What Is This Thing Called Peace?

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This article scrutinizes discourse surrounding the Russia-Ukraine war in Western nations, where, despite widespread support for Ukraine, a contingent advocates for peace by rejecting military aid. This "pacifist" stance gains traction through public demonstrations in European countries and political endorsement. However, by opposing military aid while advocating peace, these messages, while ostensibly altruistic, distort genuine efforts for establishing peace in Ukraine. The article argues that recent developments from the philosophy of language, combined with the realities of Russia's invasion and main war objectives, provide clarity on this phenomenon, making a case for considering such calls for peace as propagandistic, perverting the meaning of the word.

Keywords: propaganda, language, war, meaning, protests, public speech, Ukraine, Russia

> People in Ukraine want peace more than anyone else. But peace does not come when the country that was attacked lays down its weapons. That's not peace, that's occupation. And occupation is just war in another form. —Oleksandra Matviichuk, A Speech to Europe 2023

1. Introduction

In the backdrop of escalating tensions with Russian troops amassing at Ukraine's borders in late 2021, Germany witnessed protests against increasing COVID measures, particularly targeting the unvaccinated. From my living room window in a small town in the eastern part of the country, I observed the gatherings on Monday nights. Maskless, the crowds chanted against the German government, criticizing policies and incentives for vaccinations, brandishing signs bearing the word "freedom". The scene was somewhat reminiscent of George Orwell's dystopian imagery, especially when one recalls the Monday demonstrations happening three decades prior opposing the communist dictatorship of the German Democratic Republic

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(GDR). "Freedom", or, more exactly, "Freiheit", for the 2021 crowd, did not seem to mean the same as what it meant for the demonstrators in 1989. Or perhaps it did mean the same, though what demonstrators were now doing with the word suggested something else was afoot. A perversion of sorts, not only with the word and its meaning, but also with the memory of the peaceful protesting from actually unfree citizens.

Fast forward to the end of 2022, amid the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Monday night demonstrations continued, though now under a different theme. Replacing calls against government policies designed to curb the deadly consequences of the COVID pandemic, demonstrators now carried signs bearing messages of "peace". "Peace without weapons", or "Frieden ohne Waffen", was one of the favorite slogans among them. They demanded an immediate end to the Russia-Ukraine war, but the weapons they were ostensibly against were *Ukrainian* and *NATO* weapons. The way to peace, they claimed, required the end of NATO's military support for Ukraine. There were no calls for Russia to bring its war of aggression to an end. In fact, interspersed with the occasional singing of John Lennon's "Imagine", one could even see the fluttering of some Russian flags among the crowds. "Enough of war", they would say, "NATO warmongering ought to stop". What exactly did those people want? What did they mean by "peace" and how could they demand it without voicing a single criticism against the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin? How could they possibly relate Russia with peace and NATO with war after Russia's invasion, after the kidnapping of thousands of Ukrainian children, after Bucha? Peace was murder. Peace was death. This was full Orwell.

It's entirely possible that some of the demonstrators harbored a genuine desire for peace and the well-being of Ukrainians. Still, there is evidence linking demonstrations and demonstrators advocating for peace in Germany to Russia itself, as part of Russia's ongoing campaign to sway public opinion in its favor within the European Union (See Belton et al. 2023). Such operations were likely to gain traction in Germany, particularly considering Russia's influence on political parties and politicians at the far ends of the German political spectrum (See Lucas 2014, Snyder 2018, and Wehner and Bingener 2023). Moreover, this influence is especially pronounced in Germany's eastern states, formerly part of the GDR, where there is a more prominent endorsement of both far-right and far-left ideologies (See Connolly 2022 and Connolly 2023). The protests aligned with Russia's interests—or at the very least, they were consistent with them.

