



ELROM CENTER  
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# **The Growing Impact of the Civilian Population on the Modern Battlefield**

A Glimpse into the Russia-Ukraine War

**Daniel Rakov and Sarah Fainberg**

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Research Report (0123E) May 2023

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**Elrom Center for Air and Space Studies**  
Chaim Levanon St. 30, Tel Aviv 6997801  
airspace@tauex.tau.ac.il



**ELNET**  
info@elnetwork.eu

**Director of ELROM Center for Air and Space Studies:  
Professor Eviatar Matania**

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## Executive Summary

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This report examines the role of civilians in modern warfare based on the case study of the first year of the Russian-Ukrainian war (February 2022-February 2023). This war provides a contemporary and unique example of intense interaction between an aggressor state (Russia), a defending state (Ukraine), the population caught in between (Ukrainian), and the international arena. The study offers a systemic analysis of the interactions between the parties involved in the war in four main dimensions: (1) the stakeholders' strategic objectives; (2) their different approaches to civilians in armed conflicts; (3) the leverage tools at their disposal (military, political, economic, and information warfare); and (4) the strategic and operational interaction between them. The contribution of this research lies in its holistic approach to understanding the growing influence of civilians on the modern battlefield.

The study highlights **the increasing importance of the “digital front” in modern warfare as well as the overall empowerment of civilians whose impact on the dynamics of the war is increasingly felt.** As the war in Ukraine has demonstrated, civilians in modern warfare **constitute a sub-system within the broader ecosystem of the conflict**, thereby transcending their traditional roles as passive “obstacles” for an attacking military force or as an active partisan military force for a defending state. Through digital platforms and new digital infrastructure, civilians fulfill a wide variety of roles, including intelligence collection via smartphones, early warning for activation of air defenses by using air alert phone applications, and grassroots documentation of war crime evidence. Civilians have weaponized the digital space, influencing the dynamics of the battlefield and the states' ability to achieve their strategic objectives, especially when it involves intensive ground warfare.

Both Russia and Ukraine have viewed the Ukrainian populace as a key anchor and source of leverage for weakening the enemy system. **At the beginning of the invasion, Russia limited the use of military force against civilians**, in the hope that Ukrainians would come to terms with the occupation. Following the fiasco of its surprise military attack, Russia's self-restraint gradually faded away until its near-complete disappearance later on. The Kremlin ceased to avoid collateral damage and even deliberately targeted civilians to achieve military objectives, seeking to instill fear through systematic air strikes on the Ukrainian energy infrastructure during the winter of 2022–2023. At the same time, Moscow made use of informational, diplomatic,

and economic pressure to undermine the relationship between the Ukrainian government and its citizens and to convince audiences in Russia, the West, and the Global South that Russia's actions were justified and humane. Russia implemented extensive repressive Russification measures in the newly occupied territories, forcing some of the local population to emigrate into the Russian Federation's territory, conducting a referendum on annexation, and disconnecting residents from Ukrainian communication channels. All of these intended to subjugate the local population.

**The Ukrainian government viewed mass civilian mobilization for the war effort as one of its main strengths in countering Russian aggression.** Kyiv rapidly developed a mechanism to encourage the population to support the armed forces by supplying equipment and providing support packages for partisan warfare and popular resistance against the occupation. *Ante bellum*, the Ukrainian public had been trained to identify and counter Russian disinformation campaigns, and the Ukrainian government also adopted mechanisms to block Russian information while filling the information space with Ukrainian sources. *In bello*, the Ukrainian political leadership put a central emphasis on Russian war crimes against its citizens to awaken Western conscience and galvanize US and European support (the "Bucha effect"). Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's leadership, using strategic communications and **his mastery of the "digital front"** especially at the onset of the war, combined with the existence of strong regional leaderships integrated into regional military administrations played critical roles in mobilizing the Ukrainian public to resist the Russian occupation.

Massive economic assistance and the absorption of millions of refugees by the European Union and other Western countries strengthened the resilience of the Ukrainian state, enabling it to provide basic services to the population and thereby complicating the situation for the Russian military. The West demonstrated determination to capitalize on Russia's harm to the population to extract a political price from Moscow.

**The pressure Russia exerted on the Ukrainian population backfired and caused significant strategic damage to Moscow.** Contrary to Russian expectations, the Kyiv government received strong support from the populace, which underwent an **accelerated anti-Russian political and cultural metamorphosis**. As the war unfolded, the Ukrainian public showed increased resolve to resist the occupation and lowered its expectations regarding the basic public services they received from the government.

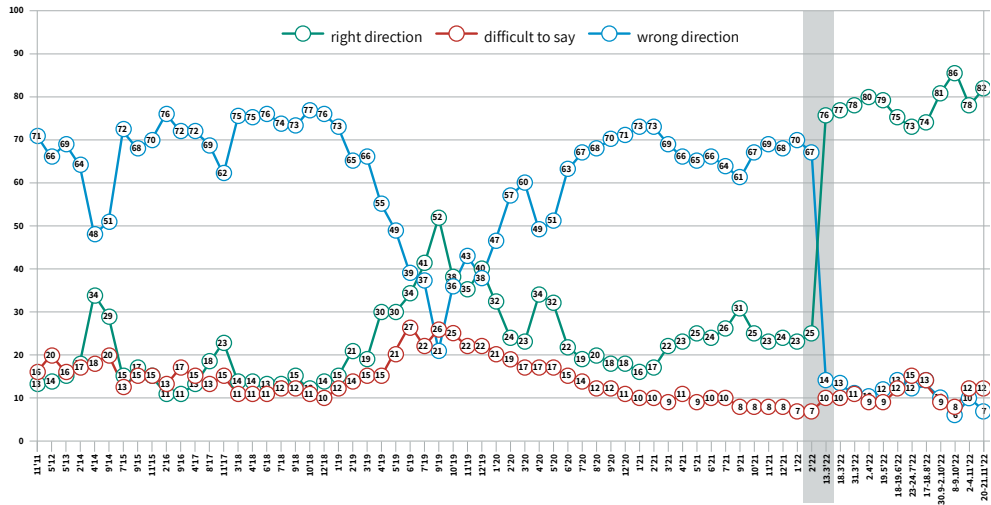
Initially, the West sought to uncouple the local Russian-Ukrainian conflict from the global Western-Russian conflict, yet Russia's widespread harm to civilians connected the two conflicts – local and global – due to the centrality of civilian rights in Western liberal ethos. Russia's atrocities committed against Ukrainian civilians increased the readiness of the Western public to make sacrifices to assist Ukraine, strengthened the legitimacy of tighter sanctions against Russia, and provided Kyiv with additional resources to fight with additional resources to fight back.

However, Russia managed to circumvent Western sanctions and mitigate their impact by deepening its cooperation with the Global South, countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America which hesitated to hold Russia accountable for civilian fatalities and damage. Through state-controlled media, the Russian public was also brainwashed to believe that harming the Ukrainian population was necessary. On Russian television, war crimes denial went hand in hand with a call for death and sacrifice and the unbridled justification of violence.

**During the first year of the war, the Kremlin's exerting multidimensional pressure on civilians failed to reach the intended effect of weakening Ukraine's resolve to fight.** Contemporary Russian military thinking ("New Generation Warfare") recommended exerting informational, psychological, economic, political, and military pressure on civilians as a source of integral and multidimensional leverage against the enemy system. This systemic pressure was to be used continuously, both in peacetime and during hostilities, to weaken and disorient the enemy, suppress its determination to fight and channel the enemy leadership's decision-making towards preferable options for the Kremlin. Exerting continuous and multifaceted pressure on the Ukrainian civilians to undermine the Ukrainian statehood guided Russian operational planning and behavior both before the outbreak of hostilities and during the war itself.

The war has illustrated **the difficulty of changing the rival leadership's policy positions by applying pressure on civilians.** It has also shown how challenging it is to predict the civilian population's behavior during war, and that applying pressure may lead to a hardening of the populace's positions. Retroactively, it is difficult to determine whether the pressure-on-civilians operational concept is fundamentally flawed, or whether the Russian army simply did not implement it properly. The rapid collapse of southern Ukraine and the lack of defensive forces in Kyiv in the early days of the war suggest that better Russian planning and more resolute execution might have led to far more severe consequences for Ukraine.

**In your opinion, is Ukraine heading in a right or wrong direction?**



The population’s support to Zelensky government changed completely in a matter of days after the war began (grey area). Opinion polls by the Ukrainian sociological group “Rating”, 2011-2022

The war demonstrated that **the aspiration to minimize harm to civilians expressed in Russian training materials was a vague principle with no practical mechanism for implementing it.** The Russian army did not prepare its soldiers mentally and logistically for intense interaction with civilians on the battlefield, nor did it enforce any ethical code to preserve civilian rights and minimize casualties. Even if Russia’s political leadership did not initially aim to inflict widespread harm on civilians or commit war crimes, these became inevitable due to an aggregation of factors: the first two weeks’ military fiasco, the mental and logistical unpreparedness of the Russian troops, the pressure exerted on the lower-rank soldiers to achieve results at any cost, and the Kremlin’s long-term delegitimization and vilification of the Ukrainian nation.

In addition, the absence of tools for dealing with civilians at the tactical level, the lack of precision-guided weapon systems (rather the opposite – excessive reliance on massive artillery fire and “dumb bombs”), the political and military echelons’ leniency towards soldiers’ violence and abuse, the lack of legal enforcement regarding war crimes, and the use of irregular military forces (Chechens and Wagner mercenaries) amplified the violence against civilians. Ultimately, the deportation of civilians – including children – to Russia and the Russification policy implemented in the occupied territory **support the accusations of ethnic cleansing and genocide by Russia in Ukraine,** even in the absence of a systematic mass murder policy.

## **Civilians' Role in Shaping Conflicts in the Digital Age**

Due to the idiosyncratic characteristics of the Russia-Ukraine war, one has to apply caution when drawing general lessons regarding the civilian population's impact on the conflict's dynamics. Nevertheless, one of the general and potentially long-term transformations that the war in Ukraine has demonstrated is the exponential increase of civilians' influence on the "digital front." The digital environment served not only as a platform for disseminating messages broadly and rapidly but also as an infrastructure shaping the stakeholders' methods of action and as a thread linking all the players and dimensions of the conflict. It enabled broad, continuous, and real-time interaction between the leadership in Kyiv and the Ukrainian public, between Ukrainian civil society and the Ukrainian armed forces, and between Western civil societies and Ukrainians, both amplifying and accelerating the impact of the war events on public discourse and political decision-making. Digital innovations allowed Ukrainian civilians to influence various aspects of the dynamics of the war (military, political-diplomatic, economic, and information warfare) and enabled Ukraine to compensate for other weaknesses especially in the initial months of the war. For example, Kyiv used information warfare to influence the Western perception of Russia's threat and convince the West to supply lethal weapons to Ukraine. It also encouraged civilians to engage in partisan warfare to compensate for the initially weak offensive capability of the Ukrainian armed forces.

The digital front-civilians nexus that emerged and crystallized during the war in Ukraine has several implications:

1. **In the digital age, harming civilians risks swiftly transforming local conflicts into global ones** due to the powerful emotional mobilization that viral images of war crimes may trigger.
2. **The blurring of boundaries between the military-security and the civilian spheres and between combatants and noncombatants has intensified. Those shifting boundaries also challenge the norms of international humanitarian law**, including those concerning combatants hiding among civilian populations and the right to destroy the enemy's economic-national infrastructure, for example in the energy sector. At the same time, the difficulty to influence the conduct of the conflict in real-time using legal means and the weak deterrence power of future punishment have become increasingly apparent (given Russia's rejection of universal jurisdiction).



3. **It is both possible and recommended to prepare for warfare on the “digital front” by learning from the conflict in Ukraine and recognizing that the enemy is doing the same.** From a defensive perspective, early “digital preparation” aimed at educating civilians to be ready for information warfare is of paramount importance. From an offensive perspective, saving “operational surprises” for the war itself is critical. The eight years of Russian-Ukrainian conflict preceding the war helped Ukraine and the West learn Russian information warfare patterns and develop countermeasures that made the Ukrainian public more immune to Russian influence. Also, there is a tension between “broad but limited” preparedness and “good enough” preparedness for a national emergency. Ukraine’s preparations were far from perfect, but they were done on national and regional levels and allowed for continuous adaptation, learning, and improvement. However, inadequate preparations contributed to the rapid loss of vast territories in the early days of the war, and if not for the Russians’ own failures and a “compensation mechanism” in the form of massive assistance from the West, the damage to Ukraine could have been irreversible.

## **Main Lessons for Israel**

1. Civilians’ importance on the battlefield is expected to increase in Israel’s future conflicts. **More significant efforts are required than in the past to factor this element into strategic and operational planning** while taking into account the heightened risk of misjudgment and miscalculation regarding civilians’ behavior in wartime.
2. **The centrality of the populace’s role must also be considered in aerial operations planning.** In Israel’s future conflicts, the Air Force is expected to be a dominant component in operations in a civilian environment, which will impose constraints on the Air Force’s use of force and affect its ability to achieve its objectives.
3. **Israel’s enemies may broadly use the civilian population to achieve strategic objectives based on lessons learned from the war in Ukraine.** Israel can expect the mobilization of civilians on the battlefield, along with enemy efforts to galvanize governments, public opinion in the West, and international corporations to support it.
4. The image of the rival parties in the international arena crystallizes quickly and is difficult to change. To keep strategic freedom of action during a crisis, **it is vital that Israel pre-plans its campaign on the “digital front” and begins to**

- implement it during routine, non-emergency periods.** This includes, among other things, the use of public diplomacy directed at governments, public opinion, NGOs and business corporations, primarily in the West.
5. Israel should **develop technological infrastructure and information content** to gain advantages on the “digital front” in the civilian sphere during times of conflict. It is worth examining whether Israel can enlist an “army of volunteers” both domestically and globally as part of its toolkit.
  6. Despite the deep organizational and cultural differences between the Russian army and the IDF, the war in Ukraine powerfully demonstrates **that military operations within the civilian population have ramifications on the strategic level** that can influence the balance of forces and political achievements in the conflict.
  7. The war in Ukraine **reinforces the importance of the IDF’s existing operational approach, which balances the principle of fulfilling military objectives with the imperative of minimizing the use of force against civilians.**
  8. Israel should examine its emergency preparedness considering the lessons learned from the war in Ukraine. The military capabilities used in this war, such as massive barrages of precise missiles and Iranian-made drones, demonstrate **the need to prepare the Israeli public and civil defense for the possibility of extreme war scenarios:** a sudden eruption of hostilities on a scale previously unseen in the Israeli home front and nationwide intensive precision strikes leading to persistent heavy damage to Israeli critical national infrastructure (energy, water, communications).

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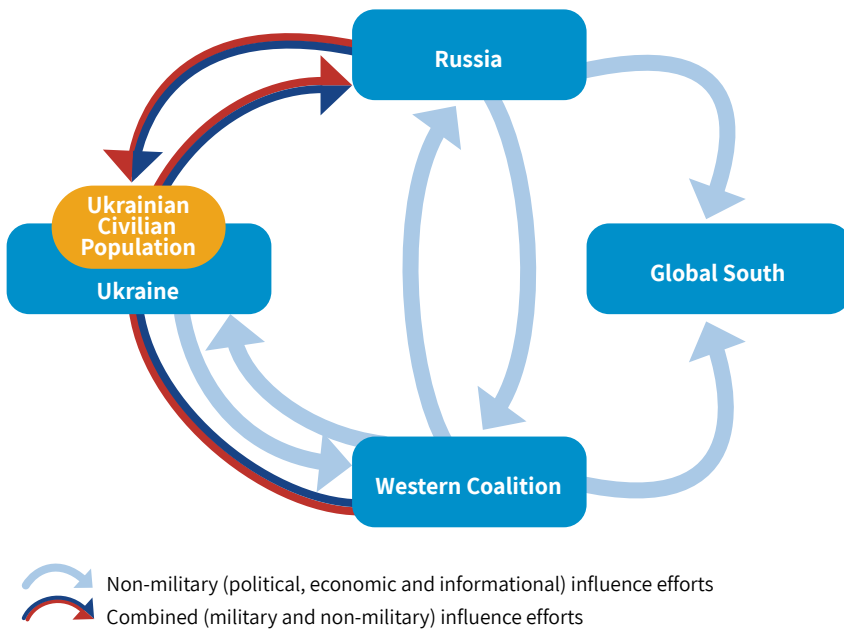
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## Introduction

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The Russia-Ukraine war – the largest military conflict in Europe since World War II - is a case in point of the interaction between a state exerting significant military force (Russia), a defending state (Ukraine), a population caught in the middle (Ukrainian), and international actors, i.e. Western nations supporting Ukraine and applying “hard” power on Russia, and Global South countries (countries in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America), most of which have maintained strategic ambiguity, thereby providing Russia with “breathing space” amid the pressure it has faced from the West.



The interaction between the main actors during the war in Ukraine

The current study aims to examine how the civilian population affects the dynamics of conflict on the modern battlefield at both the strategic and operational levels, based on the case-study of the Russia-Ukraine war (February 2022-February 2023). To this end, this research provides a systemic analysis of the interrelationships between the involved parties through the issue of civilians in armed conflicts.

Did the interaction between the involved parties and their relations to the civilian population shape the course of the war? How did its relations with the civilian population constrain the actions of the attacking state (Russia) and affect its achievements, and in what way did the civilian population impose constraints and provide opportunities for the attacked state (Ukraine)? To what extent did the issue of civilian casualties and war crimes shape the willingness of international actors to intervene in the war? In addressing these questions, we aim to highlight the conceptual approaches of the main strategic actors in the war between Russia and Ukraine with regard to the civilian population and the different leverage tools that these actors employed during the war. Furthermore, this study seeks to identify what is new in this conflict compared to past conflicts regarding the civilian population's influence on the dynamics of war, and how the impact of civilians may appear in future wars.

The focus of this study is the civilian population in Ukraine, which is both an active and passive participant in the war. We analyze the interrelationships between this population and the four actors involved in the war (Russia, Ukraine, the Western camp, and Global South countries). The analysis was conducted across four main dimensions: the actors' strategic objectives, their general conceptual approach to the population in relation to these strategic objectives, their operational toolkit used on civilians (informational tools, military and political-diplomatic actions, and economic pressure of various sorts), and the interactive dynamics between them.

We argue that in the Russia-Ukraine war, **the civilian population has acted as a sub-system within the ecosystem of the war**. This sub-system is becoming central in modern military conflicts, and it can profoundly impact the parties' ability to achieve their strategic objectives as well as the dynamics of warfare. The Ukrainian population has been shaping multiple dimensions of the battlefield and the strategic interaction among the actors in the following ways: as a military obstacle for the attacking state, as an opportunity to weaken the enemy for the defending state, as an active player on the battlefield and in the information sphere, and as a player whose degree of combat participation is increasingly blurred. These roles outline the dynamics of relationships among all the actors involved and deeply affect the conflict itself, particularly due to the empowerment of civilians in the digital age.

## Outline

The report is composed of four chapters. Chapters 1-3 expand on the actors' perspectives. For each actor, we analyze its strategic objectives and their implications for the Ukrainian population; we then define each actor's approach to civilians in the context of the war in Ukraine, while implementing these objectives and map out the action methods used by each actor on the civilian population.

**Chapter 1** will analyze the Russian side, **Chapter 2** will focus on the Ukrainian government's perspective, and **Chapter 3** will discuss the international actors, with an emphasis on the Western camp, and general observations on the Global South countries.

**The last chapter** will present the main conclusions arising from the analysis of the Ukrainian case study regarding the potential dimensions of the civilian population's influence on future conflicts and draw recommendations for Israel.

The present report is a condensed version of a larger research project published in Hebrew by Tel Aviv University's Elrom Center for Air and Space Studies in February 2023. It was not systematically updated in response to later developments in the war in Ukraine. However, some data on the number of casualties and refugees were updated, yet they do not alter the general conclusions of the present work.

We would like to thank ELNET, the Executive Director of ELNET-Israel, Dr. Emmanuel Navon, and ELNET's CFO, Omri Attar for their partnership and support in publishing our research in English. We are grateful to Professor Eviatar Matania, Lt. Col. (Res.) Yuval Kali, Dr. Assaf Heller, Dr. Tomer Fadlon, Prof. Dmitry (Dima) Adamsky, Lt. Col. (Res.) Omer Dank, Roy Zilber, Uri Castel, and Osnat Zilberman, who each contributed in their own special way to the writing of the original research in Hebrew. Gali Arad was extremely helpful in publishing the Hebrew and the English versions. Daniella Blau, Avi Staiman, Joshua Amaru, Nitsan Lear and Miriam Blum worked relentlessly in translating and publishing the English edition.





