

## **POLITICAL, MILITARY, AND LEGAL ASPECTS OF THE MASS VIOLENCE COMMITTED BY RUSSIA IN UKRAINE**

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*In this paper, we examine the political and legal dimensions of Russia's aggression toward Ukraine and the potential consequences this military action may have for the international system. First, we analyze the political aspects of the widespread violence, drawing on the literature related to political violence, conflict, and democracy. Second, we investigate the factors contributing to Ukraine's resilience and explore the conditions under which Ukraine can defeat Russia. Third, we assess the legal and military dimensions of the war, analyzing its various phases and providing legal evaluations of the war crimes committed against Ukraine. Finally, we discuss the implications of this conflict for the international system. To address these complex issues, we used qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews with military experts, an analysis of leadership speeches, and a review of secondary sources.*

**Key Words:** *Mass Violence, War Crimes, Genocide, Ukraine, Russia.*

### **Introduction**

On February 24, 2022, Russia launched an attack on Ukraine and infringed its sovereignty and territorial integrity. This military aggression resulted in mass violence and war crimes. Russia's war against Ukraine has dramatically changed the international system and its order. For the first time since the World War II, a state attacked its sovereign nation and made claims that Ukraine has no right to exist, which is a genocidal intention. Prior to this war, Russia attacked Georgia in 2008 and unilaterally breached Georgia's sovereignty by recognizing its separatist regions, with the intention of further incorporating these territories into Russia. This five-day war was preceded and accompanied by massive passprotization, a well-practiced tool used by Russia to lay the ground for military invasion. Furthermore, Russia invaded the Crimean Peninsula in February 2014, following the Euro Maidan Revolution, which resulted in the regime change of President Viktor Yanukovich, who was openly pro-Russian. In this paper, we examine the political and legal aspects of Russia's aggression towards Ukraine and the consequences this military action may have for the international system.

### **Political Aspects: The Roots of Mass Violence**

The political science literature suggests that since World War II, interstate conflicts have dropped (Cederman and Pengl, 2019). Similar patterns characterized ethnic civil wars. Scholars explain these decline trajectories by forming inclusive political institutions and consolidating democracies by promoting Wilsonian principles and placing democratization as a central component of the Western post-cold war foreign policy (Cederman, Hug, and Wenger, 2008; Gurr, 2000). Nonetheless, Russia's imperialistic aspirations necessitate a review of the potential causes of interstate conflicts to explain its raging war against Ukraine and comprehend Ukraine's political and military resilience.

As an explanation for interstate wars, conflict scholars propose the concept of "enduring rivalry." This concept builds on three aspects of "special consistency, duration, and militarized competitiveness" (Diehl and Goertz, 2000, 19-24). Spatial consistency primarily focuses on the dyadic nature of conflict but also involves political and military competition among states based on alliance membership. Empirical examples are the Cold War and post-Cold War rivalries between NATO, the Soviet Union, and its successor Russia. Such a constellation of states engenders the condition known as a "security complex," in which member states form collective defense capabilities and perceive a member state's security concern as a shared obligation (Diehl and Goertz, 2000, 20; Buzan, 1983). The second component relates to the war's duration and entails a sequence of conflictual episodes that developed over time. For instance, Russia's rivalry with Georgia, Ukraine, and the collective West lasted nearly thirty-two years and varied in intensity. The third and final component of "enduring rivalry" suggests that states prefer to wage wars rather than use foreign policy soft power instruments to maintain political influence (Diehl and Goertz, 2000). While "enduring rivalry" can explain Russia's war-proneness, it is necessary to determine the source of rivalry and confrontation, which necessitates an examination of internal factors in Russia.