Similar calls for peace, coupled with pleas to end military support for Ukraine, have emanated from high-profile politicians in Germany and in other parts of the world. Members of the far-right German party *Alterna-*

tive für Deutschland (AfD), such as Beatrix von Storch, who once defended using firearms against illegal immigrants (See Kroet 2016), have constantly opposed Germany's military aid to Ukraine, saying "it is better to start peace talks" (Court 2024). Likewise, Sarah Wagenknecht, a former member of the far-left party *Die Linke*, delivered speeches advocating for "peace and detente, instead of arms races and ever more war", saying "no to weapons exports in combat zones" (Chazan 2024). In the United States, current presidential candidate Cornel West opposes military aid for Ukraine, blames NATO for the war, and claims "what is needed now is not a path for NATO membership [for Ukraine], but a path for peace".[1] Brazil's President Lula, who in a 2019 interview for RT expressed admiration for Putin's role in "current political history" (Redação 2019), has repeatedly criticized military support for Ukraine, accusing the United States of "encouraging" the war, while urging Europe and the United States to "start talking about peace".[2] He even suggested that Ukraine consider relinquishing Crimea as a potential resolution to end the conflict.[3]

Such rhetoric not only condones Russia's illegal annexation of Ukrainian territory, but also helps changing the focus away from the atrocities committed by Russia as well as its broader war objectives. While much has been written about Russian propaganda, narratives, and conspiracy theories, it's worth taking a closer look at these seemingly paradoxical calls for peace, namely, those that explicitly denounce support for Ukraine's military efforts in the same breath. First, we'll discuss the notion of peace itself. Rather than aiming at a definition, we'll see that it can be understood broadly as implying not only the absence of war, but also the absence of occupation and the forms of violence it ensues. Then we'll see examples of concepts in philosophy of language that can help make sense of such calls for peace. Coupled with calls for ending military support for Ukraine, they can be seen not only as misguided, but as propagandistic in character, regardless of whether they were intentionally voiced as propaganda. This enables us to make better sense of seemingly contradictory and absurd rhetoric and phenomena, shedding light on how this type of propaganda can be countered.

2. Peace and war

It's intuitive to conceive of peace as the absence of war. And there is a sense in which this conception is perfectly appropriate, at least as a stipulative and useful meaning of "peace" applied to the relationship between states which

[1] See https://www.cornelwest2024.com/press_release_071223.
[2] News Wires 2023.
[3] Euronews and AFP 2023.

are not in a military conflict against one another. Still, this narrow conception may fail to capture the realities of a broader range of actors, say, when military hostilities come to an end, or armistices are signed, given what takes place afterwards. Timothy Garton Ash, who witnessed firsthand the fall of the Berlin Wall on 09 November 1989, offers an anecdote that illustrates this point. He recounts the story of a Berliner carrying a sign that read, "Only today is the war really over" (See Garton Ash 2023). While World War II officially ended with Germany's unconditional surrender in 1945, peace remained elusive for many Eastern Germans in the aftermath. Instead of experiencing true peace, they found themselves under Soviet occupation, which evolved into a decades-long dictatorship, a ruthless police state, effectively imprisoning them behind a wall.

The experiences of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania vividly illustrate this point, too. After World War II, the Baltic countries endured decades of brutal Soviet occupation, stemming from the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact signed in 1939 and the subsequent Soviet military invasion.[4] For the citizens of these nations, true peace was not realized until they started regaining their independence in the tumultuous months preceding the dissolution of the USSR. Their struggle highlights that genuine peace must also encompass the restoration of dignity and freedom for individuals, communities, and populations who have endured state violence, oppression, and occupation. "The myth of a "Long Peace" after World War II", writes Stella Ghervas, "would have sounded laughable to Europeans of the 1980s who lived with tank divisions of the Red Army stationed within a few hours' drive" (Ghervas 2021, 361).

Moreover, there exist broader conceptions of war that acknowledge its presence even in the absence of active fighting. In Chapter 13 of Part 1 of his book *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes proposed that war be understood "not in the actual fighting, but in the known disposition thereto, during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary". Hobbes formulated this idea within the context of his exploration of the "state of nature", a hypothetical condition in which individuals exist without a governing authority. According to Hobbes, in such a state, people would be inclined to turn against each other, leading to a state of generalized war. However, this doesn't necessarily imply constant fighting but rather a persistent readiness or inclination toward conflict in the absence of assurances to the contrary. By framing war in this way, Hobbes illuminates the broader spectrum of conflict, encompassing not just active military engagements but also the underlying tensions and dispositions that perpetuate hostility and instability.