# Chapter 1

## Russia and the Ukrainian Population in Wartime



### Strategic Objectives

- Dissolution of Ukraine as a sovereign state and its subjugation to Russia
- Weakening the West and limiting its involvement in the war; securing support from the Global South
- Bolstering Russia's ability to withstand external pressures and securing domestic public support for the war

### General Approach to Ukrainian Civilians during the War

Continuous pressure on civilians aimed to undermine their will to resist occupation; to weaken the Ukrainian state, to change its government's position, and to promote pro-Russian alternative leadership. Pressure includes disorientation, demoralization, political and carceral oppression, physical and moral violence, starvation, war-induced freezing conditions, long-term economic damage, and demographic change



### Information Warfare

Reaching out to Ukrainian, Russian, Western audiences and the Global South; disseminating false narratives to ruin the government's reputation in the eyes of the Ukrainian public; lauding the humane behavior of Russian forces vis-à-vis the population while vilifying the Ukrainian armed forces' conduct. Information warfare is used to compensate for weaknesses in other domains



### Military Means

Intimidation of civilians; lack of operational concepts, mechanisms, and moral commitment to minimize collateral damage (extensive use of unguided munitions, lack of doctrinal foundation and training to deal with civilians on the battlefield); lenient attitude of the political and military leadership towards soldiers' violence and war crimes



### Political and Diplomatic Measures

Cultivating collaborators and imposing pro-Russian leadership; coerced Russification and "passportization" (imposing Russian citizenship); referendum on annexation; demographic engineering (refugee crisis, forced displacements, and exacerbating demographic decline); binding political negotiations with humanitarian ones



### Economic Measures

Maximizing pressure on the Ukrainian government by causing severe economic damage to the population and attacking civilian infrastructure; weaponizing civilian access to energy, food and water

## Russia's Strategic Goals

President Putin's personal worldview regarding the Ukrainian state and Ukrainian people played a pivotal role in his decision to go to war and in shaping Russia's strategic goals and operational plan. Most of the Russian elite were surprised by the war, some felt they had been dragged into it unwillingly. Over the past decade, Putin has been obsessed with denying the very existence of a Ukrainian nation and portraying Ukraine's reorientation toward the West as a Western effort to harm and weaken Russia<sup>1</sup>.

Since the invasion of February 24, 2022, Russia pursued three main strategic goals: (1) the dissolution of Ukraine as a sovereign state and its subjugation to Russia; (2) weakening the West and limiting its involvement in the war while securing support from the Global South; and (3) strengthening Russia's ability to withstand external pressures and mobilizing the Russian public's support for the war.

The initial Russian military plan included a lightning-fast seizure of Kiev, overthrowing the Ukrainian government, occupying most of the country within the span of ten days, and completing the takeover, to the point of annexation that was to be concluded by August 2022. This plan relied on four main pillars: conducting a short operation to prevent Western intervention; toppling the central government so that pro-Russian elements in Ukraine could publicly support the Russian occupation; seizing control of the energy infrastructure and the financial system; and decisively defeating the Ukrainian military, which was considered vastly inferior to the Russian army<sup>2</sup>.

In the spirit of this approach, since 2014, the Ukrainian population has been subjected to sustained and multidimensional pressure, combining information (including cyber), and economic warfare, as well as subversive activities. The Russian military invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was supposed to be a culmination of this continuous pressure campaign. The five-pronged invasion, the effort to seize Kiev

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- 1 Vladimir Putin, "Article by Vladimir Putin 'On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians,'" *President of Russia*, July 12, 2021. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181> [accessed: October 30, 2022]; Domańska Maria and Żochowski Piotr, "Putin's article: 'On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians,'" OSW, July 13, 2022. <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2021-07-13/putins-article-historical-unity-russians-and-ukrainians> [accessed: November 22, 2022].
  - 2 Michael Kofman and Jeffrey Edmonds, "Russia's Shock and Awe: Moscow's Use of Overwhelming Force Against Ukraine," *Foreign Affairs*, February 22, 2022. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-02-21/russias-shock-and-awe> [accessed: May 1, 2023]. Mykhaylo Zabrodskyi, Jack Watling, Oleksandr V. Danylyuk and Nick Reynolds. "Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfighting from Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: February–July 2022," RUSI, November 30, 2022. <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/special-resources/preliminary-lessons-russias-unconventional-operations-during-russo-ukrainian-war-february-2022> [accessed: January 23, 2023], 7-8.

quickly, missile strikes across the country, the use of collaborators, cyber-attacks, and digital and information warfare were all intended to create a systemic shock among the Ukrainian population (as part of the broader Ukrainian state structure) that was in turn supposed to apply pressure on the political and military leadership for rapid capitulation<sup>3</sup>.

## Civilians as a Pressure Channel on the Enemy System

While Western academic literature (including Western military literature) deals intensively with the status and fate of civilians in warfare, both theoretically and practically, the discussion of this issue is rather anemic in the Russian military. In general, Russian authors are very critical of the “excessive” importance the West attaches to civilian rights and “humanitarian interventions,” seeing them as a means for the West to justify external involvement in conflicts and promote its global dominance. Having said that, Russian military academic literature does refer to the needs to minimize civilian harm in the context of kinetic warfare, yet it is scarcely mentioned, especially when it comes to its practical implementation.

The Russian Ground Forces’ combat regulations, which have not been updated since 2005, give only marginal attention to the interaction between the army and civilians. Out of approximately 200 pages, only half a page is devoted to this issue, dealing with it only in general terms, requiring every soldier to be familiar with international humanitarian law and to behave humanely toward civilians. The sections dealing with the conquering of urban areas rarely mention civilians, except for the need to take their movements into account as they may interfere with the army’s activity<sup>4</sup>. The Russian army’s routine regulations mention soldiers’ obligation to behave in a dignified manner toward civilians, their lives, and their property, and place

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3 Daniel Rakov, Assaf Heller, Sarah Fainberg and Itamar Heller, “Boo or Boom? Russia’s Opening Airstrikes in Ukraine through the Lens of Moscow’s Strategic Design,” Research Report (0122E), *Elrom Air and Space Research Center, Tel Aviv University*, November 2022. [https://social-sciences.tau.ac.il/sites/socsci.tau.ac.il/files/media\\_server/social/poli-heb/elrom/Elrom\\_Research\\_0122E\\_may23.pdf](https://social-sciences.tau.ac.il/sites/socsci.tau.ac.il/files/media_server/social/poli-heb/elrom/Elrom_Research_0122E_may23.pdf) [Accessed: May 2, 2023].

4 Ministerstvo Oborony Rossijskoj Federacii Министерство Обороны Российской Федерации [Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation]. “Boevoj ustav po podgotovke i vedeniju obshhevojskovogo boja. Chast' 3: Vzvod, Otdelenie, Tank,” “Боевой устав по подготовке и ведению общевойскового боя. Часть 3: Взвод, Отделение, Танк” [Combat Regulations for the Preparation and Conduct of Combined Arms Combat. Part 3: Platoon, Squad, Tank], Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo Москва: Военное Издательство, 2005. [http://militera.lib.ru/regulations/0/g/2005\\_bu3.pdf](http://militera.lib.ru/regulations/0/g/2005_bu3.pdf), p. 11. [accessed: May 1, 2023].

responsibility on commanders to ensure that this is done<sup>5</sup>. However, the war in Ukraine points to a significant gap between these guidelines and the soldiers' and commanders' actual behavior, making the statements in these documents, which were approved and signed by Russia's president, a dead letter.

For example, an article on the tactics to employ in seizure of population centers by Russian marine forces, published in 2021 in the leading Russian military journal *Voyennaya Mysl*, does not focus at all on the protection of civilians. It does not even mention civilians but analyzes optimal methods for attacking population centers, such as using fire strikes, dismantling enemy systems in the city, or "purging" urban areas of the enemy<sup>6</sup>. The issue is also absent in the booklet, *A Brief Guide on Military-Political Work for Graduates of a Military Higher Education Institution*, which was published in October 2022, and presented on the Russian Ministry of Defense website as recommended reading material for officers. A negative reference to harming the civilian population appears incidentally in only a single sentence in one of the guide's 86 pages and is described as a possible "by-product of desertion"<sup>7</sup>.

Since the invasion of February 2022, the principle of protecting Ukrainian civilians appears only marginally in Russian official statements. Furthermore, Russian propagandists call for the punishment of the Ukrainian population, to the point of erasing cities and foregoing self-restraint in using force. In Russian opinion journalism, the blurring between civilians and fighters is salient: civilians are portrayed as "spies" and "saboteurs" who are "activated by the Ukrainian security services and military" and therefore are to be treated as fighters rather than noncombatants. A booklet for Russian soldiers and conscripts published during the war by the Afghanistan Veterans Organization noted that the erosion of boundaries between

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- 5 "Obshhevoinskie ustavy VS RF" Общевоинские уставы ВС РФ [General Military Regulations of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation]. <https://ivo.pnzgu.ru/vuc.pnzgu.ru/page/48091> [accessed, May 1, 2023].
  - 6 Sergej Nikolaevič Volyk, Maksim Pavlovič Berendeev & Il ja Alievič Sukorev Сергей Николаевич Волык, Максим Павлович Берендеев & Илья Алиевич Суколев. "О Применении Десантно-Штурмовых Подразделений Воздушно-Десантных Войск в Современных Военных Конфликтах," [On the Use of Airborne Assault Units of the Airborne Troops in Modern Military Conflicts], *Voennaja mysl* Военная мысль, 7 (2021):13-24.
  - 7 "Kratkij spravocnik vypusknika voennogo vuza po voenno-politicheskoj rabote: uchebno-metodicheskoe posobie," "Краткий справочник выпускника военного вуза по военно-политической работе: учебно-методическое пособие," [A Brief Guide on Military-Political Work for a Graduate of a Military High Education Institution: an educational-methodological manual], Novossibirsk, NVVKU, 2022. <https://vvo.ric.mil.ru/upload/site176/iVDA27rgPg.pdf> [accessed: November 20, 2022].

the civilian and military components in the Ukraine war legitimizes the use of violent measures against civilians in the conflict zone (including arrests, investigation, forced evacuation, and more). The booklet was available on the Russian Ministry of Defense's education website in the months following the invasion before it was removed in January 2023<sup>8</sup>.

At the same time, Russia's contemporary military thinking, known as "New Generation Warfare" (*Voiny Novogo Pokolenia*), approaches the civilian population primarily as an "obstacle" or a "zone of operations." "New Generation Warfare" is a collection of operational ideas and concepts, and not a strictly codified military doctrine, yet it heavily influenced the military planning of the Russian military before the invasion to Ukraine. Its intellectual roots are both Russian military thinking (from the Tsarist and Soviet eras to the present day) and modern Western military writings. Regarding the civilian population, "New Generation Warfare" does not deal with the rights of civilians in conflict zones and ways to protect them, but rather with the need to influence and shape the enemy's public consciousness in order to achieve victory in war.

The "New Generation Warfare" approach assumes that in contemporary conflicts the dividing line between the civilian and military-security spheres is blurred and that the West has been waging hybrid warfare against the Russian government and people for decades in an attempt to turn the Russian population against its leadership. The "New Generation Warfare" concept views civilians as an integral component of the enemy system. That system can be weakened by exerting continuous pressure on the population before and during the kinetic confrontation. Therefore, the focus in dealing with the civilian component in the enemy's system is on influencing its consciousness by demoralizing and instilling fear in the population. The goal is to break the civilians' spirit and cause them to put pressure on their political and military leadership to comply with Russian demands. The expectation is that kinetic force will serve as a final and decisive step following the ongoing efforts to

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8 "Zhivu, Srazhajus', Pobezhdaju! Pravila Zhizni Na Vojne," "Живу, Сражаюсь, Побеждаю! Правила Жизни На Войне" [I Live, I Fight, I Win. Life Rules in War], *Ministerstvo Oborony Rossijskoj Federacii* Министерство Обороны Российской Федерации [Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation]. *Obshherossijskaja Obshhestvennaja Organizacija Rossijskij Sojuz Veteranov Afganistana i Special'nyh Voennyh Operacij* Общероссийская Общественная Организация Российский Союз Ветеранов Афганистана И Специальных Военных Операций [All-Russian Public Organization Russian Union of Veterans of Afghanistan and Special Military Operations]. Moskva 2022, 17. <https://vvo.ric.mil.ru/upload/site176/sQuillbANp.pdf> [accessed: November 20, 2022].

demoralize components of the enemy's system, including the civilian population, thus minimizing the need for prolonged kinetic warfare<sup>9</sup>.

## Russia's Arsenal against the Ukrainian Population

This subchapter presents the various tools Russia employed in an effort to influence the Ukrainian population. These are divided into four categories: information warfare, military force, political-diplomatic methods, and economic pressure. These categories will also underlie our analysis of Ukraine and the international actors involved.

### Information Warfare

Russian thinking about **information warfare**, or in Russian terminology, "**information confrontation**" (*informatsionnoe protivoborstvo*), has developed as a standalone concept; however, it is also an integral part of the aforementioned "New Generation Warfare" approach. It is conducted continuously with the aim of influencing the perceptions of reality among the rival system's leadership and public alike<sup>10</sup>. The centrality of information warfare in the Russian "toolbox" derives from it effectively serving as the "glue" between its other tools<sup>11</sup>. Russia's information warfare is designed to amplify the effect of the use of military force, diplomatic or economic pressure, and humanitarian efforts.

The Ukrainian population played three roles in Russia's information warfare:

1. **As a target for influence:** Russia sought to influence the Ukrainians' behavior by distilling narratives regarding the unity of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples, casting doubt among Ukrainians on the need for an independent Ukrainian state, negatively portraying the West, and eliminating local opposition to the occupation.
2. **As an instrument for weakening the Ukrainian state**, overthrowing its government, and undermining its public legitimacy.

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9 Jānis Bērziņš, "Not 'Hybrid' but New Generation Warfare," in *Russia's Military Strategy and Doctrine*, ed. Glen E. Howard and Matthew Czekaj. Washington, DC: Jamestown Foundation, 2019.

10 Keir Giles, *Handbook of Russian Information Warfare*, Rome: NATO Defence College Research Division, 2016. <https://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=995> [accessed: November 28, 2022].

11 Dmitry (Dima) Adamsky, "Cross-Domain Coercion: The Current Russian Art of Strategy," *IFRI*, Proliferation Papers, No. 54, November 2015, p. 33. <https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/pp54adamsky.pdf> [accessed: November 28, 2022].

3. **As an operational domain:** This involves recruiting collaborators, intelligence sources, and promoting the operational needs of the Russian military.

In the past decade, and particularly since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia has developed a sophisticated mechanism for conducting information warfare against Ukraine. Some of the components of this mechanism are generic in the sense that they can serve any Russian operational arena and goal. For example, Russia's central state-controlled media outlets (television channels, news websites, and news agencies) broadcast anti-Ukrainian narratives in the years leading up to and during the invasion. Alongside these outlets, dedicated communication and media tools aimed on Ukraine were created for the purpose of filling the Ukrainian "information space" with Russian messages.

The most prominent dedicated mechanism for the Ukrainian arena is the Fifth Service of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB). Originally, this was the directorate responsible for gathering intelligence from outside Russia and the former Soviet republics, but over the past decade, it has become responsible for collection of intelligence and writing reports about Ukraine to the Kremlin and initiating influence operations inside Ukraine<sup>12</sup>. The Fifth Service worked to recruit an extensive network of collaborators in all Ukrainian political, security, and economic systems. These collaborators provided Moscow with inside information and were supposed to assist Russian invading forces in taking control of Ukraine by providing secret information and deliberately creating vulnerabilities.

Since 2014 and prior to the war in 2022, Russian units targeted the Ukrainian cyber space in operations, some of which were unprecedented, breaking global taboos regarding target selection for cyber-attack and innovative *modus operandi*<sup>13</sup>. During this period, Russia shut down public services (government institutions, banks, power stations) in order to undermine the basic resilience and cohesiveness of Ukrainian society and drive a wedge between the government and the public, ostensibly demonstrating the Ukrainian government's failure to handle the challenges of managing the state.

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12 Roman Anin, "How Putin Decided to Go to War," *Important Stories*, May 16, 2022. <https://importantstories.media/en/opinions/2022/05/16/how-putin-decided-to-go-to-war/> [accessed: May 2, 2023].

13 Maggie Smith, "Russia Has Been at War with Ukraine for Years – in Cyberspace," *The Conversation*, February 7, 2022. <https://theconversation.com/russia-has-been-at-war-with-ukraine-for-years-in-cyberspace-176221> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

Certain conceptions about the Ukrainian population took a central place **in the strategic narratives President Putin used to justify the invasion of Ukraine**. He presented a revisionist historical narrative that denied the existence of a Ukrainian nation separate from the Russian one<sup>14</sup>. The idea of Ukrainian independence was portrayed as a historical “fiction” established by the “Collective West” in order to turn Ukraine into an anti-Russian “fifth column”<sup>15</sup>. Putin justified the invasion by claiming that the government in Kiev had allegedly conducted a “genocide” against Russian speakers in the Donbass region. He put forward a narrative that the Ukrainian population as a whole had fallen victim to “Nazi” and Russophobic government policies that served the West as a tool for weakening Russia.

The colossal efforts the Russians invested in preparing the Ukrainian information space for the invasion were characterized by a deep assessment failure regarding the population’s view and potential reaction. The Russians did not grasp the strength of the political changes that had taken place in Ukrainian society since 2014, nor did they properly assess its ability to resist Russian aggression. The FSB manipulated data and spread misleading reports to support the invasion plan, which was based on the assumption that the Ukrainian population lacked the will and ability to resist. It is unclear whether Putin was informed of the non-public survey results that showed, just a few weeks before the invasion, that 48% of Ukrainians intended to fight for their country, and only 2% of them said they would consider a Russian invasion an act of “liberation”<sup>16</sup>.

At the beginning of the war, the Russian propaganda campaign tried to convince the Ukrainian public that the operation was meant to bring justice to the Ukrainian people, who were facing a dual internal-external threat from a hostile “puppet regime” in Kyiv controlled by the West. The campaign particularly emphasized reassuring messages, claiming that Russian forces were exercising the utmost caution in dealing with the innocent civilian population. In reality, interrogations of Russian war prisoners

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14 Marlene Laruelle and Ivan Grek, “Decoding Putin’s Speeches: The Three Ideological Lines of Russia’s Military Intervention in Ukraine,” *Russia Matters*, February 25, 2022. <https://www.russiamatters.org/analysis/decoding-putins-speeches-three-ideological-lines-russias-military-intervention-ukraine> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

15 According to Putin’s statement on the eve of the invasion, the main purpose of the “Special Military Operation” was to “correct” the historical mistake attributed to Lenin, of establishing a Ukrainian political entity that was followed in the post-Soviet era by transformation of Ukraine into an anti-Russian lever for the West.

16 Catherine Belton and Greg Miller, “Russia’s Spies Misread Ukraine and Mised Kremlin as War Loomed,” *Washington Post*, August 19, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/interactive/2022/russia-fsb-intelligence-ukraine-war/> [accessed: October 30, 2022].



captured by the Ukrainians since February 25 revealed that Russian soldiers were not even aware they were being sent to fight in Ukraine, and that they had not been prepared about how to behave when encountering the civilian population<sup>17</sup>. On the other hand, the Russians accused Ukraine of cynically exploiting the civilian population and turning it into “human shields” for its soldiers<sup>18</sup>. Labelling the data published by Ukraine that indicated widespread harm to civilians as a result of Russian military operations as “fake news,”<sup>19</sup> Russia accused the Ukrainians of deliberately harming noncombatants to create provocations and cast responsibility on Russia. Notably, a significant part of Russia’s propaganda activities regarding its army’s treatment of the Ukrainian population was directed at the Russian public itself.

## Using Military Force

Russian leaders and military thinkers understand that excessive violence against civilians could trigger popular resistance, international and domestic criticism, and political and economic pressure. Therefore, they sought to avoid it in the context of the war in Ukraine. However, in general, they have no principled-ethical objection to the disproportionate use of force against civilians. With the exception of information warfare tools available to some in the military, the Russian army as a whole and the average Russian soldier lack the understanding, weapons, and training designed to deal with the population without resorting to harming it<sup>20</sup>. A prominent example of this is the Russian army’s unpreparedness (before the invasion) for urban warfare missions<sup>21</sup> and its excessive reliance on unguided artillery and rockets i.e. on contactless

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17 *Video of a Russian POW, Рыбарь Rybar*, February 25, 2022. <https://t.me/rybar/24972> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

18 Maksym Levin and Pavel Polityuk, “Ukraine and Russia Agree on Evacuation Corridors as U.S. Punishes Oligarchs,” Reuters, March 4, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/top-wrap-10-ukraine-seeks-ceasefire-humanitarian-corridors-talks-with-russia-2022-03-03/> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

19 "Sročno Razoblačen Fejk IPSO SSO VSU. My Svjazalis S Žitelem Čugueva Dlja Verifikacii Gibeli Mal'čika Sročno Razoblačen Fejk ИПСО ССО ВСУ. Мы Связались С Жителем Чугуева Для Верификации Гибели Мальчика," [A Fake of the Informational and Psychological Operations of the Special Operations Forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine Was Urgently Dismissed. We Contacted a Resident of Chuguyev to Verify the Death of the Boy], *Rybar*, February 24, 2022. <https://t.me/rybar/24612> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

20 This conclusion is based on a search for materials on the subject of civilians in combat in recent 5 years editions of the leading journal of the Russian Ministry of Defense – *Voennaja mysl'* (*Военная мысль*, The Military Thought).

21 Gary Anderson, “Russia Doesn't Train Troops for Urban Warfare. It's about to Learn the Consequences in Ukraine,” *Military.com*, March 8, 2022. <https://www.military.com/daily-news/opinions/2022/03/08/russia-doesnt-train-troops-urban-warfare-its-about-learn-consequences-ukraine.html> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

warfare that spares soldiers from the moral burden of physically encountering their potential victims.