On 12, 2007, at the 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy, Vladimir Putin challenged the unipolar world order, which, in his view, deprived Russia of the privilege to pursue an independent foreign policy. In international politics, unilateral actions authorized by the EU and NATO were a significant source of discontent. Putin identified the United Nations Charter as the only viable source for approving military actions, given that Russia had no veto power in these international organizations.<sup>1</sup> By this argument, he was referring to the NATO air strikes launched in 1999 in Yugoslavia in response to the acts of ethnic cleansing committed against the Kosovar Albanians. Putin served as prime minister from 1999 to 2000, and he won 52.9% of the vote in the 2000 presidential election. Putin's

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<sup>1</sup> Putin's Prepared Remarks at 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy, Munich Conference on Security Policy Monday, 12, 2007.

opponents contested the presidential results because a substantial number of votes in the republic of Dagestan were incorrectly assigned to Putin by the Central Election Commission (Fish, 2005). In 1999 and 2000, his first years in power were marked by a brutal war in the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. As a result, Putin centralized control over federal units. Conflict scholars explain such episodes of civil insurgency in terms of democratization, which allows for expanding mass participation without democratic political institutions. Under these conditions, vertical accountability mechanisms are weakened, and political elites are more likely to employ nationalist appeals to ensure the survival of their regime (Snyder and Mansfield, 2002, 1995).

Four political parties were elected to the Russian Duma in the 2007 election: United Russia, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, and Just Russia. United Russia, supported by the Kremlin, dominated the party system. The Communist Party was viewed as a political rival, while the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia and Just Russia were viewed as satellites. Putin's party-based authoritarian power was consolidated by changes to regional and federal electoral laws, such as annulling governors' elections, increasing the electoral threshold by 7 percent, and switching to a proportional system (Gel'Man, 2008). Putin nationalized primary economic resources by persecuting uncooperative oligarchs such as Berezovsky and Khodorkovsky and putting the state-owned corporation Gazprom in a favorable position. Putin's political opponents, such as Alexey Navalny and Boris Nemtsov, were murdered. In pursuit of authoritarian policies, Putin reinstated control over the Russian media and utilized it to justify policy failures and construct propaganda networks domestically and internationally to achieve foreign policy objectives.

This political avarice and resentment, deeply rooted in Russia's nationalist-revisionist policies, are primary motivators of this war against Ukraine and the collective West. These nationalist revisionist policies arose from "state-to-nation incongruence" within federalist Russia and prompted the country's leadership to employ violence to alter the status quo (Miller, 2006). To achieve its strategic goals, Russia employed a variety of instruments, such as territorial conflicts and captures, cyberattacks, economic and energy cuts, sabotage, and disinformation campaigns, to discredit and delegitimize target political actors and institutions and undermine democratic processes (Bugajski, 2022, 2000; Ambrosio, 2009).

### **Ukrainian Resistance: The Potential to Defeat Russia**

While the theoretical and empirical overviews shed light on the causes of this war, less is known about the sources of Ukrainian resistance to this brutal invasion and the evolving military dynamics during the offensives of 2014 and 2022. We chose to approach this part of our research inductively and by tracing the theory-development process (Beach and Pedersen, 2016, 2013). We collected data by interviewing six top Georgian military and intelligence officials educated in the West and Ukraine. Additionally, we

examined secondary sources, such as the speeches of political and military leaders of conflicting states. Through this qualitative data analysis, we intend to explain military aspects of this war.

Sources of Ukrainian Resistance in 2014 and 2022 varied. During the invasion of Crimea in 2014, Ukraine had different political and military realities. To explain this distinction, a brief overview of political developments since the presidency of Kuchma is required. Together with Yulia Tymoshenko and Petro Poroshenko, the political party – Our Ukraine and its leader Viktor Yushchenko were the leading political forces of the Orange Revolution. This political cohesion was supported by a well-organized civil society and mobilized citizens who demanded improving their economic and social conditions (Bunce and Wolchik, 2011). It is essential to recognize the international democratization efforts that made the democratic transition in Ukraine possible. In the post-revolutionary period, political parties served as bridges between the political and economic elites. Specifically, Russia-linked oligarchic networks shaped the political processes and supported the Party of Regions, and increased the likelihood that Viktor Yanukovich would win the presidency.

