

# INTRODUCTION: DIFFERENT ASPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF THE WAR

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The current volume<sup>1</sup> entitled “Putin’s War in Ukraine. Volume II. Different Aspects and Challenges of the War” is the continuation of the first volume “Putin’s War in Ukraine. Volume I. The Background and Anatomy of Russian Aggression” which was published in late 2022<sup>2</sup>. Since the first volume was published, another year of open Russian military aggression against Ukraine has passed, started by Putin’s aggressive and revanchist regime on 24 February 2022 when the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation launched a massive military invasion of Ukraine.

Putin’s ruthless military invasion of Ukraine has completely changed the entire geopolitical situation in the whole region. Moreover, it has changed the entire security and stability framework in the Eurasian region and, even more broadly, in the whole world. But Putin is not the only main initiator of this war, genocide and terror against Ukraine; there are many other main initiators (e.g. military leaders such as Sergei Shoigu, Minister of Defence of Russia, Nikolai Patrushev, the secretary of the Security Council of Russia, and others) responsible for planning and instigating this war and directing military actions against Ukraine, like for instance Army General Valery Gerasimov, the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation.

One year before the annexation of Crimea, in early 2013, Valery Gerasimov published the article “The value of science lies in foresight. The new challenges require forms and modes of combat operations” where he stressed inter alia that the role of military science is growing today.<sup>3</sup> It was his so-called

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<sup>2</sup> Putin’s War in Ukraine. Volume I. The Background and Anatomy of Russian Aggression. Ed. by Vladimir Sazonov and Andres Saumets. – Sõjateadlane (Estonian Journal of Military Studies), Vol. 20/2022 [Cultural, Peace and Conflict Studies Series, Vol. XII]. <https://www.kvak.ee/sojateadlane20/>.

<sup>3</sup> **Герасимов, В.** 2013. Ценность науки в предвидении. – Военно-промышленный курьер, 8 (476), с. 1–3. [Герасимов 2013]

concept or vision<sup>4</sup> that formed the basis of Russia's hybrid war<sup>5</sup> and aggression against Ukraine back in 2014 when Russian troops in the form of 'green men' in uniform without military insignias seized and occupied Crimea in early 2014, which was then illegally annexed by Putin's regime. In his text Valery Gerasimov accentuates that asymmetric actions are widely used to level the playing field in armed combat. These include the use of special operations and internal opposition to create a permanent front line on the adversary's territory, as well as informational influence, the forms and methods of which are evolving. In the same text, Gerasimov discusses the role of information influence in today's wars and military conflicts: the emphasis of the methods of confrontation is shifting towards political, economic, informational, humanitarian and other non-military methods which are realised through the involvement of the people's protest potential. All this is complemented by (covert) military measures, including information influence, military operations, and also large-scale war.<sup>6</sup>

Gerasimov's vision envisages the simultaneous influencing of enemy troops and objects across an entire territory, as well as simultaneous combat in all physical environments and information spaces, all with the use of asymmetric and indirect actions. It seems that Russian military thinking is rational and follows the principles of total war. It was supposed that Russia was able to put both the Ukrainian army and the country as a whole in such a position in May–June 2022 and November–December 2022 and that, without Western support, Ukraine would have been forced to make some concessions.<sup>7</sup>

Russia has shown that, as part of its warfare, it attacks the country at different levels, attacking the armed forces as well as the population and the civilian and military infrastructure. The Kremlin's cynical calculation may be that Ukraine will run out of ammunition before Russia runs out of cannon fodder.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Sometimes wrongly called Gerasimov's doctrine **Galeotti, M.** 2018a. I'm Sorry for Creating the 'Gerasimov Doctrine'. – Foreign Policy. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/05/im-sorry-for-creating-the-gerasimov-doctrine/>; **Galeotti, M.** 2018b. The mythical 'Gerasimov Doctrine' and the language of threat. – Critical Studies on Security, Vol. 7(2), pp. 157–161.

<sup>5</sup> For more on Russian understandings of hybrid war see **Брычков, А. С.; Дорохов, В. Л.; Никоноров, Г. А.** 2019. О гибридном характере войн и вооруженных конфликтов будущего. – Военная мысль, 2, р. 15–28.

<sup>6</sup> **Герасимов** 2013.