[4] For the case of Lithuania, which the Germans wanted in their zone of influence, see (Overy 1999, 51).

In the case of the Russia-Ukraine war, would there be peace in some such sense if NATO or the West stopped sending military aid to Ukraine? In the narrow sense, peace might eventually be achieved, if only because the lack of military support for Ukraine would make its defeat or capitulation much more likely, thereby ending the military conflict sooner, ensuring Ukraine's occupation and annexation—partial or total—into the Russian Federation, or at the very least Russia's control over Ukraine in some alternative form. If this isn't what those calling for peace intend, they might believe that if the West stops sending weapons to Ukraine, there will be negotiations, peace, *and* Ukraine will still exist as a sovereign country. This nevertheless presupposes highly controversial, if not demonstrably false, ideas about the goals and interests of the two countries, as well as the violent reality of Russian occupation.

First, there would need to be reasons to believe that Russia wants negotiations while accepting a sovereign Ukraine. Instead, there are plenty of reasons to believe otherwise. Russia won't make concessions if it believes it's able to achieve more in the battlefield now or in the immediate future, and it has reasons to believe this to be the case, especially given the dire situation for Ukraine on the battlefield (as I write, $60 billion in American aid has just been unblocked in the United States House of Representatives, Edmondson 2024) and a possible Trump presidency. Furthermore, there are many reasons to think Russia won't accept a sovereign Ukraine, be it because its authorities feel threatened by Ukraine's democratic development and Western orientation,[5] or because those making foreign policy decisions in Russia simply don't believe Ukraine to be a real country. The perpetuation of nationalistic, fascist, or imperialistic ideologies in Russia continues to fuel a disposition among many to view Ukraine's statehood as illegitimate. These ideologies are often reinforced by influential figures and historical narratives shaping perceptions of national identity. This is not only because Security Council Chairman Dmitry Medvedev publicly claims, repeatedly, that Ukraine "should not exist" and that "Ukraine is definitely Russia",[6] or because Putin has explicitly denounced Ukraine's existence as an independent state, deeming it "illegitimate" and "fictitious", as articulated in his essay published on the Kremlin's website on 12 July 2021, besides being occasionally filmed looking at old maps (containing, incidentally, the name "Ukraine") while saying they don't contain the name "Ukraine", and that this would prove Ukraine's statehood to be some sort of fiction (Motyl 2023). The idea that Ukraine is not a real country did not just recently arise in the minds

[5] Listed by Sasse (2022, 13) and others as one among many factors motivating Russia's total invasion of Ukraine

[6] Ukrainska Pravda 2024.

of a few politicians, propagandists, and even wannabe philosophers in Russia such as Aleksandr Dugin. Even authors revered in the West, like Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, a survivor of the Soviet prison and labor camps, have espoused and defended such views. Solzhenitsyn claimed that Ukraine's current territorial borders were a result of Vladimir Lenin's policies, advocating for the incorporation of Eastern and Southern Ukraine into Russia. Putin has repeatedly reproduced the very same narrative, not only during the map debacle, but also, for instance, in his televised speech on 21 February 2022; his conception of the "true" Russian nation, going far beyond the current borders of the Russian Federation, as a *civilization*, encompassing all those who "speak and think in Russian", is well known and has been widely discussed (See Popova and Shevel 2024, especially chapter 1). Variations of this view were ventilated already by some figures playing non-trivial roles in the formation and independence of the Russian Federation during the dissolution of the USSR, enjoying some traction and influence within Russian political circles.[7]

On the other hand, it is difficult to believe Ukraine will make any concessions soon, as they too think battlefield gains are achievable, especially with the prospect of future military aid, hoping both for a Biden victory as well as for a stronger show of resolve from the United States and its allies centering (for once) on Ukraine's victory. There is also massive and free support from the Ukrainian population for the resistance led by their government and army. Ukrainians have largely rallied around the flag, demonstrating their strong civic national identity.[8] Ukrainians fight for their existence. They have no other choice.