Kudelia and Kuzio conclude that hierarchical and personalized governance systems within political parties facilitated the formation of clientelist networks. Patronage, protection, and political and financial gains were the main determinants of political behaviors. The most durable political parties were those that, in addition to personalization, were able to create a network of elite groups that revolved around the hegemonic leader and were rewarded for doing so. This was true of Yanukovich and his Party of Regions (Kudelia and Kuzio, 2015). The pro-Russian oligarchs and their political proxies opposed the Europeanization of Ukraine. President Yanukovich rejected the EU Association Agreement to 'gatekeep' democratic tendencies (Tolstrup, 2013). The Ukrainian population and pro-Western politicians demonstrated in response to this democratic regression. Yanukovich's use of violence against "Euromaidan" protesters in 2013 led to his resignation. Amid this political turmoil, Russia initiated the annexation of Crimea in February 2014 in order to seize the port of Sevastopol and strengthen its military positions in the Black Sea, and punish Ukraine, like Georgia, for its pro-Western foreign policy orientation. Politically and militarily, Ukraine was not prepared for this military aggression. Due to the cooperation of local political and military forces in Crimea, the Russian military could advance with fewer costs and casualties. Petro Poroshenko won the presidency in a snap election, and his bloc won the majority of legislative seats in the 2014 parliamentary elections.

Crimea was a strategic point in the Black Sea for Russia. Russia viewed the NATO littoral states of Turkey, Romania, and Bulgaria as its competitors in this region. As a consequence, Georgia and Ukraine gained significance. Invading Georgia and thwarting its NATO ambitions in 2008 was a rehearsal. Georgia possessed no large-scale military capabilities comparable to those of Crimea in Ukraine. Russia was able to control the coastlines of the Black

Sea, collect military intelligence, and gain positional superiority in the event of a military offensive thanks to Crimea's extensive coastal perimeter. In 2014, Russia counted on Ukraine's moral and military unreadiness, and it expanded its presence in Donetsk and Luhansk in eastern Ukraine. Russia seized these Ukrainian territories without severe fights. Ukrainian military vessels and crews stationed in Crimea surrendered without resistance to Russia, shocking Ukrainian regiments deployed beyond Crimea. These developments convinced the military and political leadership of the need for radical changes.<sup>2</sup>

The 2019 presidential election resulted in a change in political leadership. President Volodymyr Zelensky won the presidency by an overwhelming margin. He was a Jewish, Russian-speaking president intent on ending the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. At the same time, the collective West decided to increase its military support and bolster Ukraine's fighting spirit. President Zelensky delivered a speech just prior to the 2022 Russian invasion. To counter Putin's propaganda narrative and genocidal language about "denazification," he called for peace and addressed the Russian people, emphasizing the significance of Russian culture and the Ukrainian contribution to World War II. Presidents Zelensky's attempts to reach the Russian President were unsuccessful. In addition, he reminded Russia of the assurances and guarantees made under the Budapest Memorandum to respect the territorial integrity of Ukraine, and he warned all parties involved of severe consequences.<sup>3</sup> In response to the Russian invasion, President Zelensky's resolute resolve and decision to request more Western military aid instead of the fleeing country, such as Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, was a defining moment in defense of democracy and European security. Striking is the most recent operation Spider's Web involving 117 drones and damaging dozens of Russian strategic bombers. This operation showed military and intelligence precision and substantially reduced Russia's military capabilities.<sup>4</sup> Despite the initial skepticism of the new U.S. administration, Ukraine has demonstrated that it is fighting not only for its own freedom but also for the freedom of the democratic world. This resilience has led to the renewal of U.S. military aid and the mobilization of military efforts among EU member states. The political will of the Ukrainian people, the country's military readiness, and the steadfast support of the West were the three most important determinants of Ukrainian resilience.

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<sup>2</sup> Analysis of the interview with Zviad Chkhaidze, Head of Georgian Military Intelligence Department from 2000 to 2005 at the Ministry of Defense of Georgia. Interview by author, Tbilisi, December 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Office of the President of Ukraine, Президент України – про посилення обороноздатності держави available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T8Gazh3lz8Y&t=5s>

<sup>4</sup> Spiderweb: Ukraine's undercover operations in Russia, 06.07.2025; available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/spiderweb-ukraines-undercover-operations-in-russia/a-72824703>