<sup>7</sup> **Eesti kaitseväe aastaraamat 2022** [EDF Annual Book 2022], p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> **Gressel, G.** 2022. Mob unhappy: Why Russia is unlikely to emerge victorious in Ukraine. – ECFR, Commentary, 21 October. <https://ecfr.eu/article/mob-unhappy-why-russia-is-unlikely-to-emerge-victorious-in-ukraine/> (visited 20.12.2023).

Putin believes Ukraine has not yet suffered enough to break. Putin hopes that the West will grow tired of the war in Ukraine and that Western countries will reduce or even stop supporting Ukraine. If that happens, the Kremlin will be able to push Ukraine into a corner and demand peace on its own terms. In order for the West to tire of supporting Ukraine militarily, financially and otherwise, the Kremlin will use various information campaigns in an attempt to tarnish Ukraine's image, or to create the situation where the West will no longer believe in a Ukrainian victory. Moscow is attempting to divide the West by using elements of hybrid warfare, including sending Middle Eastern migrants to the EU border, using them as a weapon of war. The Kremlin is trying to divert Western attention from Ukraine by supporting various war cells in the world, including e.g. anti-Israeli campaigns, terrorist groups such as HAMAS, etc. As far as Ukraine is concerned, Russia is systematically trying to destroy the Ukrainian state, its economy, its infrastructure, bombing cities and carrying out terror and genocide against the Ukrainian people. Part of Putin's strategy of subjugation is to systematically dismantle Ukraine's energy infrastructure in the winter cold, with the aim of destroying it. There has also been a change of commanders following the resignation of General Alexander Lapin, with General Sergei Surovikin being appointed on 8 October 2022 to lead the Russian forces in Ukraine. In the summer of 2023 Surovikin, known as "General Armageddon", lost his position as a result of Wagner's rebellion.

In its information warfare during the war in Ukraine which Russia started in 2014 and expanded in 2022, the Kremlin has not changed its strategy much regarding its influence activities, except for some details and messages from strategic narratives which will not be examined in this article. Russia is still trying to influence the Western world and undermine Euro-Atlantic security. To this end, pro-Kremlin forces have created different strategic narratives<sup>9</sup> that shape world perceptions and policy preferences, based on the objectives and imperialist policies of Russia.

Several anti-colonialist and anti-Western narratives which originated in the Soviet era have been revived and exploited by Russia in an attempt to divert Western public attention and resources from Ukraine. Russia has deployed private military companies, including Wagner, to multiple African countries with the aim of distracting Western Europe, especially France. Russian operations are predominantly kinetic in Ukraine, largely non-kinetic

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<sup>9</sup> For more on strategic narratives see **Miskimmon, A.; O'Loughlin, B.; Roselle, L.** 2013. *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order*. Routledge.

elsewhere, and sometimes synchronised across theatres<sup>10</sup>. Information campaigns against Ukraine have been pursued in parallel with Russian operational efforts on the ground. Russia has experienced operational setbacks and local defeats in information confrontation, but at a strategic level it has not yet lost the information war.<sup>11</sup>

2022 and 2023 have shown that Putin's regime will not back down from its goals any time soon and will continue to seek the destruction of Ukrainian statehood, despite huge losses in manpower and military equipment, reminiscent in many ways of the Soviet Union's World War II era when it threw hundreds of thousands of soldiers into the war in disregard for the lives of its own men, mainly so that the goal it had set itself could be achieved. The Kremlin's strategic approach does not seem to have changed much since then. In 2023 Ukraine shifted several times between defence and offence. In 2023 Ukrainian armed forces were able to obtain several tactical gains on land and some operational-level impact against the Russian Black Sea Fleet, but failed to break through Russian defence lines. However, despite huge losses in material and in human lives, the Kremlin has not achieved its military aims either.

Therefore, this volume will examine Russia's military invasion of Ukraine, and Russia's hybrid and information influence activity in Ukraine and more broadly in the West. This second issue (Vol. 2) will analyse several challenges for the West coming from the Russo-Ukrainian war, and also several aspects of Russia's military aggression (e.g. Russian tanks in war, Russia's information war against the West and Ukraine, possible scenarios of post-War peace, the impact and implications of war).

The collection begins with an article written by *Yevhen Mahda* whose contribution entitled RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR: 500 DAYS OF CHALLENGES AND CHANGES focuses on the debate on the future of the international relations system, as it became clear that it needed to be reformed after the end of hostilities.

