

“US VS. THEM”: WESTERN NARRATIVES OF MORAL RIGHTEOUSNESS ON THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

The war between Russia and Ukraine is the latest chapter in a long-crafted series of narratives of Russia being a perennial enemy of Western efforts at making the world more democratic and more peaceful.

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Nearly three-year war between Ukraine and Russia has been framed and interpreted in Western media outlets, policymaking circles, and diplomatic statements, as a fight between democracy vs. authoritarianism, freedom vs. tyranny, and good vs. evil; all as presumptive self-evident facts.¹ Nearly all mainstream analyses of the conflict view Russia as the aggressor that illegally invaded Ukraine; first to prevent it from joining the alliance of Western liberal democracies, and second, in outright annexing occupied territories in a clear violation of another country's territorial integrity. At the same time, Ukraine has enjoyed near-unanimous sympathy and support from those same sources as the state that wants to break free of its Soviet past and embrace a democratic and European future it deserves. In this, the war between Russia and Ukraine is the latest chapter in a long-crafted series of narratives of Russia being a perennial enemy of Western efforts at making the world more democratic and more peaceful.

Within formal academic studies of international relations, states are often theorized to be rational actors that conduct foreign policy in accordance with national interests.² Because the international arena, even with the presence of institutions like the United Nations, remains unpredictable, 'national interests' are closely connected to

the state's own security and stability. Depending on the size, power, and capability of that state, 'security' can mean anything from simple self-preservation to maintenance of a favorable international status quo. Within specific theories of Liberalism, states that claim to uphold and promote principles of democracy, human rights, and collective peace, openly adhere to ideologies that add a sense of moral legitimacy to justify their decisions and actions.³ Wars are undesirable, but sometimes necessary if the purpose is to help free a people from a tyrannical government. Intervention is justified if the target government is accused of human rights violations or election fraud. Whatever the situation, Liberalist states like the United States or the United Kingdom utilize a series of narratives that connect their foreign policy decisions to a self-perceived moral good that goes beyond national self-interest and is an act of charitable sacrifice that expends national resources to the benefit and assistance of others in need. That is, at least, the narrative state leaders use to justify their actions towards their audience of both national and global citizens.

A 'narrative,' a word often used when describing the ways in which groups understand things, is a critical component of the ways in which states conduct foreign



policy. In plain terms, I define a narrative as a conscious connection of previously unstructured and possibly even unrelated events, figures, and ideas into a seemingly (and seamlessly) emplotted framework of logic and reference. In other words, a 'narrative' is constructed by groups to convey both a message and a story. It draws on pieces of factual evidence, but that evidence is oftentimes deliberately selected in order to prove a point. Thus, a narrative is different from history in that it tells a story, but a particular interpretation of that story to suit larger purposes and agendas. There is nothing inherently sinister about using narratives. To a wide degree, nearly all states, societies, organizations, or any collective group use narratives as a way of understanding something in context. But narratives are often used by groups to frame something in a way that justifies a proper and logical response.

In the case of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the narrative used in the West frames Russia as an aggressive state that is determined to undermine security and stability in much of the world, and it is therefore up to the West in general, and NATO in particular to contain, and if necessary, counteract its actions in the name of freedom and democracy. The narrative is strongly connected to the fact that Russia invaded another country. The motives and rationales for the invasion are irrelevant to the narrative.

In truth, in order for the narrative of Russia's clear aggression and violation of another country's sovereignty and territorial integrity to carry any legitimacy, any rationales explaining the invasion risk undermining another Western narrative: that NATO is a purely defensive alliance that poses no threat to Russia at all. It is unimportant that Russia perceives NATO as a security threat and has categorically attempted to reach an agreement with it and the United States on the cooperative security guarantees and has been rebuffed at every attempt. It is problematic to mention the fact that the West has been actively working to undermine Russia's

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influence in Ukraine since shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union; even to the point of enabling socio-political extremists in Ukraine to radicalize politics that alienate and discriminate against Russian-speaking communities. Narratives may be built on factual evidence, but as mentioned above, in order for a particular understanding and bias to be conveyed – this being the ultimate goal of a narrative – other pieces of evidence need to be selectively filtered in order to convey a particular ‘story’ in Western political and media circles. In the plainest sense of meaning, narratives in the West about Russia depict it as the ‘enemy,’ and the ‘other,’ to the West’s political and moral superiority.