### **Legal Aspects: Breach of Sovereignty and War Crimes**

Laws should be upheld during the wartime. Ukraine defended its sovereignty and citizens in accordance with international law, and targeting only critical objectives. The same cannot be said for Russia that has violated Ukraine's sovereignty and committed war crimes. Russia's intention to commit war crimes that could be equal to genocide can be explained by erosion of macro, micro and meso level constraining factors. At the individual level, some Russian citizens may consider inhumane and immoral to commit war crimes. Nevertheless, at the macro level, when the state evolves into a consolidated authoritarian regime,<sup>5</sup> the mechanisms for holding rulers accountable are weakened. Moreover, the state controls meso-level groups such as churches and civil society organizations, downplaying the importance of mixed families. This situation weakens intergroup cooperation and allows the unrestrained and unchecked state to commit acts of genocide (Straus, 2012). Genocides are committed by states, as they require consistency, economic support and a mentality devoid from the fear of reputational damage, which can be extremely costly. As Article II of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crimes of Genocide – Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court defines:

“In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”<sup>6</sup>

Russian leadership has openly expressed its intent to destroy Ukraine as a nation.<sup>7</sup> By targeting civilians, their brutal war has inflicted serious physical and psychological injuries on Ukrainian citizens. Notably, there has been a forceful transfer of Ukrainian children to Russia, resulting in the separation of families. One of the emblematic examples of creating an enemy icon to legitimize political violence and mass killing in Ukraine among Russian citizens is Timofey Sergeyev's, “What Russia Should Do with Ukraine”.<sup>8</sup> This dehumanizing narrative exacerbates “confrontational fears”

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<sup>5</sup> Russia country report, 2025 available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/russia/freedom-world/2025>

<sup>6</sup> Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, available at: [https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.1\\_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.1_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Institute for the Study of War: Russia's Medvedev declares Ukraine government ‘must be destroyed, must not remain in the world’ available at: <https://bcfausa.org/institute-for-the-study-of-war-russias-medvedev-declares-ukraine-government-must-be-destroyed-must-not-remain-in-the-world/>

<sup>8</sup> “Что Россия должна сделать с Украиной”, RIA Novosti, April 3, 2022.

against authorities among Russian citizens and generates support to such atrocities (Valentino, 2014). The International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Putin for committing war crimes.<sup>9</sup> The Council of Europe and Ukraine agreed to establish the Special Tribunal to prosecute the crimes of aggression against Ukraine committed by political and military leaders.<sup>10</sup>

Russia's primary military objective in Ukraine was to control the west bank of the Dnepr River and usurp the Azov Sea and the Black Sea territories. The acquisition of Zmiyni Island as a point of intelligence collection was crucial to Russia's plan to maintain control over the Sea. This Island could have been used as a location for the acquisition of specific arms. Russia initiated hostilities with the intention of rapidly and with minimal internal resistance to capture Ukraine. However, Putin's channels of communication and decision-making process proved to be flawed. General Leonid Ivashov's critical appeal to Putin, for instance, exemplified the existence of internal controversies.<sup>11</sup> Previously, General Valentin Korabelnikov, who oversaw the Main Intelligence Directorate, also known as GRU, opposed Putin. The former Russian Defense Minister, Sergei Shoigu, was not supported by generals within the Russian army. These prerequisites undermined Russia's military consistency. He was subsequently replaced by Andrey Belousov.

Ukraine's military dynamics can be divided into four distinct phases. Russia's blitzkrieg to occupy Kyiv and overthrow Zelensky's democratic government initially failed. At the forefront of the decisive battles, Ukrainian troops successfully inflicted severe damage on the Russian rapid response troops. This decentralization and division within the Russian forces made it easier for them to engage in aggressive behavior against civilian communities, ultimately leading to war crimes and crimes against humanity. Bucha and Irpin were the locations of these atrocities. The second phase of the fighting occurred in the directions of Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Luhansk. Kharkiv remained under Ukrainian control despite Russia's limited advancements. Notable is the fact that Kharkiv is a predominantly Russian-speaking city, and the citizens' dismissive responses to the Russian invasion shook the confidence of Russian troops. To control the central part of the Azov Sea, Russian troops simultaneously attacked and captured Mariupol, Berdyansk (in Zaporizhzhya), and Henichesk. The third phase consisted of conducting military offensives against Kherson to buy time and construct protective fences around Crimea. After entering Kherson, Russia realized

