, Rasmus, *Ukrainske mænd i tusindvis risikerer en indkaldelse til den russiske hær*, Danmarks Radio, 29. September 2022

9. The End? – When? How?

In the run-up to the eventual invasion on the 24th of February 2022 of Ukraine by Russian military forces much of the political debate during the second half of the previous year had been taken up by speculations as to what the eventual outcome would be, especially what chances Ukraine had of surviving. Most commentators seemed to be sceptical of the country's chances and based their argument by referring to Russia's seemingly infinite superiority in terms of size and access to resources.

One commentator, quoting "a close Putin ally" reported: "Open military conflict between Russia and Ukraine cannot be a war, or, at least, a long-term war, because the difference in military potential is so big that there can be only an operation for forcing the peace," he said. It will take 48 hours maximum, and we cannot talk about different fronts."¹⁾

Others have a less professional approach: "The war won't last a week. It'll be over in a matter of days. The whole regime will wind up in London and go around telling everyone that they would have ridden their tanks into Moscow if the [west] hadn't given up on them."²⁾

After more than 5 months of fighting has put more factual information to the fore: "Almost everyone you speak to asserts that the official death announcements, currently standing at 200 soldiers killed daily, are understated. Reporting from the ground now emphasises the losses Ukraine is suffering, as outgunned troops struggle to hold their positions under constant shelling."³⁾

"Russia "fires approximately 20,000 152-mm artillery shells per day ⁵⁵Ukraine's 6,000", drawing not only from new production but from Soviet stocks, of which "by some estimates, several years' worth still remains.... the supply of replacement materiel from Western stocks has enabled the Ukrainians to survive, but is inadequate to procure a strategic victory."⁴⁾

General Valerii Fedorovych Zaluzhnyi was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Armed forces of Ukraine on the 27. July 2021 and is called one of the most open-minded generals, who understands the problems of soldiers and junior officers. As a representative of Ukrainian senior officers and a participant in the hostilities in the Donbass, who did not serve in the USSR, he has a positive attitude to the renewal of personnel by young people and the departure from Soviet practices. One of his first steps in office was to allow the military at the front to open fire in response to the occupiers without the consent of the top leadership and eliminate the need for the military to fill out unnecessary documents.⁵⁾

He was part of the Ukrainian brass who spent years transforming the country's military from a clunky Soviet model into a modern fighting force. Hardened by years of battling Russia on the eastern front, he was among a new generation of Ukrainian leaders who learned to be flexible and delegate decisions to commanders on the ground. ... His leadership enabled the Ukrainian armed forces to adapt quickly with battlefield initiative against the Russians.⁶⁾

It may also be worth noting that behind the men on each side there were very different and diverse forces leading them to be involved on the battlefield. One former Russian soldier describes his introduction to the battles:

“Armed with nothing but a rusty machine gun and an ill-fitting uniform, Filatiev claims he had no idea he was being sent to invade Ukraine until he was awoken by the sound of gunfire in the back of an army truck crossing the border.”⁷⁾

On one side is an army – Ukraine’s – that considers itself to be fighting for the cause of national liberation, the very existence of their nation. Set against them are the Russian invaders with poor morale, poor camaraderie, a lack of confidence in their command from the beginning. And most soldiers had not told a war was starting and many things they were told about Ukrainians were wrong.⁸⁾

“Ukraine has recaptured its first village in Luhansk, a region that Russian forces took five months to bomb into submission and conquer...”⁹⁾

“Ukraine said its troops have marched farther east into territory recently abandoned by Russia, paving the way for a potential assault on Moscow's occupation forces in the Donbas region as Kyiv seeks more Western arms.”¹⁰⁾

“Ukraine is massing a million strong fighting force equipped with western weapons to recover its southern territory from Russia, the nation’s defence minister has revealed ...”¹¹⁾

Two weeks later a Ukrainian official and aide to the ousted head of the Kherson region, Sergey Khlan, declared confidently Ukrainian forces backed up by sophisticated Western weapons, including long-range Himars, have changed the conflict and were defeating Russia’s army around the region.¹²⁾

By the following month, August 2022, an offensive appears to be prepared: “Ukrainian forces have been launching limited counteroffensives around Kherson for months now, but the recent strikes, which were made possible by Ukraine’s new U.S.-supplied High-Mobility Advanced Rocket Systems (HIMARS), appear to be the opening phase of an all-out Ukrainian offensive to retake the city.”¹³⁾