In the kinetic aspects, the “New Generation Warfare” approach stipulated a synchronized and continuous military offensive activity throughout all the depth of enemy territory, in which precision weapons systems and special forces would be used alongside “traditional” conventional means, based on accurate and continuous intelligence<sup>22</sup>. However, there is a significant gap between this concept and the reality of the Russian military’s force buildup. The war in Ukraine has shown that the Russian army did not manage to prepare before the invasion precise firepower capabilities, had difficulty integrating real-time intelligence in the targeting process, and failed to develop a large corps of special forces.

In an attempt to bridge the gap in the Russian military’s ability to deal with masses of civilians, new and reorganized military and paramilitary frameworks have been established in recent years specifically for dealing with civilian populations (as their primary mission or as one of their primary missions). For example, in 2012, a military police force was established, its tasks including dealing with civilian populations during military conflicts and the “restoration of peace” phase. Alongside the military, the National Guard, the Rosgvardia (which includes Chechen units known for their brutality and actually functioning independently), FSB units, and paramilitary forces, including Wagner Group mercenaries and various volunteer units, entered Ukraine. Although most of these forces were apparently designed to cope mostly with non-military threats, their pre-war activity did not demonstrate a “soft” attitude toward civilians. On the contrary, mercenary and “volunteer” units were able to exercise excessive violence against civilians, while their extra-governmental status allowed the Russian regime to evade responsibility for their deeds.

The Kremlin’s flawed assumptions regarding Ukrainian national identity and the weakness of the country’s political institutions influenced the military planning of the invasion. In the early days of the war, Russian commanders were instructed to be careful not to harm civilians and to minimize damage to economic infrastructure. The Russians sought to maximize the territory they occupied in the first days of the war and bypass urban centers without delay. However, Ukrainian resistance, logistical difficulties, coordination problems between forces, and the overextension of the attack halted the rapid progress. The Russian army soon found itself in state of

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22 Jānis Bērziņš, “Not ‘Hybrid’ but New Generation Warfare”.

intense friction with the Ukrainian population, resulting in the erosion of restraints against harming civilians.

From the beginning of the invasion, some Russian military moves were designed to disorient the public aiming to reduce its resistance to the occupation. The missile barrage in the first hours of the war was intended to sow terror by striking targets throughout the country, so that a significant part of the population would directly experience the war even if it was far from the main invasion axes<sup>23</sup>. In addition, military convoys that crossed the border from many directions were meant to frighten the population and create the impression that the Ukrainian government and its army were incompetent and that the Russian takeover would be completed in a short time. The dissemination of reports on the arrival of Chechen fighters, renown for being ruthless, was intended to instill fear in the public that the continuation of the war could become even more violent if the Ukrainians did not cooperate<sup>24</sup>. The military pressure on the population (and via it, on the leadership) escalated in the fall of 2022, when Russia began systematically targeting Ukraine's electricity infrastructure in order to intensify the public's fear about its ability to safely survive the winter<sup>25</sup>.



Blackout in Ukraine following a Russian attack on its electrical infrastructure in the fall of 2022

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23 Rakov, Heller et al., "Boo or Boom."

24 Justin Ling, "Russia Tries to Terrorize Ukraine with Images of Chechen Soldiers," *Foreign Policy*, February 26, 2022. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/02/26/russia-chechen-propaganda-ukraine/> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

25 Aura Sabadus, "Ukraine needs urgent help to counter Putin's energy infrastructure attacks," *Atlantic Council*, November 14, 2022. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/ukraine-needs-urgent-help-to-counter-putins-energy-infrastructure-attacks/> [accessed: November 20, 2022].

## Harming Civilians: Part of Russian Military Strategy?

Russia's military history over the last decades involved inflicting widespread harm to civilians, and in the current war, the Ukrainian side has also described Russia as a "terror state," accusing it of committing war crimes<sup>26</sup>. In light of this, the question arises as to whether brutality is a deliberate component of the Russian military strategy or whether it is perceived in Russia as an inevitable evil accompanying any war.

The Russian military committed numerous and severe incidents of violence, including many that can be defined as war crimes<sup>27</sup>. The UN data regarding the number of civilians harmed support the claim that the Russian military is not doing everything required to prevent widespread harm to the population, and rather that it is systematically and indiscriminately targeting Ukrainian civilians. Since the beginning of the war until April 23, 2023, the UN identified 8,574 civilians killed and 14,441 civilians injured – a figure that includes casualties in Ukrainian territories that were under Russian control prior to the conflict<sup>28</sup>. It should be mentioned however that the number of civilian casualties in the war is relatively low (in absolute terms) compared to other violent conflicts, such as the war in Syria (2012–2022: about 30,000 civilians killed per year),<sup>29</sup> Iraq (2003–2016: about 15,000 civilians killed per year and almost 30,000

26 The war crimes done by the Russian forces in Ukraine is a complicated issue that is extensively investigated by official and civil society organizations. The current study doesn't focus on this topic, though the authors are convinced that this is indeed a widespread phenomenon, based on a testimony of Ukrainian citizens, such as mentioned in the following UN report: OHCHR, "A/77/533: Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine - Note by the Secretary-General," October 18, 2022. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/reports/a77533-independent-international-commission-inquiry-ukraine-note-secretary> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

27 UN, "Killings of civilians: summary executions and attacks on individual civilians in Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Sumy regions in the context of the Russian Federation's armed attack against Ukraine," December 7, 2022. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/killings-civilians-summary-executions-and-attacks-individual-civilians> [accessed: January 17, 2022].

28 The number of civilians killed in Ukraine is unknown, since reliable data collection takes time, and the occupation of Eastern regions of Ukraine by Russia does not allow to collect such a data. However, the figures released by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights could suggest an order of magnitude of Ukrainian civilians killed, although the UN underscores, that the actual numbers are significantly higher.

United Nations. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Ukraine: civilian casualty update 24 April 2023," April 24, 2023. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2023/04/ukraine-civilian-casualty-update-24-april-2023> [accessed, May 2, 2023].

29 According to estimates by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in the summer of 2022, 306,000 civilians have been killed in the ten-year civil war in Syria.

United Nations, "UN Human Rights Office estimates more than 306,000 civilians were killed over 10 years in Syria conflict," *Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights*, June 22, 2022. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/06/un-human-rights-office-estimates-more-306000-civilians-were-killed-over-10> [accessed: November 20, 2022].

at the peak)<sup>30</sup>, and Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992–1995: about 7,500 civilians killed per year, and more than 20,000 at the peak of the war)<sup>31</sup>.

The ethos of the Russian military is based on myths from the “Great Patriotic War,” according to which the Russian-Soviet soldier is the “liberator” who cares for the needs of the occupied population, as opposed to the Nazi soldier who is uncontrollably violent. Although this is the spirit in which soldiers are educated in the Russian army, evidence from the battlefield shows that incidents of violence against civilians are quite common and are either encouraged or covered up by commanders<sup>32</sup>. Preventing such acts is left up to the soldiers and officers’ personal judgment<sup>33</sup>.

Significant harm to the population and evidence of war crimes committed by Russia began to emerge in the early days of the invasion. However, for the Russian military and its political leadership, these are not a goal in and of themselves, but rather a regrettable yet inevitable byproduct of the war. First, tools that can prevent harm to civilians are either lacking or non-existent in the Russian military. The Russian military does not have a combat doctrine designed to prevent harm to civilians and lacks accurate munition and intelligence systems as well as specialized forces trained for fighting in urban areas. As a result, it tends to rely on unguided artillery systems and “dumb bombs” as a central means of achieving its military goals, even if the collateral damage includes infrastructure destruction and harm to civilians. The pressure that the Kremlin applies on the military and that senior military ranks exert on the lower-rank soldiers to deliver military achievements have led to a high number of casualties in populated areas since the early days of the invasion<sup>34</sup>.

Second, previous conflicts of the Russian army demonstrate that the difficulty of achieving military and political objectives on the battlefield leads to **attacks on national and civilian infrastructure** and the destruction of residential neighborhoods

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30 “Documented civilian deaths from violence”, *Iraq Body Count Project*. <https://www.iraqbodycount.org/database/> [accessed: November 20, 2022].

31 Mirsad Tokača, “The Bosnian Book of the Dead: Human Losses in Bosnia and Herzegovina 1991-1995.” Sarajevo: Istraživačko Dokumentacioni centar, 2012, p. 113.

32 Gall Carlotta, “‘Fear Still Remains’: Ukraine Finds Sexual Crimes Where Russian Troops Ruled,” *New York Times*, January 5, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/05/world/europe/ukraine-sexual-violence-russia.html> [accessed: January 5, 2023]

33 Dima Shvets, “Nas naebali prostite Нас наебали, простите [We were fucked up, sorry]”, *Mediazona*, August 19, 2022. <https://zona.media/article/2022/08/19/filatyeu> [accessed February 2, 2023].

34 “Cluster Bombs Dropped in the Ukraine City of Kharkiv: 7NEWS,” *YouTube*, March 1, 2022. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=npB-9eHBL\\_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=npB-9eHBL_8) [accessed: October 30, 2022].

as a means for putting pressure on the enemy<sup>35</sup>. In the war in Ukraine, Russia has systematically attacked energy infrastructure, dams, and industrial plants in order to harm civilians and use them to exert heavy pressure on the government to submit and comply with its demands<sup>36</sup>.

Third, the Russian security establishment is driven by a deep-seated culture of **disregard for human life, intimidation and punishment**. Soldiers are subjected to pressure from their commanders to complete their missions at any cost and are threatened with personal punishment if they fail. An organization that does not prioritize the well-being of its soldiers is unlikely to make a concerted effort to avoid harming civilians and their rights. Such a culture leads to acts of aggression by individual soldiers toward civilians in the field<sup>37</sup>.

Fourth, the security and political establishment in Russia has displayed tolerance toward violent acts and war crimes committed by Russian forces against the Ukrainian population, including many documented cases of systematic sexual violence committed during the war<sup>38</sup>. Russian security and propaganda agencies categorically deny that any wrongdoing has been committed toward civilians and there have been no documented cases of punishment or prosecution of Russian soldiers following violent events. In addition, the Russian government publicly supports military units accused by Ukraine and the West of committing war crimes<sup>39</sup>. De facto approval and ex post facto whitewashing of war crimes legitimize the use of violence against the civilian population; this stems from the Red Army's long-standing motto that "war is war."

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35 Mona Yacoubian, "How Russia May Reprise Its Syrian Playbook in Ukraine". See also: Media Resistance Group, "Vtoraja Čečenskaja Vojna i Vojna v Ukraine: Kolonial'noe Nasilie Kak Opora Vlasti Putina Vtoraja Čečenskaja Vojna i Vojna v Ukraine: Kolonial'noe Nasilie Kak Opora Vlasti Putina," [The Second Chechen War and the War in Ukraine: Colonial Violence as a Supportive Base for Putin's Power], *syg.ma*, May 12, 2022. <https://syg.ma/@media-resistance-group/vtoraia-chiechienskaia-voina-i-voina-v-ukrainie-kolonialnoie-nasilie-kak-opora-vlasti-putina> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

36 Ministry of Defense GB (2022, September 18). *Twitter*. <https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1571373728008736769> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

37 Interview with a former Israeli defense official specializing in the Russian military and the war in Ukraine, August 31, 2022, Tel Aviv.

38 Sarah Fainberg and Céline Marangé, "Between Intentionality and Inevitability: Uncovering the Enablers of Russian War Crimes in Ukraine", *The Russia Program at GW*, April 2023. [https://therussiaprogram.org/onlinepapers\\_1](https://therussiaprogram.org/onlinepapers_1) [Accessed: May 1, 2023]

39 "Putin Honors 64<sup>th</sup> Brigade Accused of Bucha Massacre," *Ukrinform*, April 18, 2022. <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-ato/3461024-putin-honors-64th-brigade-accused-of-bucha-massacre.html> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

## Political and Diplomatic Actions

As noted earlier, Ukrainian collaborators were meant to serve as a key component in the Russian invasion plan in February 2022. Collaborators in government and lower ranks were supposed to assist Russia in occupying territories and subsequently managing them. Areas that were occupied for long periods of time illustrate how Ukrainian collaborators helped the Russians take over by providing sensitive insider information and promoting operational decisions on the Ukrainian side that assisted the Russians. While in most cases the collaborators failed to secure a Russian takeover – their failure in Kyiv is particularly salient in this context – according to some estimates, in the early days of the invasion, there was a real danger of Kyiv falling and the entire Russian plan succeeding<sup>40</sup>. Had the other components of the Russian invasion plan materialized, the collaborators might have been more helpful and willing to serve Russian objectives.

Kherson, the only regional capital the Russians temporarily succeeded in occupying, represents a good example of how Russia sought to gain control over the territories it occupied. Up to 75% of Kherson's residents left the city following the occupation<sup>41</sup>. The mayor, who was loyal to Kyiv, was replaced by pro-Russian leadership that encouraged residents to obtain Russian citizenship, cut off access to Ukrainian media and internet connections and replaced them with Russian media and internet connections. The forced referendums on annexing Kherson to Russia were staged to provide a legal “stamp of approval” for the takeover<sup>42</sup>.

The extensive and rapid Russian invasion was intended from the outset to accelerate the transition from the kinetic phase to the diplomatic-political phase of the operation. The goal was to paralyze the attacked country and elicit concessions around the negotiating table regarding its territorial sovereignty (the “15-Point Plan,” which includes securing Ukraine's neutral status and recognition of the special status of Donbas) and achieve a ceasefire on terms that were favorable to Russia<sup>43</sup>. In the early days of the war, the negotiations between Russia and Ukraine were framed

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40 Zabrodskyi, Watling, Danylyuk and Reynolds. “Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfighting from Russia's Invasion of Ukraine,” 12.

41 Hanna Arhirova, “‘We survived’: Kherson comes alive after Russian withdrawal,” *AP*, November 20, 2022. <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-europe-business-46c1061fc44458c903cf12fa442c57e1> [accessed: November 20, 2022].

42 “Kherson: How Is Russia Imposing Its Rule in Occupied Ukraine?”, *BBC News*, May 11, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-61338617> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

43 Max Seddon et al. “Ukraine and Russia explore neutrality plan in peace talks,” *Financial Times*, March 16, 2022. <https://www.ft.com/content/7b341e46-d375-4817-be67-802b7fa77ef1> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

asymmetrically (with relatively low-ranking Russian representatives as opposed to senior Ukrainian officials) and were intended to put pressure on Ukraine, both directly and through Western countries, to lay down its arms and accept humiliating Russian dictates.

**Russia exploited humanitarian issues and population movements to advance its military goals in the war.** This was driven by three main motives: military, demographic, and psychological. On the military front, Russia used the issue of humanitarian corridors for an operational-tactical purpose: evacuating the population from the battlefield in order to remove restrictions on the use of force<sup>44</sup>. In the first weeks of the war, Russian-Ukrainian talks regarding humanitarian corridors, the evacuation of civilians, prisoner swap and return of bodies were held at the same time as talks on a ceasefire and through similar channels.

In order to maintain control over Ukrainian civilians, Russia established **sorting and separation mechanisms** (“filtration,” as Russia defined it), including concentration camps that were established before the start of the war near the Ukraine-Russia border<sup>45</sup>. These mechanisms were intended to help the Russians interrogate millions of Ukrainians and neutralize those who were considered “challenging” (by interrogating, arresting, torturing, and deporting them to penal colonies)<sup>46</sup>.

**On the demographic front, Russia sought to increase the Russian population through a forced displacement of Ukrainian civilians** to territories located in the “Russian world” (the Russian Federation, Belarus, and the occupied territories in Ukraine), in order to hinder Ukraine’s recovery and to mitigate, at least in part, the demographic crisis from which Russia is suffering.

**The demographic changes in Ukraine are one of Russia’s main “achievements” in the war to date.** As of April 2023, it is estimated that about 33% of Ukraine’s population (about 14 million out of approximately 41 million<sup>47</sup>) have become displaced persons

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44 Interview with a former Israeli security official specializing in the Russian military and the war in Ukraine, August 31, 2022, Tel Aviv.

45 “Mapping the Filtration System in Donetsk Oblast,” *Conflict Observatory*, August 25, 2022. <https://hub.conflictobservatory.org/portal/apps/sites/#/home/pages/filtration-1> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

46 Ilze Brands Kehris, “Human rights concerns related to forced displacement in Ukraine”, September 7, 2020. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2022/09/human-rights-concerns-related-forced-displacement-ukraine> [accessed: November 28, 2022].

47 The figure 41 million is attributed in Wikipedia to the Ukrainian Central Bureau of Statistics, but the data is not available. “Demographics of Ukraine,” *Wikipedia*. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics\\_of\\_Ukraine#cite\\_note-ukrstat\\_population-2](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Ukraine#cite_note-ukrstat_population-2) [accessed: December 30, 2022].



and refugees. Around 8.4 million Ukrainian refugees currently reside in Europe (about 8.2 million<sup>48</sup>) and in the United States (220,000<sup>49</sup>), and another 5.4 million are internally displaced persons (a decrease from about 8 million in May 2022<sup>50</sup>).



Ukrainian refugees, Lviv, March 2022

In terms of propaganda, Moscow sought to use its humanitarian activities as a basis for gaining legitimacy regarding the use of Russian force and its collateral damage. Similar to Russian humanitarian activity during the war in Syria,<sup>51</sup> Russian humanitarianism in Ukraine was largely hollow: symbolic displays of humanitarian efforts, which, given their limited scope, were not intended to significantly improve the plight of the population<sup>52</sup>.

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48 UNHCR, "Ukraine Refugee Situation". <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine> [accessed: May 2, 2023].

49 "Remarks by President Biden and President Zelenskyy of Ukraine in Joint Press Conference," *The White House*, December 22, 2022. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/12/21/remarks-by-president-biden-and-president-zelenskyy-of-ukraine-in-joint-press-conference/> [accessed: December 30, 2022].

50 "Ukraine - Internal Displacement Report - General Population Survey Round 12," *The International Organization for Migration (IOM)*, January 23, 2023. <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/ukraine-internal-displacement-report-general-population-survey-round-12-16-23-january-2023> [accessed: February 3, 2023].

51 "What the war in Syria tells us about Russia's use of humanitarian corridors," *NPR*, March 8, 2022. <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/08/1085097957/what-the-war-in-syria-tells-about-russias-use-of-humanitarian-corridors> [accessed: November 28, 2022].

52 Matthew Page and Paul Stronski, "How Russia's Hollow Humanitarianism Hurt Its Vaccine Policy in Africa," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, April 28, 2022. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/04/28/how-russia-s-hollow-humanitarianism-hurt-its-vaccine-diplomacy-in-africa-pub-87004> [accessed: November 28, 2022].

## Economic Pressure

Russian economic warfare is intended to undermine Ukraine's ability to manage a sustainable economy separate from Russia in the long term and to put pressure on the government in Kyiv in the hopes of persuading it to be more flexible toward Russian demands to end the war.

In the spirit of "New Generation Warfare", economic pressures began long before the war, with an emphasis on the use of energy as a weapon. For many years now, Russia has been building a network of oil and gas pipelines that bypass Ukraine in order to exert pressure on it. Moscow exploited the pre-war tension to disrupt economic activity in Ukraine: the fear of war drove away existing investments and deterred new ones.

The Russian invasion plan was based, among other things, on economic logic, driven by the goals of obtaining control of energy infrastructure, controlling Ukraine's access to the Azov and Black Seas,<sup>53</sup> and occupying industrial areas and quarries in the east. Russia employed a variety of means to put economic pressure on the population, both nationally and locally.

At the national level, the weaponization of key economic sectors such as energy, food, and water salient. Russia cut off gas and oil flows to areas controlled by the Ukrainian government, took control of a nuclear power plant in Zaporizhia (and other infrastructure for energy production and transmission) in order to control energy supply in areas it failed to occupy. Russia was in no rush to destroy industrial infrastructure, as it hoped to seize it in the future. It was only the series of failures it suffered in the fall of 2022 that led to concentrated bombings of electricity and energy infrastructure. These affected over 40% of Ukraine's electricity production capacity just as a cold winter was approaching. Failure to occupy the entire coastline led Moscow to impose a naval blockade on the Ukrainian ports in the Black Sea. This severely damaged Ukraine's trade activity, particularly in the port cities of Odessa and Mykolaiv, and made it difficult for Ukraine to export agricultural produce (the country's main export). Although Russia consented to a deal brokered by Turkey for the export of grain from Ukraine, it retained the right to shut down this channel if needed to increase pressure on the Ukrainian population. The systemic damage to Ukraine's economy caused by the fighting, energy disruptions, shortages of basic products, refugee movement, and reduced investments led to an estimated

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<sup>53</sup> Zabrodskyi, Watling, Danylyuk and Reynolds. "Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfighting from Russia's Invasion of Ukraine," 6.

30% decline in Ukraine's GDP in 2022<sup>54</sup>. This resulted in severe economic damage to Ukrainian citizens, while Russian propaganda was attempting to convince them that the government in Kiev was to blame.