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<sup>9</sup> Situation in Ukraine: ICC judges issue arrest warrants against Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin and Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova, 17 March 2023; available at: <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-ukraine-icc-judges-issue-arrest-warrants-against-vladimir-vladimirovich-putin-and>

<sup>10</sup> Frequently Asked Questions about the Special Tribunal, available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/frequently-asked-questions>

<sup>11</sup> Retired Russian Generals Criticize Putin Over Ukraine, Renew Call for His Resignation, <https://www.justsecurity.org/80149/retired-russian-generals-criticize-putin-over-ukraine-renew-call-for-his-resignation/>

that further advancement was impossible. During the current phase, Russia shifted from a strategy of destruction to one of war fatigue to force the Ukrainian leadership and people to begin negotiations. However, Russian intelligence miscalculated the gravitational center between the Ukrainian people's desire to resist and the degree to which the West would provide Ukraine with military and political support. The relevant divisions of the Russian Armed Forces initially planned this war using misleading intelligence information. This absolute and comprehensive failure of the Russian intelligence community was caused by the fact that Putin, as an authoritarian leader, created an environment where information confirming his beliefs could be processed.<sup>12</sup>

Initially, Ukraine's objective was survival, whereas the current objective of the Ukrainian military is victory. Due to the expansion of Western military aid, the Ukrainian Armed Forces hold the strategic initiative, while the Russians hold the tactical advantage. In other words, Ukraine chooses the attack targets, method, and timing. Ukraine's military dynamic was determined by the cohesion of its people, army, and government. Remarkably, Ukraine learned from the 2014 invasion of Crimea and trained itself by participating in annual NATO exercises. The Ukrainian Armed Forces modernized, equipped, and organized themselves with the assistance of their strategic partners. It also utilized the concept of Territorial Reserve and Territorial Defence Forces efficiently. By attacking Ukraine in 2014, Putin altered the attitudes of young Ukrainian conscripts towards Russia, who began to view it as an enemy and provided a moral foundation for them to develop a sense of national identity. The excellent and uncontested leadership of Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, General Valery Zaluzhny, was complemented by the Ukrainians' bottom-up combat spirit.

Russia remained an imperial power, and its leadership was motivated by this ambition to pursue expansionist policies. A massive mobilization of Belarusian and Russian troops near the Ukrainian border indicated that Putin was planning a war against Ukraine. An incident between the British frigate HMS Defender and a Russian warship during maneuvers between Odesa and Georgia in the Black Sea is noteworthy.<sup>13</sup> The primary causes of Russian miscalculations and subsequent failures are several factors. Under the guise of ideological principles, corrupt politicians, militaries, and intelligence officers process information and make decisions based on opportunistic considerations. In Ukraine, Russian ties were limited to local political and national economic elites.

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<sup>12</sup> Analysis of the interview with Major General Vakhtang Kapanadze, Chief of General Staff of the Georgian Armed Forces, from 2013 to 2016. Interview by author, Tbilisi, December 2022.

<sup>13</sup> "Royal Navy ship off Crimea sparks diplomatic row between Russia and UK" <https://amp.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/23/russian-ship-fired-warning-shots-at-royal-navy-destroyer-hms-defender-moscow-says>



In contrast to the situation in Crimea, the financial rewards or promises of political privileges following Zelensky's planned overthrow did not strengthen their ties due to the high levels of corruption within the respective networks in Russia and Ukraine. In addition to this circumstance, the division and unhealthy rivalry between the Federal Security Service and the Military Intelligence of Russia contributed to the failure. The initial years of the fall of the Soviet Union were difficult for the Russian intelligence community. Nonetheless, Military Intelligence maintained its advantageous position due to its disproportionate influence over financial resources and the arms trade. Putin has attempted to install his cronies within Military Intelligence since 2002, and this struggle lasted until General Valentin Korabelnikov's resignation in 2011. Putin successfully lobbied for Alexander Shliakhturov's promotion to head of Russian Military Intelligence. All central special units of the Russian Armed Forces, including the Russian 31st Guards Air Assault Brigade, were subordinate to Shliakhturov. Thus, it became challenging for Putin to exert control over his associate. Putin initiated institutional reforms to disperse its powers, disbanded the 12th Unit of the GRU, established during World War II, and was responsible for intelligence and special missions (e.g., the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan). Putin dismantled the 12th Unit and created a cyber unit on its base because he could not install his subordinates there.