Now, despite the *prima facie* desirability of an armistice to end the awful killing and suffering of Ukrainians, as well as the destruction of Ukraine's infrastructure, it is difficult to see how peace would be achieved if violence and oppression against Ukrainians, especially those living in territories occupied by Russia, persist. While victory in war may fail to yield peace, as military accomplishments may fail to guarantee political successes, peace will certainly not be attained for those living in occupied territories in the eventuality of a Ukrainian defeat. Moreover, whether there will be peace depends largely on Russia's resolve to halt its criminal war of aggression against Ukraine, withdrawing its army. Since Ukraine's incapacity to fight would all but guarantee Russia's continued military efforts and eventual victory, calls for peace, when conjoined with calls for the end of NATO's military support *as a means of achieving it*, are at the very least misguided. Besides, they add

[7] For examples, including Solzhenitsyn, see (Plokhy 2023, 100–105) and (Zubok 2022, 322–325).

[8] A strong case for this is made throughout in (Onuch and Hale 2022).

pressure and place obligations on the victim, while the moral responsibility for ending the war (and paying reparations) lies with Russia, who started it unilaterally—though, of course, this doesn't mean at all that Russian forces will ever retreat voluntarily and, what is even more unlikely, pay eventual reparations to Ukraine.

Russia's violations of international agreements such as the United Nations Charter or the Budapest Memorandum also highlight the precarious nature of relying on agreements with it, especially in light of the idea that peace in the narrow sense could be achieved once Ukraine loses support to fight back, while assuming a Hobbesian notion of war. The Budapest Memorandum, for instance, signed in 1994, serves as a poignant example of Russia's disregard for commitments to respect Ukraine's territorial integrity and borders. Despite pledging to do so, Russia's subsequent actions, including influence over Ukraine's former president Victor Yanukovych, the annexation of Crimea, and the war in the Donbas, demonstrate a constant disposition to deny Ukraine's sovereignty and assert its interests over Ukraine, even if that entails extreme measures such as the deployment of military force. Given this history, much of which is shaped by Putin's fanatic fixation with Ukraine (to use Lawrence Freedman's (2024) words), it's perfectly reasonable to harbor skepticism about the effectiveness of diplomatic agreements in deterring future aggression from Russia—without, that is, the provision of full security guarantees in the form of NATO membership for Ukraine.[9] Thus, calls for peace between Russia and Ukraine must consider not only the cessation of current hostilities but also what comes afterwards, as well as the deep and legitimate security concerns of Ukraine. The challenge here is how to end Russia's disposition to control its neighbors, especially Ukraine. Lack of military support for Ukraine is of no help. As a matter of fact, it seems to incentivize Russia's aggression. We know this because this strategy has already been tried: it's the story of Western's failure to effectively support Ukraine militarily between 2014 and 2022, ending in the West's greatest deterrence failure in decades, i.e., Russia's full invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Despite his ideas about Ukraine, in the context of the Cold War between the USSR and the United States, Solzhenitsyn expressed, correctly, the thought that even in the absence of open war, namely, a full military conflict, peace may be elusive:

> When an open war is impossible, oppression can continue quietly behind the scenes. Terrorism. Guerrilla warfare, violence, prisons, concentration camps. I ask you: is this peace? The true antipode of peace

[9] Though see (Applebaum 2023). A case for an armistice, while recognizing its challenges, was made by Kotkin (2024).