On a local level, siege, starvation, and water deprivation techniques were noticeable in the areas Russia sought to occupy. During the months-long siege of Mariupol, there was a shortage of food and water in the city, and in Mykolaiv, attacks on electricity and water systems led to severe disruptions in the supply of potable water.

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The Ukrainian population became a dominant preoccupation of the Russian side during the war due to President Putin's personal obsession with the "Ukrainian question" and his systematic denial of the existence of a Ukrainian nation. To a large extent, the war in Ukraine is Putin's personal war and rests on his revisionist views and is also framed by the Kremlin as a "total war." The totality of the war means that it is waged over military and civilian domains alike, and in the Kremlin perspective it justifies all means, including psychological, physical and economic harm to the population.

The significant harm to the Ukrainian population stems from a range of structural problems in the Russian army, including the lack of precise weapons and practical operational concepts intended to minimize civilian casualties. Also, exerting pressure on the population is seen as a legitimate and a common tool in the Russian military, and there is deep-seated tolerance for acts of violence by soldiers as part of in the bitter spirit of *à la guerre comme à la guerre*.

While Russian attempts to weaken and subjugate the Ukrainian "enemy system" by exerting multidimensional pressure on the population have failed, demographic "engineering" efforts alongside the deliberate economic destruction are liable to cause long-term damage to Ukraine and thus materialize, at least partially, the Russian strategic goal of undermining the foundations of the Ukrainian state and weakening it.

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54 Olena Harmash, "Ukraine suffers biggest economic fall in independent era due to war," *Reuters*, January 5, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/ukraines-economy-falls-304-2022-minister-2023-01-05/> [accessed: 5 January, 2023].



# Chapter 2

## The Ukrainian Government and its Population during Wartime



<p><b>Strategic Objectives</b></p>	<p>Defending Ukraine’s political sovereignty</p>	
	<p>Ensuring Western support against Russia</p>	
	<p>Protecting civilians in war zones and taking care of their needs</p>	
<p><b>General Approach to Ukrainian Civilians during the War</b></p>	<p>Tradition of a proactive civil society involved in repelling Russian aggression; government channel to co-opt civil activism; harnessing patriotism into a national popular struggle aimed to overstretch the Russian army</p>	
<p><b>Operational Toolkit</b></p>	 <p><b>Information Warfare</b></p>	<p>Educating the public on critical consumption of information; exposing, neutralizing, and shaming Russian information warfare; filling the “information space” with Ukrainian messages</p>
	 <p><b>Military Means</b></p>	<p>Fighting for the liberation of Ukrainian civilians from Russian occupation; encouraging volunteers to combat alongside Ukrainian armed forces and provide lacking equipment; bolstering and organizing active (partisan warfare) and passive resistance to Russian occupation</p>
	 <p><b>Political and Diplomatic Measures</b></p>	<p>Charismatic leadership of President Zelensky; strong local leaderships integrated with regional military administrations; collecting evidence of Russian war crimes against civilians to mobilize the West to provide military and financial support; binding humanitarian negotiations with ceasefire negotiations in a single communication channel</p>
	 <p><b>Economic Measures</b></p>	<p>Stabilizing the economic situation of the population by maintaining a functioning government; adopting emergency economic measures; repelling cyberattacks with assistance from Western governments and international private corporations</p>

## The Ukrainian Government's Strategic Goals

Zelensky's government saw the Ukrainian public as one of its main sources of strength for coping with the Russian attack. In response to claims that he did not prepare the public for war and ignored Western warnings that Russia was about to invade Ukraine, Zelensky said in an interview in August 2022 that his pre-war policy was intended to prevent public panic and keep citizens within the country to fight for its defense: "Cynical as it may sound, those [the people who stayed and fought for their homes] are the people who stopped everything"<sup>55</sup>.

Since the February invasion, Kyiv pursued three main strategic goals relating to its civilian population:

1. Defending Ukraine's political sovereignty.
2. Ensuring Western support against Russia.
3. Protecting the civilian population in conflict zones and taking care of its needs.

Kyiv sought to harness the population's surging patriotic spirit to promote national unity and support the struggle to defend Ukraine's independence. The Ukrainian government called on citizens to sabotage Russian military operations, provide a support network for Ukrainian armed forces, refuse to cooperate with Russian occupying authorities, and resist the Russians through partisan warfare. Kyiv also worked to neutralize Russian propaganda and subversion efforts aimed at undermining the government's legitimacy. The government's ability to provide minimal services to civilians during the war strengthened their resilience and undermined the Russian campaign portraying the Ukrainian government as "dysfunctional." The uninterrupted functioning of the government relied on ongoing Western financial support which Kyiv was able to secure by raising awareness about the extent of Russian war crimes targeting civilians and garnering public backing by Western governments and civil societies.

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55 Isabelle Khurshudyan, "An Interview with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky," *The Washington Post*, August 16, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/08/16/zelensky-interview-transcript/> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

## Mobilizing and "Victimizing" Civilians: a Lever for Weakening the Enemy

The government in Kyiv places a central emphasis on illustrating the harm inflicted on the civilian population, collecting information about it, and leveraging it in the media as a means of undermining the legitimacy of Russia's actions and encouraging the West to support Ukraine. An example of this is a series of visits by Western leaders in April 2022 to suburban areas of Kyiv that had been liberated that included tours of mass grave sites aimed at shocking the visitors from the West. While the Russian approach toward the civilian population in conflicts stems from military thinking that addresses all the types of operations the Russian military is required to perform, both offensive and defensive, the Ukrainian approach is primarily based on a defensive mentality. This approach is based on practices and norms that developed during the eight years of confrontation with Russian military aggression and subversive activity before the Russian invasion (2014–2022), as well as on ongoing efforts to adapt the Ukrainian military structure and training to NATO standards.

The doctrinal documents of the Ukrainian army emphasize the need to rely on the civilian population to resist the enemy<sup>56</sup>. This is based on experience from the fighting in 2014, in which grassroots defense efforts against Russian aggression compensated for the failures of the regular Ukrainian army. Ukraine's military and civilians conduct against the Russian invasion could have been inspired by Resistance Operating Concept proposed by the US military in 2013. This concept was developed by the US Special Operations Command to deal with the Russian threat in Eastern European countries and emphasizes popular resistance to occupation<sup>57</sup>.

However, it cannot be said that the Ukrainian Armed Forces' activities systematically preserved the sanctity of civilians' lives or their rights. Human rights organizations such as Amnesty International accused Ukraine of violating international humanitarian law during this war (see at the end of the current chapter). Throughout the war, there

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56 Prezydent Ukrainy. Volodymyr Zelens'kyu Президент України. Володимир Зеленський, "Ukaz Prezidenta Ukraini № 121/ 2021 Указ Президента України №121/2021," [Decree of the President of Ukraine № 121/ 2021]. <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/1212021-37661> [accessed: November 20, 2022].

57 Oren Liebermann, "How Ukraine is using resistance warfare developed by the US to fight back against Russia," *CNN*, August 27, 2022. <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/08/27/politics/russia-ukraine-resistance-warfare/index.html> [accessed: November 20, 2022]; James Marinero, "Ukraine: The Resistance Operating Concept in Action," *Medium*, September 2, 2022. <https://medium.com/the-dock-on-the-bay/ukraine-the-resistance-operating-concept-in-action-3a2a97f413d8> [accessed: November 20, 2022].

have been allegations of afflictions of harm on those who collaborated with the Russians, with no trial. There are many testimonies regarding “popular punishment,” such as tying people to poles in public<sup>58</sup>, and problematic practices toward prisoners of war<sup>59</sup>. Previously, monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) determined that the number of civilians killed as a result of shelling incidents in the Russian-controlled part of Donbas between 2017 and 2020 exceeded the number of deaths on the Ukrainian side of the region<sup>60</sup>. The Ukrainians attribute this to the complexity of defense in their territory. The use of irregular and semi-regular units and acts of “popular punishment” are likely to contribute to such violations, but we have not found any evidence that the Ukrainian side has consciously exerted pressure on Russian civilians to influence the policy of the Russian government.

## **Kyiv’s Toolkit for Civilian Mobilization**

From 2014 to 2022, Ukrainians faced continuous multi-dimensional Russian aggression (informational - including cyber and psychological, military, political, and economic) in the spirit of “New Generation Warfare.” The Ukrainian state and civilian society’s continuous wrestling with Russian subversive efforts turned to be a learning opportunity: Kyiv developed military and civilian defense mechanisms for the ongoing confrontation with Russia and to prepare for a potential escalation.

Since the beginning of 2021, Zelensky’s government strengthened its defensive countermeasures, especially in the months leading up to the attack. Retrospectively, it is evident that Zelensky’s measures added a difficulty to the implementation of Russia’s “Blitzkrieg” plan. Following the outbreak of war, Ukraine developed additional coping mechanisms, that were initiated both by the government and by civil society. In this context, one should mention that Zelensky’s government held a public debate with the United States about the possibility of war and did not take

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58 “Ukraine Cracks Down on ‘Traitors’ Helping Russian Troops,” *PBS*, April 29, 2022. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/ukraine-cracks-down-on-traitors-helping-russian-troops> [accessed: November 28, 2022].

59 Shira Silkoff, “Human Rights Watch warn Ukraine against posting videos of POWs,” *The Jerusalem Post*, March 1, 2022. <https://www.jpost.com/international/article-701645> [accessed: November 28, 2022].

60 “Civilian Casualties in the Conflict-Affected Regions of Eastern Ukraine (1 January 2017-15 September 2020),” *Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (OSCE)*, November 2020, 10. <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/b/469734.pdf> [accessed: November 20, 2022].



all possible measures to improve readiness, arguing that preparing too early would cause panic among the public and severely harm the economy<sup>61</sup>.

## Political and Diplomatic Tools

The leadership in Kyiv saw the Ukrainian masses as a resource that could be exploited to thwart Russian plans, and with the onset of war, focused on unifying them and strengthening the spirit of resistance to occupation. As the attack began, Zelensky made it clear that he would not leave Kyiv, conveying determination not to submit to Russian dictates, optimism regarding the end of the war, and normalcy in terms of the government's ability to continue functioning.

The president, his advisors, and senior government officials made sure to appear constantly in the media and convey targeted messages to the public to strengthen their spirit and resistance to the occupation and provide them with defense recommendations. This was done to counter false Russian messages that Zelensky and his people had fled. His remaining in Kyiv was cardinal for the government and the public's rapid transition to a state of emergency, as it thwarted a central component of the Russian plan, i.e., the rapid overthrowing of the central government<sup>62</sup>.

The lessons of 2014 taught Ukrainians the importance of local and regional leadership. During Zelensky's tenure, regional decentralization and empowerment accelerated<sup>63</sup>. From the very first day of the Russian attack in 2022, civilian and military government representatives appeared on social networks and toured the field to demonstrate that state institutions, both in the regions (oblasts) and districts (rayons), continued to function. Local authorities worked to ensure access to water, food, fuel, medicine, and municipal services. Civilian leaders appeared wearing khaki clothing to signal the transition to a state of emergency and mediated military instructions to civilians. Alongside civilian authorities, military and civilian defense institutions were established at the regional and municipal levels to decentralize the national defense effort and make it more robust.

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61 Liz Sly, "Zelensky Faces Outpouring of Criticism over Failure to Warn of War," *The Washington Post*, August 19, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/08/18/zelensky-ukraine-wapo-interview-warn-of-war/> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

62 Mykhailo Minakov, "Zelensky versus Putin: The Personality Factor in Russia's War on Ukraine," *Wilson Center*, April 13, 2022. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/zelensky-versus-putin-personality-factor-russias-war-ukraine> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

63 Jessica Pisano, "How Zelensky Has Changed Ukraine," *Journal of Democracy* 33, no. 3 (July 2022): 5-13.

The Ukrainian leadership at various government levels made it clear to the public and local leaders in areas occupied by Russia that any cooperation with the Russian occupation would be considered treason. In areas where the local leadership acted decisively, calmly, and in conjunction with military mechanisms, the Russians struggled to integrate the occupied territories into a pro-Russian governance system. By contrast, at the beginning of the war the Russians had an easier time taking control of the Kherson region, where the local leadership showed weakness and may have even assisted the Russians in taking control of the city in the early days of the attack (there were, of course, reasons related to Ukraine's lack of military preparedness in the area)<sup>64</sup>. However, the fact that Ukraine's communication infrastructure (internet and cellular) continued to function in the first months of the occupation of southern Ukraine enabled the central government to transmit messages to local officials behind enemy lines, thus undermining the Russification efforts. This reinforced the personal and public dilemmas of Ukrainian officials residing in invaded areas on the question of cooperation with the occupier.

The Ukrainian government's diplomatic and political activity regarding civilians enabled President Zelensky to leverage humanitarian issues and gain widespread support from the international community, particularly the West. It also helped extract a price from Russia and thereby improve the Ukrainian public's sense of resilience and feeling that Ukraine was not standing alone against Moscow. In addition, the Ukrainian government sought to address humanitarian aspects in the conflict zone (civilian evacuation, humanitarian aid, exchange of prisoners and soldiers' and return of bodies), to enter some kind of negotiation with Moscow regarding the end of the fighting and to facilitate the exit of refugees from Ukraine.

Initially, Kyiv had to deal with the skepticism of Western governments regarding Ukraine's ability to withstand the attack and therefore their limited willingness to provide assistance combined with the inclination of some stakeholders to seek an end to the fighting at the expense of Ukraine's national interests. The harm to the population caused by Russia played a crucial role in rallying the West to Ukraine's side, reducing restrictions on military aid, and convincing Western countries to accept more refugees and provide economic and humanitarian assistance to the population.

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64 Mark Galeotti, "Why Zelensky Is Purging the Security Services of Ukraine," *The Spectator*, July 23, 2022. <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/why-zelensky-is-purging-the-security-services-of-ukraine> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

Mirovalev Mansur, "Ukrainians question the ease of Russian capture of Kherson," *AlJazeera*, May 27, 2022. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/27/residents-question-ease-of-russian-capture-of-ukraines-kherson> [accessed: October 30, 2022.]



Zelensky addressing the public in Western countries, urging them to pressure their governments to assist Ukraine

Throughout March 2022, the Russian-Ukrainian diplomatic dialogue (in Belarus, Turkey, and on video calls) formed a channel for negotiating an agreement to end the fighting. The Ukrainians took advantage of this channel and the international diplomatic activity surrounding it to demand that Russia establish humanitarian corridors for the flow of aid to fighting zones while maintaining a ceasefire to allow civilians to be evacuated. The operation of humanitarian corridors disrupted the continuity of the Russian offensive, created operational-tactical constraints on the Russian forces, and hindered the Russian effort to wear down the defending forces. Numerous disputes arose between the parties regarding the opening of the humanitarian corridors and modalities of their operation (start and end points, corridor routes, and the duration of their operation), with mutual accusations of agreement violations and cynical and immoral use of these corridors. The Russians' insistence on opening humanitarian corridors into their territory was viewed by the Ukrainians as an attempt to "steal" the population. The Ukrainians accused the Russians daily of firing at the humanitarian corridors, thereby contributing to the negative image and delegitimization of Russian military activity in Ukraine.

During these weeks Ukrainian public opinion influenced the mandate received by Zelensky and the Ukrainian negotiating team regarding concessions to the Russians on the possible ceasefire. The end-of-war settlement that the Russians sought to impose on Ukraine through warfare was supposed to fundamentally change Ukraine's

nature as a state, given the Russian demands for territorial changes, demilitarization, and “de-Nazification” (a vague and extremely loaded term used to justify Russian political and cultural demands). The Ukrainians had been engaged in continuous negotiations with the Russians since 2014, during which they learned about the Kremlin’s attempts to impose humiliating political arrangements under the threat of violence, in the style of the Minsk Agreements, which no Ukrainian government could implement without risking the loss of public trust<sup>65</sup>.

Ukrainian society, the Ukrainian government, international organizations, and foreign governments were mobilized to document allegations of war crimes and violations of international humanitarian law by Russian forces<sup>66</sup>. The objective was to promote legal proceedings against Russia, its soldiers, and its senior officials in Ukrainian courts<sup>67</sup>, the International Criminal Court (ICC), or in a special international tribunal that is yet to be established.

## Governance and Economy in Emergency

In the years leading up to the Russian attack in 2022, Ukraine prepared the legislative infrastructure for times of emergency. The State of Emergency Law was adopted in 2015, amended seven times before the outbreak of the war, and updated eight more times after it began, synchronizing it with other national laws. This law allowed, upon the president’s declaration of a state of emergency, to establish a regional military administration, limit political freedom, basic freedoms, and the freedom of movement for young people of conscription age, exercise special powers for property seizure, operate private companies in the service of the state for a fixed period, declare a curfew, among other measures<sup>68</sup>. In 2018, a state of emergency was declared for 30 days in a large number of southeastern Ukrainian regions after Russia attacked and seized Ukrainian military ships in the Kerch Strait. The

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65 Allan Duncan and Kataryna Wolczuk, “Why Minsk-2 Cannot Solve the Ukraine Crisis,” *Chatham House*, February 16, 2022. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/02/why-minsk-2-cannot-solve-ukraine-crisis> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

66 Lily Hyde, “Meet the Ukrainians Documenting Russian War Crimes, in Real-Time,” *POLITICO*, May 19, 2022. <https://www.politico.eu/article/ukraines-sprawling-unprecedented-campaign-to-document-russian-war-crimes/> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

67 Sarah Rainsford, “Russian Soldier Pleads Guilty in First War Crimes Trial of Ukraine Conflict,” *BBC News*, May 18, 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61496428> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

68 “Pro Pravovij Režim Voennogo Stanu Pro Pravovij Režim Voennogo Stanu, [About the legal regime of martial law], *Oficijnij vebportal parlamentu Ukraїni Oficijnij vebportal parlamentu Ukraїni*, May 12, 2015. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/389-19#top> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

implementation of the state of emergency provided an opportunity for citizens to practice the procedures stemming from it<sup>69</sup>.

Since the beginning of 2022, there have been many notable Ukrainian efforts to improve emergency preparedness and increase selective readiness at the national and regional levels without officially declaring a general state of emergency. As part of this, emergency plans were updated and practiced in government institutions, businesses, and with the public. In the weeks preceding the Russian attack, the Ukrainian government shifted to a heightened state of selective activity and the Kyiv municipality announced the allocation of a special budget for war preparedness in various fields. However, it was only on February 23, 2022, a day before the war began, that Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council announced partial reserve mobilization and initiated legislation to transition to a state of emergency, which was completed only after the attack had begun.

The fact that it had only taken selective emergency preparedness measures did not enable Ukraine to enter the war with maximum readiness, both on the military and civilian fronts. Many Ukrainian citizens refused to believe that a Russian invasion was possible, even on February 23, a day before the invasion. In the absence of an official declaration of a state of emergency, there was a significant disparity in the preparedness of various state institutions and regions. For example, the Central Bank of Ukraine implemented an emergency plan that had been prepared in advance, which enabled the banking system to function reasonably throughout the country (about 70% of branches, mainly outside the conflict areas, continued to operate)<sup>70</sup>. In contrast, the military commander of the Kyiv region was appointed by the Ukrainian president to serve alongside the mayor of Kyiv only on March 1, six days after the outbreak of the war<sup>71</sup>.

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69 Neil Macfarquhar, "In Standoff with Russia, What Does Ukraine's Martial Law Decree Mean?," *The New York Times*, November 27, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/27/world/europe/ukraine-crimea-russia.html> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

70 Natalia Datskevych, "Ukraine's 'Banking Miracle': How Its Banking System Keeps Operating amid Invasion," *The Kyiv Independent*, April 28, 2022. <https://kyivindependent.com/hot-topic/ukraines-banking-miracle-how-its-banking-system-keeps-operating-amid-invasion> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

71 Olena Petrishin, "Mi Gotuemosja Do Najgirših Scenariiv i Do Povtornoї Sprobi Vzjati Kiiv": Interv'ju z Mikoloju Žirnovim 'Ми Готуємося До Найгірших Сценаріїв і До Повторної Спроби Взяти Київ': Інтерв'ю з Миколою Жирновим," ["We are Preparing to the Worst Scenarios and to the Repeated Attempts to take Kyiv," Interview with Mykola Zhirnov], *Večirnij Kiiv* [April 17, 2022. <https://vechirniy.kyiv.ua/news/65028/>] [accessed: October 30, 2022].

In response to criticism that more could have been done in terms of emergency preparedness, Zelensky and his associates argued that a formal declaration of a state of emergency would have drained the treasury, accelerated the flight of capital and people, disrupted preparations for winter, and harmed public morale<sup>72</sup>.

With the outbreak of the war, men aged 18–60 were prohibited from exiting Ukraine<sup>73</sup>. This measure, which was strictly enforced at border crossings between Ukraine and European countries, preserved the potential of the Ukrainian army and various authorities to recruit these men for defense efforts – both military and civilian. It is likely that men who managed to evacuate their families outside Ukraine’s borders and remained in the country by force of this law were more emotionally available to engage in resistance efforts against Russian aggression (knowing that their families were safer).

The events of 2014 and the months of tension leading up to the war helped Ukraine improve its readiness to physically protect the population against bombings. Plans varied from place to place. In large cities such as Kyiv and Kharkiv, subway systems were rapidly converted into public shelters for prolonged stays. In the early hours of the war, images were published showing subway workers placing water taps and operating them for the public on train platforms, using infrastructure that had been prepared in advance. In the absence of an extensive network of public shelters, residents were advised to take cover in basements under public buildings or between walls. These measures helped save lives.