Much of the way in which narratives are constructed and used is therefore connected to perception; a way in which one sees the other. The West ‘perceives’ certain countries to be friendly, while others are rivals. Within studies of international relations, theories of Constructivism note the importance of how perceptions shape a state’s foreign policy. While Liberalism stresses the idea that states can adhere to greater, more moral, goods and universal human rights, Constructivism emphasizes the importance of identity, values, and perception in how states not only ‘see’ one another, but also how these perceptions shape states responding and interacting to others.⁴ Just as the above-mentioned Western states perceive one another to be friendly and seeking common ground, other states outside this group can be perceived as ranging from competitive, untrustworthy, authoritarian, devious, and inherently belligerent. To put

this in a simple context, states attribute character traits to other countries in similar ways people regard other people. It is a type of foreign policy with adjectives. For example, the United States sees the United Kingdom not only as an ally but as a special partner in global security. If the UK announced it was building five new nuclear submarines, Washington would perceive this as nothing wrong. However, if Russia, or worse, China, announced the construction and deployment of five nuclear submarines, it would be seen as a challenge to security and an escalation of conflict.

Thus, a key point in Constructivism is that state-to-state relations are primarily shaped by perception. The United States perceives Russia as an aggressor for its actions in Ukraine, Georgia, Syria, and Belarus, while continuing to view, and defend, Israel as a partner for peace despite its own actions in Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Territories. The United States will perceive Cuba as problematic because of its ‘Communist’ government, while having absolutely no problem working with Communist governments in Beijing and Hanoi. Likewise, Russia perceives NATO to be the biggest threat to global security and stability, not only for its direct antagonistic actions against Russia, but for its apparent unwillingness to accept the reality of a multipolar world and coordinate with other rising powers like China, and India. Where Russia sees NATO ‘expand’ and ‘encroach,’ the United States sees NATO ‘incorporate’ states that make the rational and sovereign decision to seek membership. Where Russia sees its actions in Ukraine as an ‘intervention,’ the United States has cast the so-called “Special Military Operation” as a bold-faced ‘invasion.’ Perceptions are therefore highly interpretive and thus deeply connected to the importance of narratives that are, in turn, connected to symbols.

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Symbols function as the tools of narrative. They are the images, people, places, and memories that give structure to what we think and focus on how we think it. Symbols therefore add much to the understanding of how states perceive themselves, other states, and the world around them. For instance, in the ongoing war in Ukraine, Russian forces often fly the so-called Victory Banner (Ru. *Знамя Победы*) whenever a major town is

captured. The Banner is an exact replica of the one raised by Red Army soldiers over the Reichstag in Berlin on 1 May 1945 and serves as the official symbol of the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany. Why would such a banner be used in the current war in Ukraine; especially since it clearly bears symbols of the Soviet Union, including the Communist hammer and sickle? To Western perceptions, one could presume that Russia is still connected with its Soviet past; even to the point it is trying to resurrect the Soviet Union, as has been frequently commented. But the use of the Victory Banner in Russia symbolizes Russia's ongoing struggle against fascism and Nazism, which is perceived to be used by governments in Ukraine since 2014. Both Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov have frequently justified their intervention in Ukraine as a struggle against neo-Nazism that targets the Russian-speaking community. They point to issues such as restrictions on the use of the Russian language in schools, media, and communication; the banning of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church connected to the Russian Patriarchate in Moscow; and the destruction of numerous monuments to Russian and Soviet-era figures.