> is violence. And those who want peace in the world should remove not only war from the world but also violence. If there is no open war but there is still violence, that is not peace. (Solzhenitsyn 1978, 55)

The end of military confrontation between Ukraine and Russia is obviously desirable, but if it happens from a position of Ukrainian weakness, which will be the case without NATO's military support, this will very likely bring about occupation, insecurity, and a rule of violence and lawless for millions of Ukrainians, a state which could hardly be described as "peace". If peace is the absence of violence, as suggested by Solzhenitsyn, then achieving it hinges on Ukraine's victory.

3. Perverting peace

Operating under the guise of defending "family values" and safeguarding national interests, Russian state-directed propaganda endeavors to portray the country as a besieged bastion of righteousness, a peaceful victim with a storied past that only ever reacts defensively to external aggression, particularly from the United States and its allies. This narrative, propagated through a combination of disinformation, outright falsehoods, and distortions, often involves a wholesale rewriting of history and a distorted view of reality. In this warped narrative, aggressors are portrayed as victims, and perpetrators are lionized as heroes. This playbook of propaganda, employed by Russia in its invasion of Ukraine since 2014, draws upon tactics reminiscent of those used during Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008. Examples abound. As Arkady Ostrovsky describes,

> Television channels were part of the military operation, waging an essential propaganda campaign, spreading disinformation and demonizing the country Russia was about to attack. The war started on 07 August 2008—the day before the opening of the Summer Olympics in Beijing—with Georgian forces responding to fire coming from the Russian-backed breakaway region of South Ossetia with heavy artillery. According to the Russian propaganda, Georgia was a reckless and dangerous aggressor and Russia had an obligation, as a peacekeeper, to protect the victims. Russian television talked about genocide, 2,000 civilian deaths and tens of thousands of refugees. (Ostrovsky 2015, 321–322)

During the 2008 invasion of Georgia, the Russian government dubbed its actions as a "peace enforcement operation," while the current invasion of Ukraine is officially labeled as a "special military operation." By refraining from characterizing these actions as war, Russia seeks to portray itself as a nation that does not instigate conflicts, does not fight wars, despite clear

evidence to the contrary. In both instances, Russia employed false accusations of genocide to justify its aggression. It falsely accused Georgia of committing genocide against Russian-passport holders in South Ossetia, now it falsely accuses Ukraine of committing genocide against Russian speakers in the Donbas. By framing its actions as protective measures against oppression, Russia attempts to paint itself as a defender of vulnerable populations, even as it inflicts harm upon innocent civilians through missile strikes and other military actions in Ukraine. Furthermore, Russia demonizes its victims as fascists and Nazis. For example, Mikheil Saakashvili, then president of Georgia, was compared to Hitler, and Georgia was depicted as an American puppet state full of fascists (Ostrovsky 2015, 318–327). Similarly, false claims about NATO aggression and even Nazi juntas supposedly taking the reins in Kyiv are repeatedly leveled against Ukraine.

The way language is manipulated in contemporary Russian propaganda often bears a striking resemblance to tactics employed during the Soviet era. As Masha Gessen observes, in the USSR, "words were constantly used to mean their opposite," reflecting a deliberate effort to manipulate language for ideological ends (Gessen 2017). This, in conjunction with the calls for peace we've been focusing on, recalls Orwell's concept of doublethink, developed in his novel *1984*. Orwell loosely characterized this concept as the ability to simultaneously hold certain contradictory beliefs and accept them both as true. This is exemplified by the Party's slogans, such as "War is Peace" and "Freedom is Slavery". As delineated by Orwell, the concept of doublethink is not so much about language *per se*, or about how language is used. If it's about that, then this is so only indirectly, for the notion seems to be about irrational *mental states* or *beliefs*, a form of "mental cheating", as Orwell himself describes it, where one holds contradictory beliefs leading to a form of self-deception. This self-deception is then exploited by the Party to ensure full obedience of the people, who will then accept a constant state of war as peace and state-imposed slavery as freedom, conscious of the truth while telling themselves, as Orwell puts it, "carefully constructed lies".[10] This apathy and acceptance of oppressive state policy, driven by doublethink, is not uncommon in today's Russia. Orwell scholar Masha Karp points to instances of doublethink indicated by empirical research surveying opinions of Russian citizens about the war against Ukraine, in which "[d]ifferent bits of propaganda were pronounced in the same breath and the conflict between them did not bother the speaker" (Karp 2023, 258).