To provide citizens with basic necessities during emergencies (food, medicine, etc.), the Ukrainian government organized various ad-hoc initiatives in collaboration with international actors, civilian society, and the business sector. Ukraine faced a significant logistics challenge in handling the aid shipments flowing into the country and the large amount of equipment collected from areas not involved in the fighting. The state-owned Ukrainian railway company, Ukrzaliznytsia, already accustomed to centralized operation, played a significant role in transporting cargo and passengers, including in combat zones. There were reports of organizational difficulties in transporting supplies by trucks and coordinating national efforts involving the government, private companies, and volunteer organizations. The

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72 Isabelle Khurshudyan, “An Interview with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky”.

73 Asha Gilbert, “Reports: Ukraine Bans All Male Citizens Ages 18 to 60 from Leaving the Country,” *USA Today*, February 25, 2022. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2022/02/25/russia-invasion-ukraine-bans-male-citizens-leaving/6936471001/> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

government took on the responsibility for addressing cross-country issues: regulatory accommodations, dealing with unique problems related to drivers – a profession that became critical (e.g., arranging the exit of draft-age drivers to foreign countries)<sup>74</sup>, or operating humanitarian corridors through which aid convoys could move.

## Smartphone Militias in Virtual Digital Trenches

Since 2014, Ukraine has been the target of rampant Russian cyberattacks, including attacks against power stations, government systems, and the financial system. These attacks led the Ukrainians to engage with Western countries in defensive cooperation. Ukraine developed neutralization and recovery tools that reduced the effectiveness of Russian cyber weapons<sup>75</sup>.

Ukraine's cyber security strategy was approved in 2016 and updated in May 2021, as "only 40% of the goals set in the previous strategy had been met." Both documents were aimed at preventing Russia from undermining Ukraine's cyber domain, and in addition to establishing military, intelligence, and civilian mechanisms for cyber

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74 Andrew Kramer, "How Zelensky Tamed Ukraine's Fractious Politics and Stood up to Putin," *The New York Times*, April 25, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/25/world/europe/ukraine-zelensky-government.html> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

Alina Kostyuchenko, "Помош' Ідет: Ктo і Как Дoстaвляeт Гуманітарніe Грузы в Україну," [Help is going on: who and how delivers humanitarian goods to Ukraine], *Centr transportnih strate*, May 25, 2022. [https://cfts.org.ua/articles/pomosch\\_idet\\_kto\\_i\\_kak\\_dostavlyaet\\_gumanitarnye\\_gruzy\\_v\\_ukrainu\\_1902/130713](https://cfts.org.ua/articles/pomosch_idet_kto_i_kak_dostavlyaet_gumanitarnye_gruzy_v_ukrainu_1902/130713) [accessed: October 30, 2022].

Victor Chevchenko, "Logistika Vojny. Kak Izmenilis Gruzovye Perevozki v Ukraine Логистика Войны. Как Изменились Грузовые Перевозки в Украине," [The logistics of war: How freight transportation in Ukraine has changed], *Biznes*, April 7, 2022. <https://biz.nv.ua/experts/perevozki-v-ukraine-vo-vremya-voyny-gumanitarnye-gruzy-ogranicheniya-na-perevozki-50231625.html> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

"V Ukraine Sozdali Koordinacionnyj Centr Pomos̄i Postradavšim Gorodam V Ukraine Создали Координационный Центр Помощи Пострадавшим Городам," [In Ukraine, a Coordination Center for Assistance to Damaged Cities was Created], *Ukrinform*, February 28, 2022. <https://www.ukrinform.ru/rubric-regions/3416242-v-ukraine-sozdali-koordinacionnyj-centr-pomosi-postradavsim-gorodam.html> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

"Sozdan Koordinacionnyj Centr Razmešeniya Postradavših Ot Agressii RF v Ukraine - Minstrategprom Создан Координационный Центр Размещения Пострадавших От Агрессии РФ в Украине – Минстратегпром," [The coordination center for the placement of victims from the aggression of the Russian Federation in Ukraine - Minstrategprom] *Interfaks-Ukraina*, March 3, 2022. <https://ua.interfax.com.ua/news/general/806091.html> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

75 Sydney J. Freedberg Jr., "'No Big Bang': Cyber successes in Ukraine are no cause for complacency in US," *Breaking Defense*, January 20, 2023. <https://breakingdefense.com/2023/01/no-big-bang-cyber-successes-in-ukraine-are-no-cause-for-complacency-in-us/> [accessed: January 20, 2023].

defense, they emphasized Ukraine's collaboration with the United States, Britain, Germany, NATO, the European Union, and others<sup>76</sup>.

The Ukrainian civilian IT sector was mobilized in an effort to defend the country against cyberattacks, including counter cyberattacks against Russia. In this area too, Ukraine has had experience in spontaneous civilian organization during national emergencies, which was gained over eight years of conflict with Russia<sup>77</sup>. Western intelligence agencies and international corporations have played a significant role in protecting the Ukrainian public from Russian cyberattacks during the war<sup>78</sup>, in cooperation with the Ukrainian government and civilian society.

The Zelensky government established the Office of Digital Transformation in 2019, headed by a young minister, Mykhailo Fedorov. His flagship project before the war was Diia, a mobile phone government services portal that provides access to all government services. Fedorov took on the task of stabilizing the communication between the government and citizens through digital technologies and connecting the government with international technology corporations. During the war, the Diia services were expanded, allowing citizens to receive government services remotely. The platform was also used as a tool for reporting enemy movements and presence, which were passed on to Ukrainian intelligence<sup>79</sup>.

After the Russians attacked Ukraine's internet and military satellite communication networks, Fedorov persuaded American billionaire Elon Musk, owner of the satellite internet company Space-X, to provide encrypted satellite internet to Ukrainian government institutions and the military (a service that was not previously available in Ukraine) and provided thousands of terminals for this purpose. This contribution

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76 "Strategija Kiberbezpeki Ukraini. Стратегія Кібербезпеки України," [Cybersecurity Strategy of Ukraine], Ofitsijnij vebportal parlamentu Ukrainy, August 26, 2021. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/447/2021#n12> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

77 Gregory Asmolov, "The Transformation of Participatory Warfare: The Role of Narratives in Connective Mobilization in the Russia-Ukraine War," *Digital War*, September 27, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s42984-022-00054-5> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

78 Mehul Srivastava, Madhumita Murgia, and Hannah Murphy, "The Secret US Mission to Bolster Ukraine's Cyber Defences Ahead of Russia's Invasion," *Financial Times*, March 9, 2022. <https://www.ft.com/content/1fb2f592-4806-42fd-a6d5-735578651471> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

79 Dragomyrova Valeria, "V Ukraine sozdali chatbot "eVorog", cherez kotoryj mozno soobshhit' o peredvizhenii okkupanta V Ukraine sozdali chatbot "eVorog", cherez kotoryj mozno soobshchit' o peredvizhenii okkupanta [A Chatbot e-Enemy was Created in Ukraine, through which it is possible to inform about the movements of the occupier]," *Ukrayin'ski Novyny*, March 10, 2022. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/bombing-to-lose-airpower-cannot-salvage-russia-doomed-war-in-ukraine> [Accessed: May 1, 2023].



was funded by Western countries, Space-X, and crowdfunding<sup>80</sup>. Microsoft assisted Ukraine in identifying and repelling Russian cyberattacks, while simultaneously uploading Ukrainian government information to its cloud servers to back up and protect it from Russian attacks<sup>81</sup>.

Fedorov maintained contact with the hacktivist community in the cyber domain, which comprised up to half a million people who were willing to use their skills against Russia. Fedorov called on this community to attack targets in Russia. He urged international technology companies to leave the Russian market, block Russian content on their platforms, and donate equipment and software to the Ukrainian government<sup>82</sup>.

The government in Kyiv worked to minimize the influence of Russian information warfare on the population. In the years leading up to the war, controversial steps were taken in the domestic political sphere, including legislation, presidential decrees, and the activation of state enforcement mechanisms. Before and during the war, Russian social networks were blocked<sup>83</sup>, and the activities of leading Russian media outlets were banned on the grounds that they were working to destabilize the state of affairs in Ukraine<sup>84</sup>. In May 2021, Viktor Medvedchuk, the politician closest to Putin in Ukraine, was placed under house arrest<sup>85</sup>. These measures drew harsh criticism

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80 Christopher Miller, Mark Scott, and Bryan Bender, "Ukrainex: How Elon Musk's Space Satellites Changed the War on the Ground," *POLITICO*, June 8, 2022. <https://www.politico.eu/article/elon-musk-ukraine-starlink/> [accessed: October 30, 2022]. Coldewey Devi, "Ukraine Lines up 10000 More Starlink Terminals as Funding Issues are Resolved," *Tech-Crunch*, December 20, 2022. <https://techcrunch.com/2022/12/20/ukraine-lines-up-10000-more-starlink-terminals-as-funding-issues-are-resolved/> [accessed: January 20, 2023].

81 Smith Brad, "Extending our vital technology support for Ukraine," *Microsoft*, November 3, 2022. <https://blogs.microsoft.com/on-the-issues/2022/11/03/our-tech-support-ukraine/> [accessed: January 20, 2023].

82 Steven Feldstein, "Disentangling the Digital Battlefield: How the Internet had Changed the War," *War-on-the-Rocks*, December 7, 2022. <https://warontherocks.com/2022/12/disentangling-the-digital-battlefield-how-the-internet-has-changed-war/> [accessed: January 20, 2023].

83 Yevgeniy Golovchenko, "Fighting Propaganda with Censorship: A Study of the Ukrainian Ban on Russian Social Media," *The Journal of Politics*, 84, no. 2 (January 2022): 639-654.

84 "Ukraine Blocks Access to Popular Russian News Sites," *The Moscow Times*, August 23, 2021. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/08/23/ukraine-blocks-access-to-popular-russian-news-sites-a74870> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

"Ukraine Sanctions 'Russian Trojan Horse' Media Assets Associated with Putin Friend," *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, February 3, 2021. <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-russia-television-stations-sanctions-putin/31083423.html> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

85 Pavel Polityuk, "Ukrainian Court Orders House Arrest for pro-Russian Lawmaker," *Reuters*, May 13, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/ukrainian-prosecutors-want->

from Russia and the political forces associated with it in Ukraine, accusing Zelensky of restricting political freedom and freedom of expression. The months of war allowed for more stringent measures against potential Russian influence activities in Ukraine. In March 2022, the activities of 11 parties described as linked to Russia were banned<sup>86</sup> and their politicians were perceived as potential collaborators with the Russian occupation. Zelensky's government hesitated to purge security services of suspected Russian influence agents but carried out extensive personnel changes in July 2022<sup>87</sup>. Russian cultural products - literature and music - were also restricted<sup>88</sup>.

The ongoing Russian information warfare attacks since 2014 have led Ukraine to establish state<sup>89</sup> and civilian<sup>90</sup> mechanisms aimed at exposing Russian information warfare tactics and educating the public on how to deal with misinformation and consume news critically. In 2017, Ukraine's Doctrine of Information Security was adopted. This is a fundamental document that pointed to Russian information warfare as a threat to Ukraine's national security and established tools for detecting and characterizing it, distancing it from Ukraine's information space, and "filling the vacuum" with Ukrainian information. To this end, mechanisms and institutions were defined that were required to carry out counteractivities against Russian influence efforts<sup>91</sup>.

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[set-bail-108-mln-kremlin-ally-treason-case-2021-05-13/](#) [accessed: October 30, 2022].

86 Isabelle Khurshudyan, "An Interview with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky".

87 Mari Saito and Maria Tsvetkova, "How Russia Spread a Secret Web of Agents across Ukraine," *Reuters*, July 28, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/ukraine-crisis-russia-saboteurs/> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

88 Max Hunder, "Ukraine to Restrict Russian Books, Music in Latest Cultural Break from Moscow," *Reuters*, June 19, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-restrict-russian-books-music-latest-cultural-break-moscow-2022-06-19/> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

89 "About Us | *Center for Strategic Communications*," Centre for strategic communications, n.d. <https://spravdi.gov.ua/en/about-us/> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

90 Olena Churanova, "Countering Russian Disinformation: Ukrainian NGOs on The Frontline," *Ukraine Analytica*, 1(11), 64–65. <https://ukraine-analytica.org/countering-russian-disinformation-ukrainian-ngos-on-the-frontline/> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

"About Us: Stopfake.org," *StopFake*. (n.d.). <https://www.stopfake.org/en/about-us/> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

91 "Ukaz prezidenta ukraïni №47/2017 Указ Президента України №47/2017 [Presidential Decree No. 47/2017], *Oficijne Prezidenta Ukraïni*, February 25, 2017. <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/472017-21374> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

From the early days of the war, an information campaign was conducted on social media and Ukrainian media instructing the population on how not to fall victim to Russian misinformation<sup>92</sup>. Ukrainian media outlets were mobilized to work closely with the government to convey the official viewpoint to the public. Freedom of the press and competition between channels were limited<sup>93</sup>. Social media channels operated in collaboration with the government and citizens with the goal of updating the public and motivate them to participate in the fighting.



"10 Rules, how to avoid becoming a victim of a disinformation," Designed by Ukrainian MOD and National Emergency Service (published on February 25, 2022)

92 "Jak ne štati žertvoju dezinformacii: instrukcija vid službi nadzvičajnih situacij Jak ne štati žertvoju dezinformacii: instrukcija vid službi nadzvičajnih situacij" [How not to become a victim of misinformation: instruction from the State Service for Emergency Situations,] *The Village*, February 25, 2022. <https://www.the-village.com.ua/village/city/city-news/323119-yak-ne-stati-zhertvoju-dezinformatsiyi-instruktsiya> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

93 Harper Lambert, "Zelenskyy Merges All TV Stations into Single Platform to Fight against Russian 'Misinformation'," *The Wrap*, March 20, 2022. <https://www.thewrap.com/zelenskyy-ukraine-national-tv-stations-russia-war/> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

The Ukrainian public played an important role in the effort to delegitimize Russia in the context of the war. At the beginning of the fighting, the government called on the Ukrainian public to personally reach out to friends in Russia and the West to present the harsh realities left by the Russian attack and to urge them to pressure the Kremlin to stop the fighting and Western governments to provide aid to Ukraine. The public was called upon to document the destruction caused by Russian attacks and to explain that Russia was committing war crimes.

One of the main conclusions of this research is that a unified public opposing the occupation, “armed” with cell phones and social media and accustomed to operating in a decentralized manner, became an asset that the Ukrainian government needed to harness in order to succeed in the war. Indeed, Ukrainians organized themselves more quickly and effectively than the Russians did in taking advantage of digital technology to improve national resilience and gain an advantage both in terms of fighting and (de)legitimization.

Asmolov has tried to explain why, specifically in Ukraine, optimal conditions were created for volunteer activity on the “digital front.” His research suggests that in the eyes of volunteers in Ukraine three conditions had converged: a sense that being passive was more dangerous than participating in the fighting, the assessment that the state was struggling to fulfill functions using civilian or military institutional tools, and the availability of tools for volunteers to fulfill such functions<sup>94</sup>. It is likely that Russian pressure on the population, especially after the start of the invasion, and the ongoing undermining of the Ukrainian government’s activity strengthened these conditions for millions of Ukrainians and pushed them to use the tools at their disposal to fight together with the government.

The Ukrainian government succeeded in creating frameworks that channeled this volunteer fervor, both within Ukraine and among refugees and volunteers in Western civilian society, to link it to institutional activity and attempt to control it. Alongside these achievements, challenges in controlling volunteers have become apparent, as volunteers are not subject to the authority of institutional frameworks and are liable to act dangerously and recklessly, while the government bears the consequences of their actions. For example, a cyberattack by hacktivists could provoke undesirable counterattacks<sup>95</sup> and volunteers operating armed drones may harm civilians or hit targets that the state is not interested in damaging. The international humanitarian

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94 Asmolov, “The Transformation of Participatory Warfare: The Role of Narratives in Connective Mobilization in the Russia–Ukraine War,” 35.

95 Elisabeth Braw, “Ukraine’s Digital Fight Goes Global: The Risks of a Self-Directed, Volunteer Army of Hackers,” *War-on-the-Rocks*, May 2, 2022. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-05-02/ukraines-digital-fight-goes-global> [accessed: December 31, 2022].

law status of volunteer involvement on the “digital front” is currently unclear and this ambiguous status could justify harming them indiscriminately, regardless of the extent of their involvement in the war. For instance, does taking a photo of Russian forces and uploading it to social media define the civilian who did it as a “combatant”?<sup>96</sup>

The government’s preparation of the public before the war and the emergency measures taken during it largely protected Ukrainians from Russian propaganda, providing them with alternative sources of information. In March 2022, over 60% of the Ukrainian public reported that their main news source was state-run Ukrainian television networks (followed by online news channels – 47%, and Telegram or Messenger channels – 42%). Unifying television channels for joint government broadcasts alongside the creation of message and information networks through other channels helped to enable direct communication between Kyiv and all citizens. Social media also allowed the public to provide feedback to the government<sup>97</sup>. The restrictions imposed by Western technology companies and governments on the dissemination of Russian propaganda messages around the world may have also weakened their influence within Ukraine.

It is unclear whether the Russian propaganda efforts were even effective among the Russian-speaking population in eastern and southern Ukraine, which was supposed to be more receptive to them in light of their frustration with the government in Kyiv or being averse to Ukrainian nationalism. Earlier Russian campaigns (going back to 2014) aimed at promoting a Russian identity among this population were unsuccessful<sup>98</sup>. Russian propaganda may have had a greater impact in occupied territories that the Russians managed to isolate from the Ukrainian media, due to a lack of alternative information. The portion of the population that adopted the Russian messages is much smaller than the Russians expected, and most of it is now in Russia or in territories occupied by Russia in Ukraine.

**The effectiveness of information warfare tools on the “digital front” can be divided into three components:**

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96 Stephen Biddle, “Ukraine and the Future of the Offensive Maneuver,” *War-on-the-Rocks*, November 22, 2022. <https://warontherocks.com/2022/11/ukraine-and-the-future-of-offensive-maneuver/> [accessed November 22, 2022].

97 “The Sixth National Poll: The Language Issue in Ukraine (March 19th, 2022)”.

98 Jon Roozenbeek, “Media and Identity in Wartime Donbas, 2014-2017” (Dissertation, Cambridge University Press, 2022). [https://www.cam.ac.uk/sites/www.cam.ac.uk/files/jon\\_roozenbeek\\_-\\_media\\_and\\_identity\\_in\\_wartime\\_donbas\\_2014-2017.pdf](https://www.cam.ac.uk/sites/www.cam.ac.uk/files/jon_roozenbeek_-_media_and_identity_in_wartime_donbas_2014-2017.pdf) [accessed February 2, 2023]

Catherine Belton and Greg Miller, “Russia's Spies Misread Ukraine and Mised Kremlin as War Loomed.”

1. **Technology** – It appears to be the case that due to having learned the Russian methods and collaborating with Western countries, leading Western technology companies, and civilian activists from Ukraine and the West, Ukraine’s technological communication skills were better than Russia’s.
2. **Information distribution channels** – The Ukrainian government successfully refined its influence channels vis-à-vis the Ukrainian audience and the West, while pushing Russian channels out of the Ukrainian “information space.” Conversely, Russia managed to exploit its control over the Russian audience and minimize its exposure to Ukrainian and Western information channels. Years of investing in messaging distribution channels in the Global South and extreme political fringes in the West gave Russia an advantage vis-à-vis these audiences, which Ukraine and Western governments struggled to reach.
3. **Persuasive content** – The Russians completely failed in the competition with Ukraine to create persuasive content for the Ukrainian public and the mainstream audience in the West. On the other hand, Russia’s experience with its domestic Russian audience, the extreme fringes in the West, and the Global South countries enabled it to tailor messages for them. In this context, Russia’s goals regarding information warfare were overly ambitious and unattainable – trying to change deeply ingrained perceptions within the Ukrainian public regarding their national identity in a short period of time and under military aggression. Russian messages aimed at the Russian audience, which demonized Ukrainians, penetrated Ukrainian media and hindered Moscow’s objectives. On the other hand, Russian disinformation machine frequently does not intend to convince, but only to insert into the public debate an "alternative" (distorted or fraudulent) point of view - and is quite successful in achieving this objective.

## The Civilian Envelope to Combat Activity

Even before the war, Ukraine experienced a rich non-governmental activity in security-related areas<sup>99</sup>. This was due to the lessons learned from the war against Russia in 2014, during which volunteer brigades were often more successful in stopping Russian forces and pro-Russian separatists than regular military forces. The civilian society remained highly willing to mobilize for the war effort and support combat units and the Ukrainian government created channels that enabled such civilian involvement,

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<sup>99</sup> Brik Tymofii and Brick-Murtazashvili Jennifer, “How Decentralized Government Brought the Country Together,” *Foreign Affairs*, June 28, 2022. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-06-28/source-ukraines-resilience> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

including through digital platforms<sup>100</sup>. In the months of tension leading up to the war, training on the use of weapons and self-defense among civilians increased and paramilitary frameworks boosted their preparedness. However, the effort was uneven because a state of emergency was not declared in an attempt to avoid panic.