The second article in this issue is written by *Tomasz Marcinkowski* REACTION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO THE RUSSIAN AGGRESSION IN UKRAINE IN 2022 and presents the European Union's actions towards the

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<sup>10</sup> **Socor, V.** 2023. Ukraine at War: The Year Past and the Year Ahead. – Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol. 20, Issue 191, December 18. <https://jamestown.org/program/ukraine-at-war-the-year-past-and-the-year-ahead-part-one/> (visited 20.12.2023).

<sup>11</sup> **Giles, K.** 2023. Russian cyber and information warfare in practice. – Chatham House, 14 December. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/12/russian-cyber-and-information-warfare-practice> (visited 20.12.2023).

Russian Federation in relation to Russia's military invasion of Ukraine and the extent of public support for this policy.

*Egbert Jahn's* article PEACE POLICIES IN THE SHADOW OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE AND THE LIMITED POSSIBILITIES OF NON-VIOLENT POLICIES discusses what may have prompted Russia to launch a military attack against Ukraine, how the war has affected the international political situation, and whether there are any possibilities for peace policies at all.

*Anton Paier* in his article TANKS IN THE RUSSO-UKRAINIAN WAR focuses on analysing the key characteristics of the main MBTs employed in Ukraine, and their role and impact as well.

*Aimar Ventsel* in the article NATIONALIST SAKHA WARRIORS FOR THE KREMLIN: THE CASE OF YS TYMSY gives an overview of the pro-Kremlin Sakha nationalist male movement *Ys Tymsy* which is an anti-immigration, anti-Western, conservative movement. Ventsel shows in his analysis that this ideology helps them to find common ground with the Kremlin's anti-Western conservative ideas. Moreover, the movement's concept of masculinity is rooted in the notion of the mythical Sakha warrior and Aimar Ventsel shows in his study that this turns all *Ys Tymsy* members into supporters of Putin's war, to the extent that young Sakha men are volunteering to join the Russian Armed Forces.

The following section of three articles discusses different aspects of Russia's information war in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

First article in this section DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES OF HATE AS A TOOL OF ESCALATING RUSSIA'S WAR AGAINST UKRAINE (BASED ON STOPFAKE FACT-CHECKING PROJECT MATERIALS) written by *Viktoriiia Romaniuk* analyses Russian disinformation narratives aimed at dehumanising Ukrainians, based on the archives of the Ukrainian fact-checking organisation StopFake. The article presents analysis of the framework of narratives through cases detected and refuted by Ukrainian fact-checkers in the period 2014–2022. In addition to the dehumanisation of Ukrainians, in her article the author also examines how disinformation disseminated by Russia has manipulated and distorted notions of fascism and genocide to create a negative image of Ukrainians and justify Russia's war as a "humanitarian intervention".

The next article in this section SOME NOTES ABOUT THE NATURE OF RUSSIAN INFLUENCE ACTIVITIES AND STRATEGIC NARRATIVES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE RUSSIAN MILITARY INVASION OF UKRAINE 2022–2023 written by *Jaanus Sägi* and *Vladimir Sazonov* looks at Russia's information influence activities in the context of the first two years

of the Russian military invasion of Ukraine, particularly focusing on Russian strategic narratives created and disseminated in 2022–2023 targeting Western audiences.

*Juliusz Sikorski* in the article entitled ONLINE ANALYTICS PORTAL AS AN INFORMATION WARFARE TOOL OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND ITS IMPACT AFTER FEBRUARY 24 2022. CASE STUDY: RUBALTIC.RU analyses the information warfare tool proxy source using the example of the Russian propaganda channel RuBaltic.ru, also showing it in the context of two other Russian propaganda channels: news-front.info and Geopolitica.ru. The study reveals that, after Russia's attack on Ukraine, the portal essentially became a tool of internal Russian propaganda, as well as being spread among the Russian diaspora in countries that did not identify it as a proxy source.

Last but not least, this volume terminates with an article from *Hans-Georg Ehrhart* GERMANY AND EUROPE AFTER THE UKRAINE WAR IN 2025: THREE SCENARIOS where the author discusses the possible ends of the Russo-Ukrainian war and the post-conflict period, allowing for an analysis of trends, challenges and opportunities. This is done through three scenario analyses based on the following aspects which author discusses in his study: What happens in and with Russia, in and with Ukraine, and what does this mean for NATO, Germany and Europe more broadly?

Wishing you pleasant reading and cogitation,

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