Indeed, the concept of doublethink pertains primarily to the simultaneous acceptance of contradictory beliefs, rather than the manipulation of lan-

[10] For an understanding of doublethink focused on the notion of self-deception, see (Martin 1984).

guage for propagandistic purposes. However, the phenomenon described in the calls for peace, as outlined earlier in the article, involves a more direct exploitation of language to advance a particular agenda. In the protests, for instance, the label "peace" is deliberately detached from associations with the West, NATO, or Ukraine, and instead framed in connection with what would very likely lead to Ukraine's capitulation or defeat, i.e., a lack of Western military support. Conversely, military support for Ukraine is characterized as "warmongering", thereby casting aggressors as victims and defenders as aggressors. While not strictly doublethink in the Orwellian sense, this linguistic framing shares similarities with the broader theme of ideological control and manipulation of perception. Because, to paraphrase Kenneth Burke, words think for us, they ought to be carefully chosen to describe events of extreme significance. "Special military operation" suggests a restricted type of strategic engagement, while "war" implies a state of armed conflict between nations or factions, with significant humanitarian, moral and legal consequences. Ukrainian authorities have been wary to describe their war effort as "asymmetric warfare", for instance, since that can lead thinking of Ukraine's campaign as akin to guerrilla fighting, which may have caused hurdles in the delivery of weapons to Ukraine (See Gumenyuk 2024).

Philosophers of language have developed and discussed notions that do help to make sense of how language is being manipulated in the cases at hand. In his work on propaganda, Jason Stanley defines a notion he calls *undermining propaganda*, which is "a contribution to public discourse that is presented as an embodiment of certain ideals yet is of a kind that tends to erode those very ideals" (Stanley 2015, 52–53). This type of propaganda, Stanley says, "requires the call to action to be one that runs counter to the very political ideal it is explicitly represented as embodying" (Stanley 2015, 52–53). Now, the calls for peace described earlier, made by people rallying against the delivery of weapons to Ukraine, would seem to be genuine instances of undermining propaganda. While these calls may appeal to the universally desired ideal of peace, they ultimately serve to undermine this very ideal by advocating for actions that would lead to the defeat and subjugation of Ukraine, to a state of occupation and oppression of Ukrainians. In fact, we may dwell even further on what would happen if Ukraine were to be defeated, which, again, is made more likely in case it stops receiving NATO weapons. A great number of Ukrainian civilians would likely face atrocities such as torture, rape, and executions, which are routinely performed in occupied territories, and Ukrainian culture and history would be under threat of erasure;[11] there would likely be purges of those involved in the Ukrainian resistance, especially of those who were enlisted in the armed forces; more

[11] See, for example, (Applebaum and Gumenyuk 2023).

broadly, a Russian victory would bring about the end of democracy in a large European country, and it could embolden authoritarian leaders worldwide, further undermining fundamental principles of international law and the international order established since the end of World War II.

Teresa Marques has developed and defended a concept similar to Stanley's *undermining propaganda*, namely, that of *meaning perversions*, which sheds light on similar phenomena where words are misapplied to distort their intended meaning and subvert shared norms or values:

> Meaning perversions are uses of words that also presuppose shared norms or values, but pervert the norm enforcement process because they misapply terms or phrases to things that don't realize the presupposed norm or value. (Marques 2020a, 276)

One example discussed by Marques involves uses of "free elections" in the USSR. Members of the government would use the term to describe electoral processes that were anything but free and fair by democratic standards, thereby creating the illusion of legitimacy and adherence to democratic principles, despite the reality of widespread repression, censorship, and manipulation of electoral outcomes. Similar examples abound today, with "free elections" in Russia or North Korea. It's important to recognize, as Marques does, that not all instances of propaganda involve meaning perversions, and vice versa. Positive propaganda, for example, may be sincere and aligned with just causes without resorting to misapplications of language. Similarly, not all meaning perversions necessarily constitute propaganda. But while meaning perversions are distinct from propaganda, they can often intersect. In cases where meaning perversions occur while advancing a particular political agenda, they can indeed be considered propagandistic.[12]