In addition, Defense Minister Shoigu appointed his trusted aide Igor Sergun to lead the GRU, which actively engaged Russia in the Syrian War. Sergun passed away in 2016 under mysterious circumstances. Igor Korobov, his successor, also passed away in 2018. The infamous general Igor Kostyukov was appointed director of Military Intelligence, which interfered in the 2016 US presidential election. The GRU performed two primary operations under the codenames Fancy Bear and Project Lakhta. Fancy Bear targeted the servers of the Democratic National Committee, in contrast, Project Lakhta, run by the Internet Research Agency (IRA), conducted influence operations to alter the attitudes and perceptions of specific communities in American society (Shaffer, 2019). Putin considered his military reforms to be complete after the appointment of Kostyukov and the erosion of the institutional memory and prestige of Russian Military Intelligence. Putin's attempts to demoralize and abuse the Russian military for political gain and regime survival had devastating battlefield effects. Locals in Kyiv could decipher coded signs intended to guide Russian special task forces. This failure suggested that the military was unprepared or that the information leak occurred due to internal conflicts within the Russian military elite.

Putin's obsessive temptation and paranoia of internal rivalry contributed to the unpreparedness of manpower, failure of the military command, and logistics in the Russian Army. Russia underestimated the abilities and capabilities of a Ukrainian soldier who outperformed a Russian soldier in terms of motivation, bravery, equipment, and training. One Ukrainian soldier was mathematically equivalent to three Russian soldiers.

Russia also employed Buryats and Kadyrov's forces from the Republic of Chechnya at the forefront of the conflict. This decision was intended to prevent uprisings in Russia's major cities amid the nationwide mobilization, which continued unofficially and sparked waves of migration in neighboring states, including Georgia. Putin's initial language regarding the special operation was altered by the announcement of massive mobilization, requiring him to use the term world war in public speeches. Due to a lack of technical equipment, the Russian military could not fight and operate armored vehicles during the night.

Regarding the military command, the Eastern Military Regiment conducted northern offensives. The West Regiment of Russia attacked from the east. Instead of the Central Regiment, the second echelon in the east was the West Regiment. The Russian command failed to establish the front successfully. Without a central command, the commanders of these regiments acted per their tasks. Russian military forces attempted to replicate the American military command structure. Thus, battalion tactical groups were established per direction and dispersed in a decentralized manner. Russian divisions were transformed into battalion task forces. Instead of a joint department, the Defence Minister and Head of Defence Forces had multiple divisions, making it difficult to transmit orders effectively. In this complex chain of command, tactical battalion commanders were unprepared to make independent decisions.

As a result, the commission of war crimes by Russian military forces became the norm. Russia is a land-based nation whose logistics rely on railroad procurements. The population and military of Ukraine disrupted these railroad connections. Thus, tanks had to move, necessitating more fuel than anticipated. The corruption wreaked havoc on Russian logistics. For example, helmets and bulletproof vest body armors have an expiration date, after which they cannot stop bullets. The logistical points were located in remote regions, and the active resistance of the Ukrainian populace and military rendered procurement ineffective.<sup>14</sup> The Russians did not anticipate the collective West to provide Ukraine with GPS-based intelligence information. In doing so, Ukraine tracked the movements of all Russian forces and engaged them with special task forces from the Ukrainian Armed Forces. The Russian satellite positioning system GLONASS encountered systemic problems and failed to detect Ukrainian task forces. Additionally, Russian militaries could not construct intelligence networks within the Ukrainian civilian population. These factors contributed to the Ukrainian Armed Forces' military superiority.