If they do not necessarily justify the actions of states, narratives, and symbols at the very least help us understand why states take the positions they do. Narratives give motive, while symbols offer meaning. If narratives form a critical part of how a state shapes its foreign policy, they also form the basis for state-sponsored propaganda, which exploits emotional biases over rational reasoning. Propaganda exists in nearly every state and is utilized in Western democracies just as much as it is presumed to be the particular vocation of authoritarian regimes. Although here, Western narratives would refer to it as 'public relations' instead. All the same, propaganda is a series of narratives that entrench beliefs, attitudes, and biases, and lock in perceptions of people and ideas to degrees even when challenged with factual truths from reality. This type of cognitive dissonance has characterized much of the way in which Western governments continued to perceive Russia over the last century, and it explains why the West in general, NATO in specific, and the United States in particular, seems so committed to the goal of supporting Ukraine's efforts against Russia; even when options for a negotiated settlement could, would, and should, have resolved the security dilemma, prevented war, and saved tens of thousands of lives. In this, narratives help us understand why states oftentimes resort to seemingly irrational courses of action.

Nearly three years into the conflict, NATO countries remain steadfast in their commitment to support Ukraine, despite clear indications that the war has been in Russia's favor. To date, Russia controls more than a

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quarter of Ukraine's territory, including the Crimean Peninsula which it formally annexed in 2014. Despite a temporary respite in 2023 in which Ukraine managed to regain some territory from Russian withdrawals, the much-vaunted Ukrainian counterattack that was presented in Western media as the moment when Russia's defense lines would break and the entire "Special Military Operation" collapse, Russian defense lines not only held but managed a few months later in 2023 to retake offensive positions and captured a series of key towns like Bakhmut, Andriivka, and Vuhledar. Reports of Ukrainian troop morale being at an all-time low are coupled with stories of desertion, dwindling ammunition, and Western hesitancy to enable Ukraine to strike deep into Russian territory with long-range missiles given for such purposes. While calls for a ceasefire and an agreement with Russia in which Ukraine would have to accept the loss of some territory are growing in some political circles, leaders in Washington, London, and Berlin, and the heads of NATO and the European Union, all remain in unison in refusing to admit that Ukraine is losing the war. More to the point, Western leaders are less optimistic about Ukraine's victory, but are steadfast in the commitment to ensure that Russia *not* win. Even more, Russia *cannot* win. To do so, would not only encourage other would-be aggressors to seek advantage on the battlefield, but would also undermine the so-called "rules-based order" that defined international peace and security since the end of the Second World War. Russia 'cannot' win, simply because it is not part of the West; and non-Western powers cannot win in a Western-dominated world order – again, according to the narratives that commit Western states to foreign policies that seem otherwise counterproductive, defeatist, and altogether irrational.

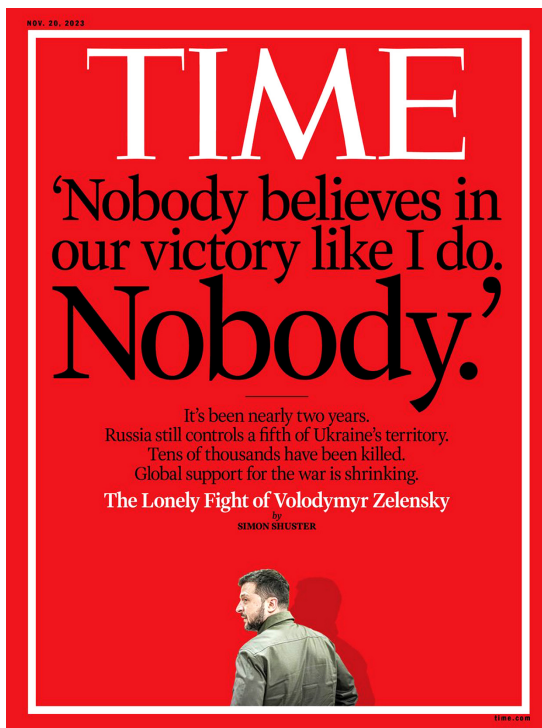
What explains the persistence of a course of action long after it has lost meaning and momentum? One key element that can be found in nearly every Western narrative about Russia is how it is, and will remain, altogether non-Western. Russia is a quintessential "They/Them" to the Western "We/Us."⁵ This dichotomy not only contributes to a sense of moral superiority and righteousness the United States has in response to Russian opposition, but has exacerbated the 'Othering' of Russia as the diametrically opposed out-group whose interests,

motives, and policies are, at best, selfish, and, at worst, destructive to global peace and security that can only be upheld and defended by the Western powers. For example, narratives are on full display through a country's media, as simple headlines already give a particular slant for events. States like Russia 'invade' other countries, while the United States either 'intervenes,' or, at the absolute worst, 'sends troops.' Russian forces in Ukraine are 'occupiers,' while American soldiers can only be 'peacekeepers.' Ukraine has a 'government,' while Russia has a 'regime.' America 'defends freedom,' while Russia 'imposes authority.'