In “Kyiv’s biggest gains since the war began in February, a lightning counteroffensive in the country’s northeast in early September stunned Russian troops, who fled in disarray and ceded vast swaths of occupied territory. Combined with a second operation in the south, Ukrainian forces say they wrested back more than 6,000 sq km from Russian control in less than two weeks, liberating dozens of towns and cities and cutting off enemy supply lines.”¹⁴⁾

The dramatic rout rattled Moscow, forcing Kremlin propagandists to admit the setback and upping the military and political pressures on Russian President Vladimir Putin. On Sept. 21 he responded by announcing the first mass conscription since World War II, a partial mobilization of up to 300,000 citizens.¹⁵⁾

However, despite reorganisation and delivery of improved weaponry from the West progress is not necessarily easy: “What had been a lightning push by Ukraine to

drive Moscow's forces from the eastern Kharkiv region slowed to a brutal slog Saturday (24th of September 2022), stalled by heavy rain and Russian resistance.¹⁶⁾

"Russia launched a series of fresh attacks throughout Ukraine on Monday (19th of September) as Moscow persisted with retaliating for Kyiv's counteroffensive this month, which has taken away thousands of square miles from Russian forces and forced them to retreat.¹⁷⁾

"Officials said that more than a dozen people were killed on Monday in new shelling attacks in ... Donetsk.¹⁸⁾

"The Russian strikes came after Kremlin President Vladimir Putin warned of retaliation for Ukraine's recent and surprising military victories in the south and northeast."¹⁹⁾

"Ukraine's progress in the southern regions of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia has been far more limited than its successes in the east. ... Although the advancement of Ukrainian forces in the south is very slow, their artillery units remain busy. (The) commander explains that the Russians target his infantry and they respond. ... But Ukraine's advancement in the south is moving slowly. All talk about counter-offensive here helps to deceive Russians, laughs the deputy commander. "But we have some success here as well. We continue liberating villages with small steps - every victory is covered with blood".²⁰⁾

Meanwhile, as the Russians were celebrating the annexation of the four Eastern regions of Ukraine known as Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia and indeed the Russian president preparing to formally sign the relevant legal documents, reports were appearing of thousands of Russian soldiers – more especially 5,000 - 'trapped' in the city of Lyman.²¹⁾

A spokesperson for the Ukrainian forces said: "This is a psychologically important moment," he said, adding that Ukrainian troops are beginning to dictate their will and turn the tide of hostilities, and were not just on the defensive."²²⁾

The government in Kyiv at first urged Russian troops to lay down their arms and surrender as long-range Ukrainian weapons made it virtually impossible to reinforce or escape the town. This was met with refusal by the Russian command, but apparently later allowed: "Russia has said it has withdrawn its troops from Lyman after Ukrainian soldiers surrounded the city. ... Ukrainian forces encircled the strategic city of Lyman on Saturday in a counteroffensive that has humiliated the Kremlin."²³⁾

From the above extracts of reports from Ukraine and other material, not least national media, it should by now be clear to the reader that the month of September overall has been a period of spectacular success for the Ukrainian defence forces.

However, bearing in mind the considerable difference in size between the two sides, one does wonder if in the long run the Ukraine will be able to hold on to their gains.

By the end of September/early October there are reports that Russia may be planning a renewed attack on Ukraine from Belarussian territory.²⁴⁾

And at the same time other reports suggest that the Russians are preparing to use nuclear armoury in the fighting if only tactically.²⁵⁾

You might classify the world's national and political leaders into three groups: Democrats, dictators and those in between.

Democrats will assume the information they receive to be correct and respond in what they consider the most optimal manner. If they are successful and their country still exists they may be re-elected in the first election after the war; if they fail they may embark on a lecture journey and somebody else will succeed them.

A true dictator with full control of all his informants will get rid of all his opponents and anybody criticising him/her.

The problem is with the leaders who are neither democrats nor dictators: because they are repressive, they often meet with bad ends, but because they are not repressive enough, they have to think about public opinion and whether it is turning against them. Such leaders may be tempted to "gamble for resurrection," to continue pursue the war option, often at greater and greater intensity, because anything short of victory could mean their own exile or death.²⁶⁾

I am reminded of a characterisation by a visitor to the inner sanctums of Russian Government: "As for how Putin sees himself, he did bring up several times his admiration for Peter the Great, so much so I was convinced he sees himself as his incarnation."²⁷⁾

Writing completed on Saturday the 8th of October 2022, the day the bridge linking Crimea and the Russian mainland was attacked.

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