On the first day of the war, Zelensky called on all sectors of society to mobilize for the war effort. Anyone who knew how to use weapons was invited to volunteer to join the Territorial Defense units – a paramilitary framework that was established and refined as part of the lessons learned from the war in 2014 to provide the government with a large pool of forces for dealing with acts of subversion and violations of the public order. These units played a very significant role in delaying the Russians on their way to Kyiv, which thwarted all the Russian war plans.

Initially, the Ukrainian government was willing to distribute weapons to anyone who requested them, without conducting thorough eligibility checks, and even allowed convicted prisoners with military experience to be released under certain conditions to participate in the fighting<sup>101</sup>. The hasty establishment of a pool of weapon holders led to a wave of robberies and crimes committed by armed individuals, and the indiscriminate distribution of weapons ended within days.

With the outbreak of the war, the population quickly responded to Zelensky's call for solidarity and support for the army. Volunteer organizations within Ukraine and abroad created a complementary network for raising resources and distributing them in order to supply equipment to fighters, prepare urban areas for defense (building fortifications, blocking roads, producing makeshift defensive and offensive equipment), cope with the effects of Russian attacks on civilian areas, provide economic and humanitarian assistance to residents in combat zones, transfer and absorb refugees, and other repercussions<sup>102</sup>. Social media was used to convey defense instructions, and information on evacuation options, and to explain methods of active and passive resistance against the occupation.

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100 Asmolov, "The Transformation of Participatory Warfare: The Role of Narratives in Connective Mobilization in the Russia-Ukraine War."

101 "Prosecutor General Clarified How Ukraine Releases Prisoners with Military Experience to Fight against Russia," *UATV*, February 28, 2022. <https://uatv.ua/en/prosecutor-general-clarified-how-ukraine-releases-prisoners-with-military-experience-to-fight-against-russia/> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

102 "Volunteers are the most powerful part of the civil society of Ukraine - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on the International Volunteer Day," *The Official Site of the President of Ukraine*, December 5, 2022. <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/volonter-i-ce-najpotuzhnisha-chastina-gromadyanskogo-suspilst-79637> [accessed: December 30, 2022].

In addition, instructions were provided on how to prepare Molotov cocktails and target the vulnerabilities of Russian armored vehicles; citizens were called to withhold food and fuel from Russian forces or to give them poisoned food; instructions were issued on how to identify Russian sabotage teams and agents and how to report them to the authorities; guidelines were provided for disseminating information about the Russian forces' movements and conversely, concealing information about the Ukrainian forces' movement and the results of Russian attacks to prevent the Russians from adjusting the fire on their targets. The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense set up a dedicated website, the National Resistance Center, which provided hundreds of tips for nonviolent resistance, instructions for preparing Molotov cocktails, and a tutorial video on how to set enemy combat vehicles on fire<sup>103</sup>.



Instructions for civilians on how to target vulnerabilities on a Russian armored vehicle using makeshift weapons in fighting in urban areas. Widely circulated on Ukrainian social media during the early days of the war

In the areas occupied by the Russians during the first weeks of the war Ukrainian communication infrastructures, including social media, continued to function. Using these channels, the central government called on the public to protest against the occupation and refrain from cooperating with it and published videos that showed successful acts of resistance that managed to stop the Russians' progress and thwart their plans. These videos were intended to serve as a model for other areas<sup>104</sup>.

103 Official site of the National Resistance Center of Ukrainian MOD, <https://sprotyv.mod.gov.ua/en/> [accessed: November 20, 2022].

104 See an example of the development of civilian resistance to the Russian occupation in Kherson: "Herson. Tihij Teror Hroniki PeklaХерсон. Тихий Терор. Хроніки Пекла," [Kherson. Quiet Terror. Chronicles of Hell], *YouTube*, July 26, 2022. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGymx\\_GXybg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGymx_GXybg) [accessed: October 30, 2022].



Throughout the war, civil organizations supporting the fighting in Ukraine evolved and expanded. An experimental mobile phone app was developed allowing citizens to report the location of cruise missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles to assist the Ukrainian military in their interception efforts<sup>105</sup> and enable drone operators to gather intelligence (Aerorozvidka) and attack<sup>106</sup>. Numerous crowdfunding efforts were aimed at helping the Ukrainian army acquire weapons and equipment. The Serhiy Prytula Fund collected donations for refurbishing tanks and purchasing satellite images, drones, unmanned aerial vehicles, night vision devices, vehicles, communication equipment, and first aid supplies<sup>107</sup>.

Between June and August 2022, international human rights organizations (Amnesty, HWR, and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights) published reports on the war in Ukraine. Alongside evidence of violent conduct by the Russian army, these reports also presented cases where the Ukrainian side did not act according to the standards of the Geneva Conventions – conducting military activity from within civilian populations without evacuating them, mistreating prisoners of war, and performing executions without trial<sup>108</sup>. These reports drew significant criticism from Ukraine and organizations in Western countries that supported Ukraine.

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Since February 2022, the Ukrainian civilian population emerged as a critical catalyzer of Kyiv's defense efforts for two main reasons. First, Ukrainian citizens played a crucial role in galvanizing international support and mobilizing concrete assistance for the

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105 "New App Lets Civilians Help Shoot down Drones and Missiles in Ukraine," *The Jerusalem Post*, October 17, 2022. <https://www.jpost.com/international/article-719836> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

106 Oleg Danylov, "Aerorozvidka: yes, we are preparing surprises for the enemy. When the time comes, you will see a "striking movie"!", *Mezha*, October 27, 2022. <https://mezha.media/en/articles/aerorozvidka-yes-we-are-preparing-surprises-for-the-enemy-when-the-time-comes-you-will-see-a-striking-movie/> [accessed: November 26, 2022].

107 Charity foundation of Serhiy Prytula, <https://prytulafoundation.org/en> [accessed: November 26, 2022].

Tania Gerasimova, "ICEYE Satellite Leased By Ukrainians Helped To Identify About 2,600 Pieces Of Equipment Of Russian Troops," *Ukrainews*, November 26, 2022. <https://ukrainews.com/en/news/897589-iceye-satellite-leased-by-ukrainians-helped-to-identify-about-2-600-pieces-of-equipment-of-russian> [accessed: November 26, 2022].

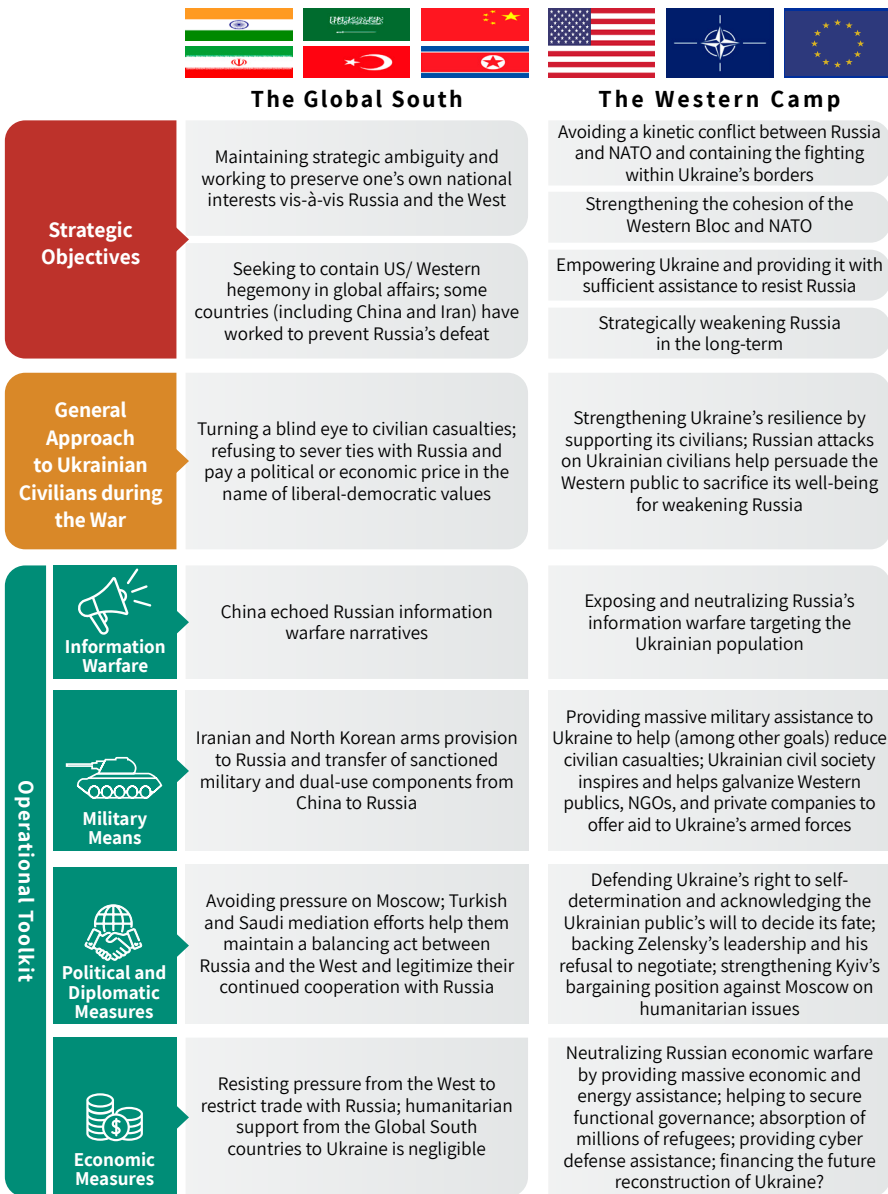
108 "Ukraine: Ukrainian Fighting Tactics Endanger Civilians," *Amnesty International*, August 4, 2022. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/08/ukraine-ukrainian-fighting-tactics-endanger-civilians/> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

sake of civilians' protection in combat zones and in response to Moscow's brutality and war crimes. Second, President Zelensky rapidly succeeded to reshape the war as a total one: Kyiv managed to mobilize society almost totally thereby giving a new impulse to Ukraine's national narrative and identity (at a time when the Kremlin sought to avoid broad mobilization in Russia).

These achievements derived to a large extent from the Ukrainian efficient leverage of the "digital front." The Ukrainian leadership and civil society rapidly mastered digital platforms and modern mass media. Subsequently, the government, its citizens and international actors built together an efficient and cross-border "digital defense network" that played a significant role in securing continuous assistance to Ukraine. Under Zelensky's leadership, Ukraine has also succeeded to win the battle of narratives by reframing the war as a clash between two rival civilizations: Western civilization adopting universal human ideals versus a "terrorist state" (Russia) threatening the security and most cherished values of modern Western history.

# Chapter 3

## The West, "the Rest", and Ukrainian Civilians in Wartime



## The Western Bloc's Strategic Goals and General Approach

The Western Bloc is characterized by American dominance and significant differences in approaches among the countries. Some countries were quick to impose harsh economic sanctions on Moscow and provide extensive military assistance to Ukraine, while others were concerned that overly severe sanctions on Russia would hurt them too and acted to limit them. For many European countries, sending lethal weapons to Ukraine before the war went against the security policy principles of not fueling conflicts with arms. Economic problems resulting from the imposition of sanctions on Russia created personal political risks for some European leaders. However, overall, throughout all stages of the crisis, it was clear to Western countries that this was not only “Ukraine’s problem”: the war in Ukraine was a Russian attempt to change the international order by weakening the centrality of the West and Russian actions deeply challenged the security status quo in Europe. This understanding allowed the Western Bloc to bridge differences and join together in action against Russia by supporting the Ukrainian government and its citizens.

Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Mark Milley, defined several objectives regarding the crisis with Russia that capture the essential strategy of the entire Western Bloc before and during the war:

1. Avoiding a kinetic conflict between Russia and NATO and containing the fighting within Ukraine’s borders.
2. Strengthening the cohesion of the Western Bloc and NATO.
3. Empowering Ukraine and providing assistance to enable it to cope with Russia<sup>109</sup>.
4. Strategically weakening Russia to reduce the threat it poses to the Western Bloc in the long term (an objective that was only publicly stated in the spring of 2022).

The Western Bloc’s general approach toward the Ukrainian population was based on an intersection of national interests: weakening Russia as a security threat on the one hand, and the ideals of assisting a democracy struggling against dictatorship and helping citizens suffering from violence on the other. Most of the aid to Ukraine came from the US government. However, while the United States was the dominant contributor in terms of defense assistance, the European contribution in terms of civilian aid exceeded that of the US. The scope of Western humanitarian and civilian

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<sup>109</sup> Shane Harris et al., “Road to War: U.S. Struggled to Convince Allies, and Zelensky, of Risk of Invasion.”

contributions was similar in size to the military support it provided<sup>110</sup>, reflecting the West's recognition of the need to invest in the resilience of Ukrainian citizens as a leading mechanism for weakening Russia. Consensus-building processes regarding the war in Ukraine in Western-controlled international institutions and Western political institutions led to the collective action of most Western countries aimed at assisting the population in Ukraine while mobilizing civilian society. Exposing information on incidents of harm to Ukrainian civilians and garnering Western attention helped maintain public support for government activities.

## The Global South Countries' Position

The Global South countries, particularly the major powers China and India, have tried to avoid taking sides on fundamental issues of "international governance," choosing instead to focus on their specific interests concerning Russia, Ukraine, and Western countries and making only the necessary adjustments to their relations with them. Despite many of these countries' reservations about the Russian policy, in terms of the balance of power in the war in Ukraine this neutral approach was advantageous to Moscow and, conversely, detrimental to Ukraine and the Western Bloc<sup>111</sup>. Some of them, particularly China, feared that a severe blow to Russia by the West would lead to a weakening of their international status and an increase in Western dominance.

The harm to the Ukrainian population did not appear to arouse particular sympathy among the Global South countries' leaders or populations. In many of these countries, claims were made by leaders and the public against the hypocrisy of the West, which denounced Russia because of the threat it poses to them while similar wars in South Global countries did not generate public attention or sufficient political involvement. In a significant part of the Global South countries the public has no significant influence on foreign policy issues, sees Ukraine as a remote issue, and is characterized by a strong anti-Western sentiment, all of which serves as fertile ground for Russian propaganda messages.

Most of the Global South countries provided symbolic aid to Ukraine or floated policy initiatives that seem designed to meet some minimum obligation (such as Indonesian President Joko Widodo's initiative to enable Putin and Zelensky to meet

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110 "Ukraine Support Tracker," *Kiel Institute for the World Economy*, October 11, 2022. <https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/> [accessed: January 19, 2023].

111 Camila Bailey and Talia Nanton, "How Global South Coverage of the Ukraine War Sheds Light on Diplomatic Neutrality: New Research," *LSE*, August 1, 2022. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2022/08/01/how-global-south-coverage-of-the-ukraine-war-sheds-light-on-diplomatic-neutrality-new-research/> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

on the sidelines of the G-20 summit, an initiative that did not materialize). Many of the Global South countries have refused to condemn Russia in the UN General Assembly resolutions that dealt, among other things, with harm to the population. These countries refused to sever economic ties with Russia and join the wave of Western sanctions despite being urged to do so by Ukraine and the West.

Viewing the Global South countries as a single entity is obviously a crude generalization. Most of these countries have chosen to sit on the fence and their leaders' decisions have had no impact on the Russia-Ukraine war. However, other countries have significantly influenced the dynamic of the war. In this context, China, India, and Turkey stand out, as they have increased trade with Russia in the energy sector, thereby contributing to Russia's resilience. OPEC countries, led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have also played a significant role by continuing to coordinate oil prices with Russia and refusing to pay an economic price to promote Western interests they do not share, despite pressure from the West.

Turkey has positioned itself as a leading mediator between Russia and Ukraine – a role that has enabled Ankara to alleviate Western pressure to limit its expanding economic ties with Moscow. This stance has been balanced by providing military assistance to Ukraine and approving Finland's admission to NATO (however Turkey did create difficulties during the process and delays in Sweden's accession approval).

Iran, and reportedly North Korea have provided Russia with weapons that greatly assisted it on the battlefield. The precise weaponry Iran supplied to Russia had a profound impact on the dynamics of the warfare: while it did not halt the Ukrainian offensive throughout the autumn of 2022, it caused significant damage to Ukraine's national infrastructure, affecting the population and putting considerable pressure on the government in Kyiv.<sup>112</sup> At the same time, it cannot be said that Iran and North Korea sided with Russia against Ukraine. Neither country had prominent conflicting interests with Ukraine and the assistance they provided to Russia stemmed from their desire to strengthen ties with Moscow and a shared interest in strategically embarrassing the West. Thus, on January 19, 2023, Iranian Foreign Minister Amir-Abdollahian claimed that Iran does not recognize Russia's annexation of territories in Ukraine, including the Crimean Peninsula<sup>113</sup>.

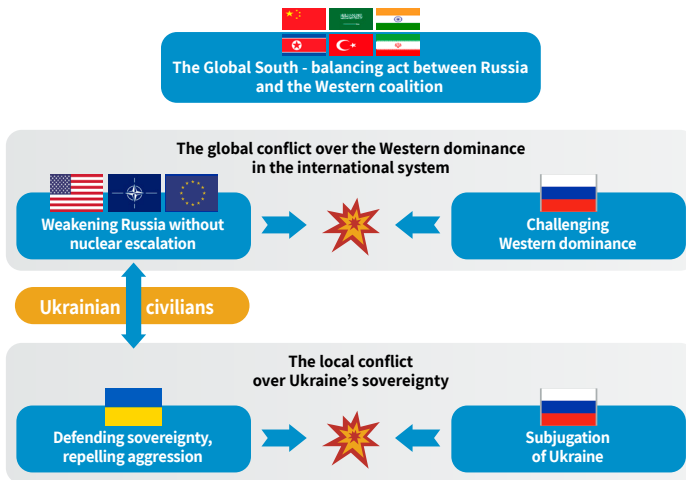
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112 Justin Bronk, Nick Reynolds and Jack Watling, "The Russian Air War and Ukrainian Requirements for Air Defence," RUSI, 36. <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/special-resources/russian-air-war-and-ukrainian-requirements-air-defence> [accessed: November 20, 2022].

113 "Iranian FM: Iran does not recognize annexation of Crimea and Ukraine's 4 other regions," *APA*, January 19, 2023. <https://apa.az/en/asia/iranian-fm-iran-does-not-recognize-annexation-of-crimea-and-ukraines-4-other-regions-394157> [accessed: January 19, 2023]

Despite their efforts to maintain ties with Moscow, as Western policy became more stringent in response to Russian harm to the Ukrainian population, the Global South countries' wiggle room was also affected. Some Global South countries' close ties with the West required them to be sensitive to the Western stance on Ukraine and they cooperated with Western sanctions where their interests might have been at risk. The Global South countries' votes in international organizations concerning the war changed based on the level of Western pressure and persuasion efforts. Even Iran, a country on the extreme fringes of the Global South that provided weapons to Russia that severely harmed the Ukrainian population, felt pressure and initially denied public reports about having done so in the Western press, later admitting, at least partially, that it had supplied these weapons. Consequently, it had to engage (unsuccessfully) in diplomatic efforts to minimize the damage caused by these reports<sup>114</sup>. On the other hand, Russian humanitarian gestures such as prisoner exchange deals or grain export deals mediated by Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, helped these countries deflect Western pressure.

## Civilians as a Critical Juncture Between Local and Global Conflicts



The casualties and damage inflicted by Russia on civilians helped Kyiv to strengthen the Western perception of the Russia-Ukraine local conflict as part of a global conflict: the liberal-democratic West against the authoritarian Russia

<sup>114</sup>"Iran and Ukraine Met To Discuss Drones Tehran Sends to Russia," *European Pravda*, November 22, 2022. <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/eng/news/2022/11/22/7151146/> [accessed: November 26, 2022].

In fact, the war in Ukraine has taken place on two parallel fronts: the local conflict, which centers on the fate of the Ukrainian state, and the global conflict between Russia and the West, which is also related to the broader competition between world powers.

In the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, Russia sought to subdue Ukraine or at least undermine its sovereignty, while Ukraine sought to defend its statehood. Western countries and Global South countries have little direct interest in the outcome of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and only suffer from its indirect effects. Moscow has failed, at least in the medium term, to achieve its strategic goals and has been forced to compromise. The Ukrainian population played an important role in thwarting these goals. Russia did manage to change the demographic reality in eastern Ukraine, but its hopes that the war would accelerate historical processes and turn tens of millions of Ukrainians into Russian subjects were shattered. On the contrary, Russia triggered the process of strengthening the Ukrainian nation; an effect of this is that the tolerance for Russian language and culture that had characterized Ukraine for centuries has significantly diminished.

In the context of the global dimension of the conflict, Putin sought to demonstrate Russia's status as a power and strengthen its international standing by subduing Ukraine. The failure to achieve a decisive victory forced him to change his goals from improving Russia's status to minimizing the damage to its international standing. Russia is trying to exploit the West's fear of escalating into direct confrontation and nuclear war to limit aid to Ukraine. Conversely, Ukraine is seeking to push Western governments to support it more by reinforcing the perception that the Russian-Ukrainian war is an inseparable part of the Russian-Western conflict. Global South countries are not interested in taking sides, but some have an interest in preventing Russia's defeat, which could strengthen the West and harm their ability to maneuver strategically (for example, China). As long as Global South countries maintain neutral positions regarding the war, they are effectively supporting Russia.