Much of this Us/Them dichotomization is associated with long-standing Western practices of Orientalism, in which the Other is depicted as backward and inferior, and at the same time, an existential threat to the civilized world. As such, the Other has a choice of only one of two roles to play. It can either adopt the role of the subordinate culture in order to be educated by the West, or it can reject the dominant-subordinate relationship, remain uncivilized, and be a threat that cannot win, and must be contained, if not outright defeated. For much of the last three decades since the collapse of Communist governments, emerging states throughout Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union frequently looked to Europe as a guiding light toward democratic transition and economic modernization. This 'return to Europe' idea that many social and political leaders embraced,

demonstrated the confidence of the European Union and NATO, but the superior position the West found itself in that allowed it to exert significant amounts of leverage over aspiring member states.⁶ Countries like Poland, the Czech Republic, the Baltic States, and most recently Ukraine, may have internal problems with functioning transparent government and toleration of minorities; they have all provided the necessary, and expected, obeisance to Western institutions to qualify as being part of the special community of European states and societies. Russia has neither ever offered this type of deference, nor has it ever been offered a place in the European "garden."⁷ For Russia, the West primarily perceives it as the second of the two roles mentioned above: an aggressive and expansionist state that is either trying to hold on to dwindling power and relevance from the collapse of the Soviet Union, or a state trying to regain that lost power and relevance through delusions of grandeur and authoritarian nostalgia. Regardless of interpretation, Russia can never be seen as an independent actor seeking its own security guarantees with the West as an equal partner.

The closest Russia reached in association with Europe and the West was in the 1990s when, in the years immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the then-President Boris Yeltsin presided over a state wracked with political instability, economic volatility, and social unrest. Yeltsin had considered the West, and in



particular the United States, to be a genuine partner and ally in the post-Cold War era, and accepted the draconian measures necessary for economic "shock therapy" that Western economists insisted was the only way for post-Communist states to overcome the inadequate conditions of command economies.⁸ Not only did "shock therapy" devastate Russia's nascent economy, but it created a class of ultra-rich oligarchs that were widely unpopular, grossly corrupt, and directly responsible for the collapse of any Western-supported political reforms. Yeltsin might have been viewed positively by Western leaders, but when he was unable to halt Russia's economic collapse, the rise of oligarchs, and the spread of organized crime throughout the 1990s, he became to be seen as weak, dependent, buffoonish, and, thus ultimately, subordinate. Yet even in the best of Yeltsin's times, the West still perceived Russia to be an outsider that, at absolute best, could 'Europeanize' to an extent, but would never be admitted into its leading organizations, the European Union and NATO; both of which continued to expand eastward while rejecting attempts by Moscow to join.

Vladimir Putin initially wanted to continue Yeltsin's goals of cooperating with the West, but advocated for engagement on equal parity. Initially, this was dismissed as little more than the nostalgia for past prestige mentioned above. However, a series of important events in 2008 significantly altered Western-Russian relations. In February, the United States supported the breakaway territory of Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence from Serbia without Serbia's approval and international legal framework of United Nations, to which Russia opposed. In April, NATO hosted a summit in Bucharest, Romania, in which Croatia and Albania were invited to join, while Georgia and Ukraine were agreed to become members of NATO at some later date, which Russia denounced. That August, Georgia, in an attempt at preparing for NATO membership, militarily intervened in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, two breakaway territories of its own in an effort at regaining control over these territories. Russia intervened on behalf of the two regions and subsequently recognized their unilaterally declared independence. When the West condemned Russia's actions in Georgia as a violation of her territorial integrity, Putin responded by saying the precedent was already set with Kosovo. To this day, Kosovo's Western supporters insist its independence remains a "special case" and cannot be equated to either Abkhazia in Georgia or especially Crimea in Ukraine. Not surprisingly, Putin's more critically assertive foreign policies since 2008 to the present have undeniably recast Russia as an aggressive and expansionist state in most Western circles.