In the context of calls for peace made alongside calls against military support for Ukraine, use of the term "peace" exemplifies philosophical concepts such as *undermining propaganda* and *meaning perversion*, presupposing widely cherished norms and values associated with peace, but misapplied to describe a situation in which violence and oppression would prevail. These uses of "peace" serve Russia's interests by: promoting narratives undermining international efforts to support Ukraine; changing the focus of public speech away from Russia and to NATO countries; and removing agency, responsibility and obligations away from the aggressor and toward the victim and its allies, ultimately associating them with an unjustified disposition to wage war.

[12] See also (Marques 2020b).

4. Final remarks

By realizing that "peace" is constantly used in a perverted and propagandistic sense to describe a situation where violence as well as oppression would thrive, and where Russia's imperial goals in Ukraine would succeed, we can also understand how such propaganda may be countered. Countering propagandistic uses of terms like "peace" requires a concerted effort to disseminate information about the violent Russian occupation of Ukrainian territories and the potential consequences of an end to the conflict without Ukraine's victory.

It's crucial to highlight the reality of the Russian occupation, including its many instances of violence, oppression, and human rights abuses committed against Ukrainian civilians.[13] By documenting and publicizing these atrocities, the true nature of Russia's actions can be exposed, debunking the false narrative of peace achieved by negotiations with Russia that would involve loss of Ukrainian territory. Additionally, emphasizing the potential consequences of a Ukrainian defeat is essential. This includes discussing the likelihood of further repression, annexation, and subjugation of Ukraine by Russia, as well as the broader geopolitical implications of allowing this kind of aggression to go unchecked. More importantly, efforts to counter this type of propaganda should focus on amplifying the voices of those affected by the war, including Ukrainian civilians, activists, journalists, etc. Their firsthand accounts and experiences provide invaluable insight into the realities of life under Russian occupation and underscore the urgent need for international support to help preserve Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and, most importantly, Ukrainian lives. To drive home this point, as well as some of the main considerations of this essay, I wish to end by citing a speech by Ukrainian writer Serhiy Zhadan (2022), delivered on his acceptance of the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in 2022:

> So what do Ukrainians find alarming about European intellectuals' and European politicians' declarations about the need for peace (which doesn't negate the need for peace, of course)? It's the fact that we understand that peace won't come merely because the victim of aggression has laid down their arms. The civilians in Bucha, Hostomel, and Irpin didn't have any arms at all, which didn't spare them from suffering terrible deaths. The people of Kharkiv aren't armed either, yet the Russians have consistently and chaotically fired rockets at them. What do proponents of a speedy peace at any cost think they should have done? For these proponents of peace, where is the

[13] The Reckoning Project (www.thereckoningproject.com) has been documenting and providing evidence of atrocities committed by Russian forces against Ukrainians, which have been systematically uncovered in territories liberated by Ukrainian forces

> line between supporting peace and not supporting resistance? The thing is, though, I'd say that when speaking about peace in the context of this bloody, dramatic war instigated by Russia, some people don't want to acknowledge a simple fact—there's no such thing as peace without justice. There are various forms of frozen conflict, there are temporarily occupied territories, there are time-bombs camouflaged as political compromises, but unfortunately, there won't be any peace, real peace that provides a sense of security and prospects for the future. And by castigating Ukrainians for being unwilling to surrender and perceiving that as an element of militarism and radicalism, some Europeans (I must note that this number is rather insignificant, but still) are doing a bizarre thing; by trying to stay in their comfort zone, they venture beyond the bounds of ethics. And this is no longer a question for Ukrainians—this is a question for the world, for its willingness (or unwillingness) to swallow yet another manifestation of utter uncontrollable evil in favor of dubious financial gain and disingenuous pacificism.

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