In both dimensions of the conflict, the population is not a direct subject of interest - not for Russia, not for the West, and neither for the Global South countries. On the other hand, for the Ukrainian government, preventing harm to the population is one of the highest priorities. Shifting the focus of discussion on weakening Russia from the level of practical Western interests (minimizing economic and security risks) to the moral level in the eyes of the public and Western leaders strengthened Ukraine's ability to persuade the West to provide more military and economic aid despite the fear of confrontation with Moscow while increasing pressure on Global



South countries to reduce their cooperation with Russia. The human cost and the ability to “put a face on the war” made it easier to identify with the Ukrainians, beyond the major geopolitical issues.

The issue of harm to civilians during war is related to the field of civil rights, which is deeply connected to the Western ethos and therefore directly affects the Russian-Western ideological conflict as part of the great power competition. For Ukraine, which has been undergoing a process of adopting the liberal-democratic Western model in recent decades, the Russian harm to its citizens has become a significant foundation for building a shared national identity.

In our view, the harm to the civilian population has been a major factor in motivating the West to assist Ukraine. However, this issue is just one of several that influenced the decision-making process in the West regarding the war in Ukraine. It is difficult to isolate the impact of Ukraine’s active efforts on the positions of the public and governments in the West from the Western disillusionment resulting from Russia’s aggressive behavior.

On the other hand, it could be argued that Russia shares common values with authoritarian regimes in the Global South: they too are not bothered by harm to civilians and see it as a “necessary evil” in achieving their goals. Therefore, the Global South countries did not view Russia’s harm to the Ukrainian population as a reason for restricting their ties with Moscow. Moreover, the regimes in the Global South sought to avoid setting precedents that could backfire on them, as they might need to harm civilians – their own or those of other countries – in order to advance their interests in the future. Despite the Global South countries’ insistence to remain neutral, Western sanctions on Russia that have developed throughout the conflict have forced them too to limit their economic ties with Russia, albeit to a lesser extent than the West and Ukraine desire.

## **Western Tools**

**In the military sphere**, Russia’s harm to Ukrainian civilians was, at the very least, a factor that helped Kyiv convince Western countries to expand the types of provided assistance. For example, Russian missile attacks against Ukrainian energy infrastructure in the fall of 2022 led to the supply of advanced Western anti-aircraft systems that had not previously been released to Ukraine.

While Western governments focused on providing assistance to official security forces, civilian society and commercial companies in the West also contributed to

the Ukrainian population's ability to carry out passive resistance or guerrilla warfare against the Russian army<sup>115</sup> and to the acquisition of equipment for Ukrainian security forces. Among these efforts were contributions by Western NGOs and corporations to the maintenance of communication infrastructure - both physical and software-based - which provided residents with information about their surroundings, including a broad and continuous flow of information from a variety of sources and sensors (including satellite-based) processed by the non-government analysts' research community. The Ukrainians used this information for defense, concealment, or evacuation, but also as intelligence for civilian sabotage activities against Russian forces. Civil society actors in the West volunteered to help Ukrainian residents not only with initiatives and humanitarian equipment but also in paramilitary aspects, such as by supplying personal protective equipment and photography drones. Technology companies and civilian activists mobilized to counter Russian cyber efforts aimed at influencing Ukrainian public opinion.

**In the economic sphere**, the extensive financial and humanitarian assistance provided to Ukraine by Western governments, particularly the United States, both directly and through international organizations where there is Western dominance (e.g., assistance through UN agencies, debt payment deferrals), allowed the Ukrainian government to function and preserved a certain level of normalcy in providing services to citizens. The absorption of millions of Ukrainian refugees in Western countries relieved Kyiv of some of the economic pressures associated with caring for internally displaced people.

Russian actions that damaged critical infrastructure in Ukraine, particularly in the energy sector, were met with Western countermeasures: the supply of weapons systems aimed at undermining the effectiveness of the Russian aerial or missile threat, the supply of carbon energy sources (with an emphasis on different types of fuel), assistance in repairing damage to the electrical infrastructure and the provision of generators<sup>116</sup>, and connecting Ukraine to the European electrical grid.

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115 William Worley et al., "NGOs, Donors Step up Response as Russian Attack on Ukraine Sparks Chaos," *devex*, February 25, 2022. <https://www.devex.com/news/ngos-donors-step-up-response-as-russian-attack-on-ukraine-sparks-chaos-102707> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

116 "EP President Metsola launches 'Generators of Hope' campaign to help Ukraine," *European Parliament*, November 26, 2022. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20221123IPR56801/ep-president-metsola-launches-generators-of-hope-campaign-to-help-ukraine> [accessed: November 26, 2022].

**In the field of information warfare**, the war removed barriers for governments and companies in the West to resist Russian influence: the activities of Russian government-sponsored media and information channels were banned, blocked, or restricted on Western social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and more);<sup>117</sup> sanctions were imposed against entities and individuals involved in Russian propaganda mechanisms;<sup>118</sup> Russian intelligence operatives operating influence agents were expelled; and a public atmosphere was created that made it difficult for Russia to influence Western affairs, and consequently, the situation in Ukraine. Western state or intergovernmental bodies<sup>119</sup> accelerated their efforts to expose misinformation in Russian messaging regarding the Ukrainian population and share these findings with the Ukrainian public as well.

As a large part of Russian influence efforts are not centrally operated but rather function as an ecosystem of channels that echo messages globally, targeting the branches of this network in the West has helped reduce the effectiveness of Russian influence campaigns on the population in Ukraine. These actions also made it more difficult for Russia to present to the world the positive image it desired regarding its army's conduct toward Ukrainian civilians.

Even before the war, sanctions were imposed in the West on individuals who were described as Russian influence agents in Ukraine<sup>120</sup>, and these sanctions continued during the war<sup>121</sup>. It is likely that the close cooperation between Western and Ukrainian intelligence agencies during the war<sup>122</sup> also included information on Russian plans to

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117 Dan Milmo, "Facebook Takes down Ukraine Disinformation Network and Bans Russian-Backed Media," *The Guardian*, February 28, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/feb/28/facebook-takes-down-disinformation-network-targeting-ukraine-meta-instagram> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

118 "UK sanctions Russian 'propagandists and state media,'" *Alarabiya*, March 31, 2022. <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/world/2022/03/31/UK-sanctions-Russian-propagandists-and-state-media-> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

119 "About - EUvsDisinfo," *EUvsDisinfo*. <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/about/> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

120 "Treasury Sanctions Russian-Backed Actors Responsible for Destabilization Activities in Ukraine," *U.S. Department of the Treasury*, January 20, 2022. <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0562> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

121 "Further Russia and Belarus Sanctions," *Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*, May 18, 2022. <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-release/further-russia-and-belarus-sanctions> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

122 Caroline Rose and Douglas London, "Great Power Espionage: The US Intelligence Community's Strategy in Russia's War on Ukraine - New Lines Institute," *New Lines Institute*, July 27, 2022. <https://newlinesinstitute.org/russia/great-power-espionage-the-us-intelligence-communitys-strategy-in-russias-war-on-ukraine/> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

influence the Ukrainian population and strengthen control in the occupied areas, similar to information revealed in the media and shared with Ukrainians before the war<sup>123</sup>.

**In the political-diplomatic sphere**, during the first month of the war, Western countries and international organizations were intensively engaged in diplomatic talks and political mediation efforts between Moscow and Kyiv. The Kremlin sought to impose a surrender agreement on the Ukrainians, and it seemed that during this period negotiations regarding a possible ceasefire were conducted seriously by both sides. However, the West refused to negotiate with Russia “over the heads” of the Ukrainians defending Ukraine's right to self-determination and acknowledging the Ukrainian public's will to decide its fate. Western pressure on Moscow regarding humanitarian issues related to the Ukrainian population, e.g., humanitarian corridors for evacuating refugees and delivering aid, and complying with the laws of war regarding civilians, linked these issues with the ceasefire terms. As the West was perceived by Russia and Ukraine as a party to a potential arrangement for ending the fighting, humanitarian issues raised by Western representatives vis-à-vis Russia and pressure placed on it by international institutions reinforced these demands.



European volunteers collecting aid for Ukrainian refugees

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123 Shannon Vavra, “This Is the Puppet Government Putin Has in Mind for Ukraine,” *The Daily Beast*, January 28, 2022. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/this-is-the-puppet-government-vladimir-putin-has-in-mind-for-ukraine> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

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The international reactions to Russian violence and war crimes targeting the Ukrainian population highlight salient differences between the Western camp and the Global South. In the West, the war in Ukraine has not only been seen as a local conflict over the control of disputed territories, but increasingly as a conflagration of global significance, with Moscow challenging the security architecture of the European continent inherited from the collapse of the Soviet Union. Moscow's widespread harm to civilians cast the war as a broader conflict between values and worldviews, and helped otherwise divided Western civil societies coalesce around common goals and ideals. Despite their deep-seated aversion for military involvement in foreign conflicts, Western governments and civil society associations sent extensive military and civilian aid to Ukraine. By contrast, Ukrainian civilian suffering did not impact the positions of most countries in the Global South.



# Conclusion

				
		<b>The Global South</b>	<b>The Western Camp</b>	
<b>Strategic Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dissolution of Ukraine as a sovereign state and its subjugation to Russia</li> <li>Weakening the West and limiting its involvement in the war; securing support from the Global South</li> <li>Bolstering Russia's ability to withstand external pressures and securing domestic public support for the war</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Defending Ukraine's political sovereignty</li> <li>Ensuring Western support against Russia</li> <li>Protecting civilians in war zones and taking care of their needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintaining strategic ambiguity and working to preserve one's own national interests vis-à-vis Russia and the West</li> <li>Seeking to contain US/ Western hegemony in global affairs; some countries (including China and Iran) have worked to prevent Russia's defeat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Avoiding a kinetic conflict between Russia and NATO and containing the fighting within Ukraine's borders</li> <li>Strengthening the cohesion of the Western Bloc and NATO</li> <li>Empowering Ukraine and providing it with sufficient assistance to resist Russia</li> <li>Strategically weakening Russia in the long-term</li> </ul>
<b>General Approach to Ukrainian Civilians during the War</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continuous pressure on civilians aimed to undermine their will to resist occupation; to weaken the Ukrainian state, to change its government's position, and to promote pro-Russian alternative leadership. Pressure includes disorientation, demoralization, political and carceral oppression, physical and moral violence, starvation, war-induced freezing conditions, long-term economic damage, and demographic change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tradition of a proactive civil society involved in repelling Russian aggression; government channel to co-opt civil activism; harnessing patriotism into a national popular struggle aimed to overstretch the Russian army</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Turning a blind eye to civilian casualties; refusing to sever ties with Russia and pay a political or economic price in the name of liberal-democratic values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthening Ukraine's resilience by supporting its civilians; Russian attacks on Ukrainian civilians help persuade the Western public to sacrifice its well-being for weakening Russia</li> </ul>
<b>Information Warfare</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reaching out to Ukrainian, Russian, Western audiences and the Global South; disseminating false narratives to ruin the government's reputation in the eyes of the Ukrainian public; lauding the humane behavior of Russian forces vis-à-vis the population while vilifying the Ukrainian armed forces' conduct. Information warfare is used to compensate for weaknesses in other domains</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Educating the public on critical consumption of information; exposing, neutralizing, and shaming Russian information warfare; filling the "information space" with Ukrainian messages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>China echoed Russian information warfare narratives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exposing and neutralizing Russia's information warfare targeting the Ukrainian population</li> </ul>
<b>Military Means</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intimidation of civilians; lack of operational concepts, mechanisms, and moral commitment to minimize collateral damage (extensive use of unguided munitions, lack of doctrinal foundation and training to deal with civilians on the battlefield); lenient attitude of the political and military leadership towards soldiers' violence and war crimes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fighting for the liberation of Ukrainian civilians from Russian occupation; encouraging volunteers to combat alongside Ukrainian armed forces and provide lacking equipment; bolstering and organizing active (partisan warfare) and passive resistance to Russian occupation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Iranian and North Korean arms provision to Russia and transfer of sanctioned military and dual-use components from China to Russia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing massive military assistance to Ukraine to help (among other goals) reduce civilian casualties; Ukrainian civil society inspires and helps galvanize Western publics, NGOs, and private companies to offer aid to Ukraine's armed forces</li> </ul>
<b>Political and Diplomatic Measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cultivating collaborators and imposing pro-Russian leadership; coerced Russification and "passportization" (imposing Russian citizenship); referendum on annexation; demographic engineering (refugee crisis, forced displacements, and exacerbating demographic decline); binding political negotiations with humanitarian ones</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Charismatic leadership of President Zelenskyy; strong local leaderships integrated with regional military administrations; collecting evidence of Russian war crimes against civilians to mobilize the West to provide military and financial support; binding humanitarian negotiations with ceasefire negotiations in a single communication channel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Avoiding pressure on Moscow; Turkish and Saudi mediation efforts help them maintain a balancing act between Russia and the West and legitimize their continued cooperation with Russia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Defending Ukraine's right to self-determination and acknowledging the Ukrainian public's will to decide its fate; backing Zelenskyy's leadership and his refusal to negotiate; strengthening Kyiv's bargaining position against Moscow on humanitarian issues</li> </ul>
<b>Economic Measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maximizing pressure on the Ukrainian government by causing severe economic damage to the population and attacking civilian infrastructure; weaponizing civilian access to energy, food and water</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stabilizing the economic situation of the population by maintaining a functioning government; adopting emergency economic measures; repelling cyberattacks with assistance from Western governments and international private corporations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resisting pressure from the West to restrict trade with Russia; humanitarian support from the Global South countries to Ukraine is negligible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Neutralizing Russian economic warfare by providing massive economic and energy assistance; helping to secure functional governance; absorption of millions of refugees; providing cyber defense assistance; financing the future reconstruction of Ukraine?</li> </ul>

The Russia-Ukraine war presents a case study of unprecedented scope and relevance of a multidimensional conflict that includes the intense involvement of international actors and has had a profound impact on the foundations of the international order. The main significance and novelty of the current study lie in its use of the Ukrainian case study to perform a systemic analysis of the role of the civilian population in shaping the dynamics between the warring parties, at both the strategic and operational levels. This approach takes a broad, multi-disciplinary, and holistic view of the clash between the parties in relation to the civilian population.

This concluding section examines lessons for future wars through the lens of the war in Ukraine. First, we consider the Russian failures in implementing the “New Generation Warfare” approach to the civilian population that have emerged from the war in Ukraine so far. Then, we discuss six central issues we chose as potential lessons concerning civilian populations from the war in Ukraine. Finally, we will examine what Israel and Western countries might learn from this war, what Israel's enemies and authoritarian states can learn from it, and what follow-up research can be identified at this stage.

Extra caution is required when attempting to draw conclusions from the war in Ukraine and apply them directly to the strategic and operational reality of other conflicts, or when attempting to extrapolate generic insights about the nature of modern warfare. First, most conclusions from the war in Ukraine are context-dependent. The war between Russia, a large global nuclear power, and Ukraine, a large non-nuclear country that has received unprecedented support in recent decades from Western countries, is being conducted under highly unique circumstances. Military lessons are also context-dependent. For example, there are contrasting views among experts regarding the conclusions that can be drawn from the war in Ukraine regarding the future of maneuver battles or the relevance of armored forces<sup>124</sup>. Second, it is difficult to isolate the reasons for success and failure: are the Russian military doctrines fundamentally flawed, or have they just not been executed properly? To what extent can Ukraine's successes be attributed to the resilience and determination of Ukrainian society, given the massive assistance it received from the West? Third, the war is still ongoing, and we were able to make use only of the information available to us at this time.

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<sup>124</sup> Stephen Biddle, “Ukraine and the Future of the Offensive Maneuver,” *War-on-the-Rocks*, November 22, 2022. <https://warontherocks.com/2022/11/ukraine-and-the-future-of-offensive-maneuver/> [Accessed May 1, 2023]



## Reexamining the “New Generation Warfare”

The study establishes that one of the central ideas in the Russian approach to modern warfare (the “New Generation Warfare”), the application of multidimensional pressure in an attempt to weaken the enemy system, was a failure in 2022. This is particularly true regarding the pressure placed on the civilian population: not only did the Ukrainian system not collapse, but its leadership grew stronger, and the population lowered its expectations regarding the quality and extent of services it would receive from the government during the conflict. The Ukrainian population underwent a rapid transformation in its positions, shifting toward extreme anti-Russian sentiment in the first weeks of the war, in stark contrast to the expectations of Russian military and strategic planners.

Despite the initial conclusion regarding the failure of the “New Generation Warfare” approach, it is important to note that better planning and more determined and meticulous execution by the Russian army could have led to much more severe results for Ukraine in the early days of the war. The Russian system's high level of secrecy led to the majority of military forces receiving combat orders only hours before the invasion and not making minimal preparations for it, resulting in numerous failed operations in the first days of the war. At the same time, the rapid fall of southern Ukraine (where the Russian army apparently was more successful and Ukrainian collaborators helped Russia more), and the fact that Russian forces were very close to entering Kyiv, which was almost devoid of regular defending forces may support the claim that the execution, rather than the doctrine, had failed. It is possible that setting more limited objectives, concentrating offensive forces on a narrower front, and better organized military preparation could have led to more significant Russian achievements. On the other hand, one could argue that flawed planning and execution (as opposed to theoretical thinking) are inherent characteristics of the Russian strategic culture, and therefore improved execution could not have been expected.<sup>125</sup>

Current training materials for Russian soldiers express a negative attitude toward unnecessary violence and looting against civilians. However, even if the Russian army had prepared its soldiers well for the war, they would not have been ready for intensive interaction with the civilian population, certainly not in a manner that emphasizes respect for human rights and ethical use of military power, as these issues are not addressed in any meaningful way on the Russian side.

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125 Dima Adamsky. *The Culture of Military Innovation: The Impact of Cultural Factors on the Revolution in Military Affairs in Russia, the US, and Israel*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010.

A long list of factors contributed to the proliferation of war crimes and incidents of civilian casualties for which the Russian army was responsible: the pressure placed on the Russian forces by their commanders and political leaders to achieve their goals at any cost; the delegitimization of the Ukrainian nation by the Kremlin and the Russian authorities; state-level tolerance for violence and looting; disregard for indiscriminate harm to the civilian population caused during infrastructure attacks and justifying it on the grounds of security; the absence of a cohesive military approach to dealing with civilians including training on the subject for all soldiers and the military prosecution's enforcement of the military norms of international humanitarian law; and a shortage of weapons systems that enable precise attacks (rather the opposite – excessive reliance on "dumb bombs"). In light of all these factors, it is possible to say that the Russian aspiration to avoid harming civilians is nothing more than an abstract principle, a dead letter.

The reports of war crimes caused severe damage to Russia's image in Ukraine and the West on both the popular and governmental levels. These reports led to an intensification of Western military and economic assistance to Ukraine. Furthermore, they impaired Moscow's ability to achieve its war objectives through political arrangements. The hollow humanitarianism of the Russian army's propaganda efforts failed to mitigate its violent image. However, information warfare helped to offset Russia's reputational damage among its own public, preserve the Global South countries' neutrality, and, as the conflict continued, raise doubts in the extreme right and left margins of Western countries about the justification for the extent of assistance provided to Ukraine.

The strategic damage Russia suffered due to inflicting uncontrollable harm to civilians highlights the importance for Western armies, including the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), to develop mechanisms for restraining military force in a civilian environment. A military approach that balances the needs related to military operations with respect for the rights of the civilian population through appropriate training, weapons, and legal enforcement is highly important in modern warfare.

While population displacement (or "strategic engineered migration") by Russia led to significant demographic changes within Ukraine, as of May 2023, it has failed as a means of exerting pressure on the enemy system and hindered Russia's progress in the conquest of the country. This Russian practice may correspond to all four typological divisions that Greenhill proposes:<sup>126</sup>

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126 Kelly M. Greenhill, "Strategic engineered migration as a weapon of war," *Suffolk Transnational Law Review*, 39, no. 3 (2016).