The 2014 protests in Ukraine provided another critical moment for the entrenchment of Us/Them

narratives between Russia and the West. Western media portrays the "Euromaidan" movement as Ukraine's desire to finally break free of Russia's influence and join the community of European nations. What is missing from Western narratives are the reasons behind the outbreak of protests, when Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich officially rejected any future development towards membership in the European Union, and opted instead to deepen with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and subsequently the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. In truth, Yanukovich would have wanted to build on Ukraine's unique geographic position as a bridge between West and East and seek membership in both. However, when the topic was asked, EU officials stated that Ukraine had to choose one or the other. There could be no "two chairs" to sit on. Knowing EU membership was years, if not decades away, Yanukovich ended all negotiations for EU integration and opted for the EAEU along with a series of economic packages with Russia. This produced mass protests throughout most of Ukraine's central and western cities; protests that Russia claimed were spurred on by the United States in an attempt at formulating another "color revolution".

The protests ultimately succeeded in forcing Yanukovich to dissolve parliament and call for elections. It was also widely assumed that being as unpopular as he was, his party would stand to lose. In numerous interviews and press conferences, both Vladimir Putin and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said an arrangement was worked out with Ukraine, the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Poland to support new elections. However, the next day, Yanukovich fled the country and pro-Western political leaders assumed control of the Ukrainian government. In the West, this was hailed as a successful democratic revolution, while Russia continues to refer to this as a "coup d'état". The following instability that stemmed from what is now known as a Washington-sponsored power grab produced a series of clashes throughout the country between pro-Western 'democrats,' and a series of 'pro-Russian' loyalists. In truth, the conflict was led by members of Ukrainian political extremists who were able to encapsulate their ethnonationalism within the guise of being pro-Western, and thus "anti-Russian." The resulting instability led Russia to sponsor extremists of their own in Ukraine who supported secession of Crimea and its annexation to Russia in March; one month after the demonstrations.

Russia's annexation of Crimea caught most of the West off guard but produced near-unanimous condemnation and reinforced both Western and Ukrainian resolve to secure the country's fate to that of the European Union and NATO. Conflicts in the

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Donbass region failed to repeat the scenario of secession, but the resulting Minsk Agreements offered some sort of compromise solution that retained the rest of Ukraine's territorial integrity while offering the local Russian-speaking population some form of institutional autonomy. However, while the Agreement was signed between Russia and Ukraine, it failed to be implemented. Russia accused the West, specifically the Americans, French, and German leadership of reassuring Ukraine's then-President Petro Poroshenko and later Volodymyr Zelensky that the best strategy was to stall for time and allow military armaments to accumulate so the region could be taken back by force. Ukraine's position was that no deal with Russia should be agreed upon until the status of Crimea was resolved. In other words, Russia should not have been given the pleasure of being treated as an equal partner for peace with the liberal democratic world, and instead, remain isolated without international support.

The eight years between the events of 2014 and the launch of the so-called "Special Military Operation" in February 2022 were marked in Western media circles by castigation of Russia's actions, sanctions to either force it to reconsider its policies, or to isolate it from the rest of the global community. Within this period, NATO continued to speak of further expansion by still considering Ukraine, Georgia, and also Moldova, as potential future members. Repeated opposition from Russia that NATO was a security threat was met with contradictory reasoning. NATO continued to reassure Russia that it was not considered a threat, and therefore not a target. However, NATO also stressed that it would reassess Russia's threat if it took actions that were contradictory to NATO's security objectives. In the meantime, Russia's constant protests against NATO's actions worked to justify Western narratives that NATO's expansion was all the more necessary to protect smaller states like Ukraine that, taken as self-evident in the narratives, possess "common European values" with the West. In short, "if Russia's rulers have no revanchist

aspirations, they have no reason to resent NATO's inclusion of the new democracies."