In this military equation, Putin included the Wagner Group, a private military company. Putin held Yevgeny Prigozhin in high regard as a trusted associate. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) issued an international

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<sup>14</sup> Analysis of the interview with Brigade General Giorgi Surmava, a former head of J3 Operative Planning Department at the General Staff of the Georgian Defense Forces. Interview by author, Tbilisi, December 2022.

arrest warrant for Prigozhin for obstructing the legitimate operation of the Federal Election Commission from 2014 to 2018 by funding the IRA and interfering with U.S. elections. The accusation against him is a conspiracy to defraud the United States.<sup>15</sup> Prigozhin's Wagner claimed victory over Soledar to block the path to Bakhmut. He confronted the Russian military leadership openly, revealing a division between the Russian paramilitaries and militaries. This confrontation posed dangers to the Russian military command during the war and in the aftermath of the conflict. Consequently, Putin thwarted Prigozhin's attempted revolt and subsequently assassinated him.

In the case of the Russian intelligence agencies, the three components defining military intelligence were lacking. They failed to coordinate to process, value, and make timely and relevant assessments and decisions in peace and war (Clark, 2007; Pecht and Tishler, 2014; Solan and Yariv, 2004). Russian military intelligence had a distorted understanding of the enemy and terrain (Bracken and Darilek, 1998), which diminished their relative effects at the operational and evaluation levels (Pecht and Tishler, 2014; Clark, 2007). The deployment of troops on the battlefield necessitated fire support and direct and indirect firepower to maximize impact against the enemy and gain a tactical advantage (FM 3-100/MCWP 3-3.7.1 Doctrine, 1996; Lind, 1985). To support maneuver force operations, the acquisition of weapons, armed aircraft, and other lethal or nonlethal means should be collective and coordinated (Zachar, 2000), whereas, in the case of Russia, it was disorganized. Henry E. Eccles argued, "The logistic process using the fundamental elements of logistics, forms a bridge between the economic system of the nation and the actual operations of the combat forces" (Eccles, 1958, 41). Russia's logistics system and national economic capabilities were rendered incompatible by the sanctions imposed by the West, resulting in unstable communication connections and a disorganized army.

Russian political elites experience decay through internal erosion and corruption. Russia is an international outcast due to the consistency of Western political, economic, and military sanctions. Putin will continue to pit military and intelligence groups against one another to ensure the survival of his regime. Internationally, Russia seeks military assistance from Iran, whose military factories were recently bombarded and nuclear facilities destroyed by Israel and the USA. In this shifting geopolitical environment, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan have emerged as invincible competitors to Russia in the energy sector. The energy corridor and export of Azerbaijani energy products to Europe also give Georgia strategic significance. Russia suffered significant reputational, military, economic, and political harm. Putin's warmongering compelled Sweden and Finland to submit NATO membership applications.

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<sup>15</sup> FBI Arrest Warrant available at <https://www.fbi.gov/wanted/counterintelligence/yevgeniy-viktorovich-prigozhin/yevgeniy-viktorovich-prigozhin3.pdf/view>

The ultimate question is under what conditions Russia will employ nuclear weapons. Regarding strategic nuclear weapons, each nuclear power monitors and controls the others. Consequently, there is a high risk of mutually assured destruction (Wohlstetter, 1959), and the United States and NATO made it clear to Russia that they would retaliate.<sup>16</sup> Three nuclear briefcases – Cheget is under the control of the Strategic Nuclear Forces that command land-based intercontinental missiles (ICBMs), and which is called Kazbeg. President, Defence Minister, and Chief of General Staff have the privilege of simultaneously pressing the button. The ship's captain executes the command.<sup>17</sup> The tactical nuclear weapons are preserved in the 12th Chief Directorate of the Ministry of Defense and are subject to specific procedures. Despite this, in Russia, there is no horizontal accountability between the civil, political, and military sectors, whereas the civilian control of militaries restrains the arbitrary use of tactical nuclear weapons (Sagan, 1994). Less is known about Putin's reality construction and set psychology (Jervis, 1989). Considering these critical points, Ukraine's military capabilities, including training, arms provision, intelligence, and logistics, are also linked to the Western supply of military and financial resources. This international support makes Ukraine's victory more likely.