1. **Population displacement for the purpose of territorial annexation (dispossessive strategic engineered migration):** Territorial conquest became the central test of success or failure in the war between Russia and Ukraine.<sup>127</sup> Moscow adopted comprehensive “demographic engineering” measures to encourage refugees to move into its territory, implemented a policy of Russification in occupied areas, held referendums on annexation, and issued Russian passports to citizens. Russification of the population also contributed to Putin’s systematic effort to reverse Russia’s population decline.
2. **Population transfer to undermine foreign governments (exportive strategic engineered migration):** Throughout the war, there was a noticeable Russian interest to undermine the Ukrainian regime by leveraging massive population migration from the occupied territories across the country. Russia also sought to increase pressure on European countries that took in refugees.
3. **Leveraging refugee migration for purposes of deterrence and enforcement (coercive strategic engineered migration):** Russia has sought to use population migration, among other things, as a means of increasing pressure on Ukraine and Western countries. This pressure sought to bring about Ukraine’s capitulation to Russian demands for a ceasefire, to discourage European countries from providing assistance to Ukraine and impose sanctions on Russia, and to prompt Western countries to pressure Kyiv to compromise. The distinction between this typological category and the previous one is not clear-cut and is intended to characterize Russian motivations and Ukrainian and Western concerns. While the actions on the ground are the same, interpreting them through information warfare tools among differentiated audiences promotes different objectives.
4. **Exploiting population migration to gain a military advantage (militarized strategic engineered migration):** Population migration through humanitarian corridors, in our view, served both sides as a tool for shaping the battlefield. Kyiv linked the humanitarian issue with arrangements for ending the fighting, through the same diplomatic channel, forcing Russia to make humanitarian concessions, including humanitarian corridors between the besieged areas and the liberated Ukrainian territory, in exchange for its willingness to negotiate with Moscow. These corridors thwarted Russian attacks and allowed Ukraine to organize its defense. The population migration forced Russia to allocate significant forces to

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127 Putin claims seizure of Azov territories "significant result" of war for Russia," *Ukrainska Pravda*, December 7, 2022. <https://news.yahoo.com/putin-claims-seizure-azov-territories-153936646.html> [accessed December 11, 2022]/.

controlling and managing civilians, particularly in the occupied areas, while the dedicated internal security forces brought to Ukraine did not prove themselves as a force multiplier and were involved in brutality against civilians, exacerbating the complexity of the occupation.

Demographic changes and widespread economic damage may cause long-term harm to Ukraine's demographic base, thus promoting, at least partially, the original Russian strategic goal of dismantling the foundations of the Ukrainian state and nation. On the other hand, in the current digital age, the displacement of the population and its Russification in the occupied territory (based on Soviet-era concepts and practices) comes at a heavy diplomatic and reputational cost for Russia in the international arena and may substantiate claims of genocide and ethnic cleansing, even without mass murder having taken place.

The war in Ukraine serves as an important case study for researching the exploitation of refugees as a weapon and the concept of "engineered population migration." A more in-depth study is needed to examine the phenomenon of shaping the battlefield through the imposition of humanitarian arrangements on the rival party and the "weaponization" of refugee flows in war.

## **Civilians Shaping Conflicts in the Digital Age**

**Conclusion 1: The civilian population has an increasing influence on the parties' ability to achieve strategic goals and on battlefield dynamics.**

The systemic analysis conducted in the framework of this study demonstrates that the population is not just a "military obstacle" but rather a sub-system within the ecosystem of the war, with an increasing influence on the conduct of operations on the battlefield in the current digital era. The civilian population can create military, political, economic, reputational, and other challenges for the attacking country. In the war in Ukraine, the civilian population has had a crucial effect on the ability of both sides to achieve their strategic objectives.

One may wonder whether the civilian population's increasing impact in conflicts is a general trend, or whether it is merely characteristic of technologically advanced societies or those who are prone to political activism and grassroots mobilization. The increasing penetration of digital communication in societies worldwide appears to make this phenomenon increasingly global.

Within the limits of this study, it was difficult to weigh the civilian populations' impact on the battlefield. We demonstrated that its influence is intensifying but avoided

defining it as decisive. In consultations we held with experts in the field of studies of war, we heard opposing views. On the one hand, it was argued that it is unlikely that 30–40 million Ukrainians, each armed with a cellular device, would not bring about a dramatic change in the military balance of power. On the other hand, it was claimed that the influence on the battlefield attributed to civilians is exaggerated and that military forces remain the primary driver of change. The question of whether civilians are a decisive factor in modern wars or just one of their shaping factors requires further focused research.

In Western countries, including Israel, it is important to strengthen the focus on various aspects of the treatment of civilians in warfare, regarding both routine and emergency operational plans. This is because the enemy may also draw inspiration from the war in Ukraine, whether by terrorizing the civilian home front or by creating difficulties for the IDF or Western armies through diverse forms of civilian resistance.

**Conclusion 2: There is an increased risk of failure in predicting the population's behavior and its influence on policy decisions within the framework of strategic operational planning.**

The Russian failure to predict the behavior of the Ukrainian population led to a military fiasco. The potential politicization involved in observing the civilian population from the rival perspective increases the difficulty of the analysis and the risks of failure to identify trends related to the population before the conflict or to predict the civilian population's behavior in response to the use of force.

Even if the analysis of the population's characteristics before the conflict is accurate, it is difficult to be certain that the rival leadership will change its policy in response to pressure on civilians. This is particularly true when the object of influence is deeply tied to issues of identity. Russia's failure (at least until May 2023) to achieve significant strategic and operational gains by exerting pressure on the Ukrainian population is yet another historical example that efforts to weaken an enemy system through pressure on civilians during warfare may yield unexpected and sometimes adverse results.<sup>128</sup> Attempting to influence a leadership by harming its population may lead to the formation of a new kind of social contract regarding the scope of services provided to the public and lowered expectations by citizens from their government.

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128 Pape gives a historical perspective on failures to achieve political goals while putting pressure on civilians in wars.

Robert Pape, "Bombing to Lose," *Foreign Affairs*, October 20, 2022. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/bombing-to-lose-airpower-cannot-salvage-russia-doomed-war-in-ukraine> [accessed: October 30, 2022].

In the case of the Russian-Ukrainian war, it is evident that the Russian military pressure on the Ukrainian public was gradual, partly due to a lack of precise aerial munitions and possibly also due to Russia's unwillingness to "go all the way" and destroy Ukraine's entire energy infrastructure during the winter. Had the Russians targeted civilians earlier or the West not provided assistance to Kyiv to repair the damaged facilities and air-defense systems to shoot down the Russian missiles and drones, the humanitarian pressures on civilians and the government would have had a more decisive impact. When the war is over it will be necessary to reexamine the impact of deep-strike attacks on energy infrastructure to draw more definitive conclusions regarding the effectiveness of this tool.

Ultimately, analysis of the civilian population and its impact on warfare is a vital part of intelligence work and strategic and operational planning. Given how elusive this topic is, analysts should use exploratory methodological approaches to minimize perceptual distortions and the influence of political lenses when studying the enemy's civilian population. It is imperative that the planning addresses a wide range of possible scenarios regarding the nature of the civilian population's involvement in warfare. Russia's failure to influence the Ukrainian public's positions toward its government calls for caution in the West and Israel in all matters related to influencing the behavior of civilians in an enemy state, both during war and in routine information operations.

**Conclusion 3: It is both possible and recommended to prepare for warfare on the "digital front" by learning from the conflict in Ukraine and recognizing that the enemy is doing the same.**

The attacking state must prepare in advance for hostile information warfare campaigns aimed at influencing its population. In addition, it must keep "surprises" for real-time use and not expose them to the enemy prematurely. During 2014–2021, Moscow laid the groundwork for information warfare (that in Russian definition encompasses the fields of cyber, electronic warfare (EW), propaganda campaigns, and political subversion). However, Russia's use of the new tools it developed during these years provided Ukraine, NATO, and other actors opportunities for continuous learning, wasting much of Russia's potential to surprise its rivals. This window of time helped Ukraine strengthen its population's information literacy and develop response mechanisms that reduced the effectiveness of Russian methods in this domain, and made the Ukrainian public more immune to Russian influence campaigns in the war.

There is a tension between “broad but limited” preparedness and “adequate” preparedness for a national emergency. Ukraine’s preparations were far from perfect, but the extensive focus on them across the bureaucratic establishment and in civil society, and the experience accumulated over eight years of confrontation with Russia before the war, helped the Ukrainian government and society make a rapid transition to emergency mode and allowed for learning and improvement “on the fly.” Early organization at the local government was prioritized. Mechanisms connecting military authorities with local elected and appointed leadership contributed to Ukraine’s ability to withstand the attack. However, inadequate preparations contributed to the rapid loss of vast territories in the early days of the war, and if not for the Russians’ own failures and a “compensation mechanism” in the form of massive assistance from the West, the damage to Ukraine could have been irreversible.

There is no magic formula for the right level of preparedness for a military emergency, as expenditure on civil defense, building shelters, maintaining strategic reserves of vital products and medical equipment, conducting drills etc. depends on the resource capacity of the defending state. Transitioning to a state of emergency incurs costs and drives away investors, and Zelensky’s government used this reasoning to justify its reluctance to take many crucial steps to make Ukraine better prepared for the war. The Ukrainian case may indicate that “broad but limited” preparedness enabled the defending state to cope only partially with a surprise attack but made it possible to recover subsequently.

Israel’s adversaries may learn from the methods and practices used to prepare the Ukrainian population for war. This may reduce the effectiveness of Israel’s efforts to influence enemy populations in times of military operations. In particular, Israel’s enemies might learn the way Ukraine weakened the impact of Russian propaganda tools and successfully employed civilians to shape global public opinion and to influence Western states, civil society, and international corporations. In circumstances where Israel’s nearby enemies (Lebanon, Gaza, and Syria) already have weak and vulnerable electricity infrastructure and the population’s socioeconomic status is deteriorating, targeting national infrastructures may prove to be less effective. It is also important to examine whether the enemy is preparing plans to encourage civilian resistance as a significant part of its attempt to thwart the IDF’s ground operations.

Accelerating Israel’s emergency preparedness, including on the home front, relies partially on intelligence warnings. The Ukrainian case corroborates the Israeli modus operandi that basic preparation of the public for war should be done continuously, regardless of a specific early warning, based on an understanding of the capabilities

and intentions of Israel's adversaries to harm the civilian sector. The existence of a comprehensive regulatory infrastructure for national and local emergency preparedness and their connection to security mechanisms could improve the resilience of the populace in scenarios where early warnings are not issued on time. The relative ease with which the Russians inflicted severe damage on the Ukrainian energy infrastructure using Iranian-made precision weapons highlights the need to examine similar scenarios in Israel, including preparing the public for such events.

**Conclusion 4: Excessive harm to the adversary's population might narrow Israel's international freedom of action; as perceptions are quickly established and difficult to change, public diplomacy is becoming increasingly important.**

The war in Ukraine demonstrates the risk involved in brutal behavior conducted by soldiers toward civilians or the civilian environment. Such behavior, even if not part of strategic and operational planning, severely damages the attacking country as it delegitimizes its military both in the eyes of the targeted population and in the international arena and carries the risk of sanctions initiated by major international corporations. This is particularly true if the attacking military lacks tools for dealing with the civilian population, and its political and military leadership condones acts of violence and cruelty toward civilians.

Harm to the civilian population is a factor that connects the local-national dimension with the global and ethical dimension of the war. The harm Russia inflicted upon Ukrainian civilians has become one of the elements linking the two dimensions of the conflict - the battle over Ukraine's national future and sovereignty, and the competition between the great powers for global dominance. The Ukrainians sought to increase the West's determination to act against Russia in the context of great-power competition by convincing Western public opinion and governments that Russia is harming civilians systematically and brutally. The more the West strengthened its determination to weaken Russia, the more harm to civilians contributed to its readiness to provide Kyiv with greater political, economic, and military support. Human rights violations within a local conflict can be perceived as an issue of universal ethical importance and diminish the strategic freedom of action of a country accused of such violations.

The rapid establishment of perceptions in war: The war has demonstrated the ethical and political differences in the perception of conflicts between Western governments and publics versus non-Western countries. The effectiveness of Russia's information warfare efforts on the political fringes of Western countries and the Global South



has become clearer. On the other hand, just as Russia struggled in 2022 to change its negative image and the negative perception of the goals it sought to promote among the Ukrainian public and the mainstream in the West, so too did Ukraine struggle to promote its positions in public opinion in Russia, on the political fringes in the West, and in the Global South.

The war in Ukraine has demonstrated that Israel's freedom of action on the state level may be significantly influenced not only by state actors but also by international corporations and civil society in Western countries, which operate autonomously and independently of governments. Prominent examples include SpaceX's assistance in making its satellite network available to the Ukrainian government (providing stable internet communication that was protected against Russia's jamming capabilities), Microsoft's support of Ukraine's efforts to defend its networks from cyberattacks, and companies leaving the Russian market to punish Russia, even if they were not required to do so under the sanctions regime. In addition to the risk of using force against civilian populations, the war in Ukraine has emphasized the importance of early Israeli public diplomacy efforts aimed at expanding the legitimacy of the IDF's actions. If Israel's image is not positive at the beginning of the conflict, it may struggle to change it later on.

Regarding investing in public diplomacy in the Global South countries – it is difficult to determine how important it is for Israel to be more active in this area. Apparently, Israel suffers from a disadvantage in terms of its public relations in this arena compared to its rivals, and it attaches importance primarily to its public legitimacy in Western countries. However, even in non-democratic countries, the public puts constraints on its government's freedom of action and willingness to engage in business collaboration with Israel, so it is important not to neglect the Global South in this context. In any case, this issue merits future research.

**Conclusion 5: The growing importance of the “digital front” - The speed, continuity, and availability of modern information technologies interconnect the operations' domains (military, political, economic and information) and allow the parties to compensate for relative weaknesses in one of those. The “digital front” is the primary dimension where the civilian population can participate actively in the war.**

Information technologies and the psychological dimension are a central connecting thread between all the actors and aspects of the conflict, and this seems to be the main innovation in the war in Ukraine regarding the civilian population. Information technologies have enabled wide, continuous, and real-time interaction between the

leadership in Kyiv and the Ukrainian public, helped build a civil support base for the Ukrainian armed forces, connected Ukrainian and Western civil societies, and allowed Kyiv to put pressure on Western governments by appealing to their publics.

All the parties involved in the conflict are “playing the whole field”: they integrate their various systems (military, political-diplomatic, economic, and information warfare) when operating vis-à-vis the civilian population in the war, and try to compensate for one system’s weakness by using other tools. Therefore, it is difficult to confine the warfare to a single dimension. For example, Russia’s military failures prompted it to “weaponize” civilian fields (e.g. energy, food, population migration). While increasing the pressure on civilians did make it easier for the Russian army to temporarily control territories tactically, it also created legitimacy problems that led Western public opinion and governments to strengthen their support for Ukraine, thereby undermining Russia’s ability to achieve strategic objectives in the war.

The exposure of military forces to increasing civilian reconnaissance activities is becoming more significant than in the past. The civilian environment has become an auxiliary force in gathering intelligence on military forces before the start of the conflict and in real-time, including assistance in directing enemy fire. In some circumstances, as in the conflict in Ukraine, it may become a mechanism for recruiting civilian actors around the world to act on behalf of one of the fighting parties (e.g. by providing analyzed intelligence information from open sources). On the other hand, a state actor seeking to enlist the public in an information campaign and intelligence gathering has to work harder to conceal its secrets (the Ukrainians are struggling with the tension between sharing information and hiding it). This may not seem new, but thanks to changes in digital technology, the war in Ukraine has set a new benchmark for the speed of information flow, the proliferation of civilian sensors, and techniques for processing information from civilian sources and its depth of integration into warfare.

The question arises as to how concerned Israel should be about the potential mobilization of global civil society to assist its adversaries by providing “civilian intelligence,” as was the case in the global mobilization against Russia. This issue appears to be related to the perception of Israel’s legitimacy to operate, as well as its adversaries’ ability to rally international civil society for such efforts. Israel might not generate the same interest and hostility as Russia did among the Western public. This topic also merits dedicated and complementary research.

The challenge facing Israel regarding the empowerment of its adversaries' populations through modern communication tools is partly technology-driven and partly content-based. The Russian attempt to block the occupied population's access to free communication often failed, and this approach seems inappropriate for Israel. We have no concrete solutions to offer regarding this challenge beyond simply shining a spotlight on the need to develop technological and conceptual coping mechanisms in every dimension of action and across the domains.

**Conclusion 6: The blurring of boundaries between the civilian and military spheres and between “involved” and “uninvolved” parties (combatants/non-combatants) is increasing, in a way that challenges the operational patterns of Western and Israel's armies.**

The war in Ukraine has illustrated the increasing blurring of boundaries between the military-security and civilian realms and between “involved” and “uninvolved” parties, in a way that challenges the norms of international humanitarian law. This blurring pertains to the legitimacy of fighters hiding among civilian populations and the right to use aerial strikes to destroy the enemy's national economic infrastructure, for example in the energy sector. The tension between the legal norm prohibiting the conduct of warfare from civilian areas and the legitimacy of such warfare in the eyes of the defending side, as well as the civilian population and the international community, including governments, has intensified on both the Russian and Ukrainian sides<sup>129</sup>. The Russian legal argument that Ukraine's energy infrastructure contributes to its security and is therefore a legitimate target has been rejected by the West.

The pro-Ukrainian activists has deterred international human rights organizations from criticizing Ukrainian armed forces' combat operations in a civilian environment. This may teach Israel's enemies that exerting public pressure on investigators from human rights organizations could help them promote one-sided reports against Israel.

The difficulty of using legal warfare to influence operational warfare in real-time has intensified and the deterrent power of post-war prosecution is being challenged. Russia's response to accusations of human rights violations and war crimes is to ignore, deny, and resist courts with universal jurisdiction. Ukraine sought to raise concerns among Russian soldiers that they would pay a personal price after the war if they are found to have committed war crimes. However, as long as the perpetrators remain within Russia's territory, it will be difficult to punish them. Their freedom of

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129 Efroni Danny, “Heibetim mishpatiim bemivtsa ‘Amud Anan,’” “היבטים משפטיים במבצע עמוד” [Legal aspects of the operation ‘Pillar of Cloud’], *Army and Strategy*, vol. 5 (special issue), Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), April 2014.

movement may be limited and they may be affected in other ways, but the sheer size of Russia mitigates the deterrent power of such punishment methods in the eyes of Russian soldiers, compared to soldiers from smaller countries. Time is needed to assess the effectiveness of this approach: the legal activity needed to extract a price from Russia and its soldiers for war crimes in Ukraine will take years. It is doubtful whether violations of international humanitarian law by Ukraine, as they occur, will trigger legal action in the West (although they may generate symbolic legal activity against Ukraine in Russia).

Israel also rejects the universal jurisdiction of international courts. However, the “deny and ignore” approach, which is possible for an authoritarian Russian state, is not appropriate for Israel as it is closely tied to Western countries and deeply dependent on them. In light of this, the Israeli response to the challenge of military-civilian blurring requires to update the legal paradigm guiding Israel’s security forces and to continue enforcing it through military and civilian legal authorities, while balancing between restrained use of force toward civilians and fulfilling the military mission.

## **Main Lessons for Israel**

1. Civilians’ importance on the battlefield is expected to increase in Israel’s future conflicts. **More significant efforts are required than in the past to factor this element into strategic and operational planning** while taking into account the heightened risk of misjudgment and miscalculation regarding civilians’ behavior in wartime.
2. **The centrality of the populace’s role must also be considered in aerial operations planning.** In Israel’s future conflicts, the Air Force is expected to be a dominant component in operations in a civilian environment, which will impose constraints on the Air Force’s use of force and affect its ability to achieve its objectives.
3. **Israel’s enemies may broadly use the civilian population to achieve strategic objectives based on lessons learned from the war in Ukraine.** Israel can expect the mobilization of civilians on the battlefield, along with enemy efforts to galvanize governments, public opinion in the West, and international corporations to support it.
4. The image of the rival parties in the international arena crystallizes quickly and is difficult to change. To keep strategic freedom of action during a crisis, **it is vital that Israel pre-plans its campaign on the “digital front” and begins to implement it during routine, non-emergency periods.** This includes, among

other things, the use of public diplomacy directed at governments, public opinion, NGOs and business corporations, primarily in the West.

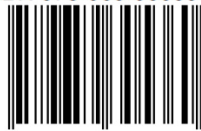
5. Israel should **develop technological infrastructure and information content** to gain advantages on the “digital front” in the civilian sphere during times of conflict. It is worth examining whether Israel can enlist an “army of volunteers” both domestically and globally as part of its toolkit.
6. Despite the deep organizational and cultural differences between the Russian army and the IDF, the war in Ukraine powerfully demonstrates **that military operations within the civilian population have ramifications on the strategic level** that can influence the balance of forces and political achievements in the conflict.
7. The war in Ukraine **reinforces the importance of the IDF’s existing operational approach, which balances the principle of fulfilling military objectives with the imperative of minimizing the use of force against civilians.**
8. Israel should examine its emergency preparedness considering the lessons learned from the war in Ukraine. The military capabilities used in this war, such as massive barrages of precise missiles and Iranian-made drones, demonstrate **the need to prepare the Israeli public and civil defense for the possibility of extreme war scenarios:** a sudden eruption of hostilities on a scale previously unseen in the Israeli home front and nationwide intensive precision strikes leading to persistent heavy damage to Israeli critical national infrastructure (energy, water, communications).

## About the Authors

**Daniel Rakov** is an expert on Russian policy in the Middle East and great-power competition in the region. He is a Senior Researcher at Tel Aviv University's Elrom Center for Air and Space Studies, and at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security (JISS). He served in the IDF for over 20 years, mainly in the Israeli Defense Intelligence (Aman). From 2019-2021 he was a Research Fellow in the Russian Studies Program at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), Tel Aviv. Twitter: @rakovdan

**Dr. Sarah Fainberg** is a Senior Researcher and Head of the Great Powers Research Program at Tel Aviv University's Elrom Center for Air and Space Studies. She is also a Lecturer in the MA Program for Security and Diplomacy Studies at Tel Aviv University and an Adjunct Professor of Israeli Affairs at Georgetown University. She previously served as Policy and Strategic Issues Adviser for Israel's Ministry of Defense and Research Fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) in Tel Aviv.

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