### **Implications for the International System**

On February 24, 2022, Russia initiated a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine. This unprovoked and unjustified military aggression challenged the international liberal order by undermining democratic stability in Europe. Apart from the political aspects, Russia violated fundamental principles of international humanitarian law, international human rights law, and Article 2, paragraph 4 of the United Nations Charter, which obliges all member states not to use force against the territorial integrity of any state.<sup>18</sup> State is a main unit of the international system. From the legal perspective acquisition and transfer of territorial sovereignty are regulated under international law. Legal scholars argue that *“the modern law forbids conquest and regards a treaty of cession imposed by force as a nullity, a logical extension of the prohibition on the use of force contained in Article 294) of the UN Charter.... This is reflected in Security Council Resolution 242(1967), (p.229) which highlighted the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force, and more emphatically, the Friendly Relations Declaration of 1970”* (Crawford 2019, 228, 479). To understand the extent to which Russia

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<sup>16</sup> Allies Will Protect, Defend Every Inch of NATO Territory, Says Secretary General, March 3, 2022 <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2953765/allies-will-protect-defend-every-inch-of-nato-territory-says-secretary-general/>

<sup>17</sup> Analysis of the interview with Major General Vakhtang Kapanadze, Chief of General Staff of the Georgian Armed Forces, from 2013 to 2016. Interview by author, Tbilisi, December 2022.

<sup>18</sup> United Nations Charter, available at: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>

violated the sovereignty of Ukraine, we suggest the legal definition of sovereignty and equality based on Crawford:

*“Sovereignty in a “catch-all” sense represents the collection of rights held by a state, first in its capacity as the entity entitled to exercise control over its territory and, secondly, in its capacity to act on the international plane, representing that territory and its people. Sovereignty is not to be equated with any specific substantive right, still less is it a precondition to statehood. Thus jurisdiction, including legislative competence over national territory, may be referred to by the terms ‘sovereignty’ or ‘sovereign rights.’ Sovereignty may refer to the title to territory or to the rights accruing from the exercise of title. .... In general, ‘sovereignty’ characterizes powers and privileges resting on customary law **which are independent of the particular consent of another state**.....A corollary of their independence is the equality of states, historically expressed by the **maxim par in parem non habet imperium**. In international law, the maxim is frequently invoked as a basis for state immunity, at the core of which (in its restricted modern application) is the concept of equality between sovereigns. But equality has further implications: it refers to the juridical conceptualization of the division of power between states. Obviously, the allocation of power and the capacity to project it in reality are different things, which suggests that while all states are equal, some are more equal than others. But nonetheless formal equality remains and has meaning”* (Crawford 2019, 431-432; 689-690).

Russia's claim is genocidal and violates all existing legal frameworks and mechanisms. Beyond these legal implications, it establishes a dangerous precedent for the international political system, undermining and eroding the conditions necessary for peaceful coexistence. Thus, the international community must address this urgent issue and employ all available means to curb the mass violence instigated and exacerbated by Russia. Additionally, it is essential to hold Russia accountable for its aggressive actions under international criminal law to ensure international peace.

### Conclusions

Ukraine's invasion and attack on Kyiv represent Putin's Waterloo. In this article, we examined both primary and secondary sources to explore the political, military, and legal aspects of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Additionally, we attempted to explain the factors contributing to Ukraine's resistance. We arrived at three key conclusions. First, politically, Russia's revisionist policies, neo-imperial ambitions, institutional decline, and political divisions are key factors driving this genocidal war against Ukraine. Although, decentralization of Russia's military command, rivalry among political, security, and military elites, and corrupt practices have devastating effects on the performance of the Russian military. Second, in Ukraine, political and national cohesion exists to confront the enemy and reshape national identity. Militarily, the Ukrainian military is well organized, and its military command channels and executes orders efficiently. Third, Western

military, financial, and political support tilt the battlefield in Ukraine's favor. The provision of military aid enhances Ukraine's military capabilities and ensures its access to vital intelligence information against its adversaries. Politically and legally, the international community condemned Russia for its atrocities against civilians, severely damaging Russia's reputation. Economic sanctions imposed by the West reduce the likelihood that Russia will acquire additional resources to fund its political violence against Ukraine. In addition, indications of the use of international legal mechanisms, such as the establishment of special tribunals and international prosecutions of Russian war criminals, appear to constrain Russia. Lastly, the international unity and Ukraine's resilience against Russian aggression have the potential to bring Putin's regime to the brink of collapse and to safeguard the international political and legal systems from unwanted consequences.

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