The West thus exonerated itself of any potential wrong-doing that might produce a negative response from Russia by simultaneously framing NATO's actions as a collective force for good, and by interpreting Russia's response of anything other than quiet acceptance as proof of its aggressive ambitions. By all but formally drawing the line between the European West and the Oriental Other at the eastern borders of Ukraine, Western political leaders and the compliant media symbolized Russia as the quintessential antagonist that justified NATO's continued existence, expansion, and engagement in hotspots outside of Europe's geographic region. Not surprisingly therefore, Putin's launch of the so-called "Special Military Operation" in Ukraine in February 2022 was not only perceived to be an outright invasion of one country by another, but affirmed presumptions within Western narratives that Russia is, and will be, a threat to global peace and security. This presumption was all but cemented once Putin announced the annexation of four regions of Ukraine to Russia that September, and when his terms for peace meant the recognition of those territories, along with Crimea, as part of Russia, and for NATO to renounce any plans for Ukraine's membership in mid-2024.

At present, the United States and leaders of the European Union and NATO remain absolutely committed to the narratives of perceiving Russia as a state only capable of causing chaos and wreaking havoc. It cannot have any legitimate security concerns of its own because NATO, according to the Western Liberalist narrative, poses no threat to anyone's security except those who choose to make it so, and if it is as such, then they have sinister intentions. To be sure, there are some European leaders who have never completely embraced the Liberalist narrative of Russia-bad/West-good. But people like Hungary's long-time Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, Slovakia's resilient Prime Minister Robert Fico, or Serbia's President Aleksandar Vučić are often depicted as either "pro-Russian," "pro-Putin," "illiberal," "populist" or, if necessity dictates, "pro-Trump." Like Russia, they are more of the "Them", than the "Us," even if they are located in Europe and are either EU members or aspiring members. Like Russia, these countries too have received scrutiny for thinking outside the Western Liberalist hive mind, and are seen more as deviants and outliers than rational alternative thinkers.

At the same time, the Western Liberalist narratives offer staunchly pro-Western and pro-NATO countries a free pass regardless of internal problems and limits to political rights and civil liberties. Numerous studies have



been made about the deteriorating conditions of democracy and civil society in Ukraine not just since the start of the war in 2022, but since 2014 when any voice to the contrary against full and total Western integration and Russian disengagement is offered and deemed dangerous contagion. Ukraine is still propped up as a paragon of liberal democratic virtues chasing the 'European dream' despite multiple infringements against its Russian-speaking minority, many members of which speak Russian but identify themselves as Ukrainians.¹⁰ Much of this has been ignored in Western press, but on the occasional instance where issues such as political extremism and open displays of neo-Nazism in Ukraine cannot be hid, Western narratives are quick to engage in 'whataboutist' tactics that either tries to point to issues even more severe in Russia, or will excuse it as irrational, if still understandably emotional reactions to a country being invaded and destroyed. If nothing else, ascribing all sorts of negative words to Putin: "KGB Officer," "tsar," "mafia boss," "bully," "dictator," "tyrant" or "fascist" usually shuts down the argument. If all else fails, Western Liberalist narratives can, and often still employ, stories of Russia interfering in the internal elections of democracies and supporting allegedly like-minded people like Donald Trump. "Russiagate" is the ultimate narrative of Western self-assurance and moral justification.

Narratives and the symbols connected with them have not only significantly contributed to the intractability of resolving the Russian-Ukrainian War, but it can persuasively be argued that narratives that depict states and societies as first out-group members and second as threats to in-group harmony led to the outbreak of conflict in the first place. Any calls by Putin for collective security that include the emerging powers in a new 'multipolar world,' of which the United States has always been recognized as being a part, is perceived by the West as a repudiation of liberal democracy, a challenge to the American-led Trans-Atlantic alliance, and a pursuit of imperial ambitions. This is particularly acute when considerations of a 'multipolar' world include rising non-Western powers like Russia, China, India, and South Africa, and have all but eliminated the possibility of any negotiated settlement to any conflicts that are cast in the Us/Them, Good/Evil, Freedom/Tyranny dichotomy. In the end, it is the West that appears more isolated than Russia with the narratives it employs and believes.¹¹

To be sure, this article should not be understood as an attempt at exonerating Russia. For its part, Russia has directly contributed to the intractability of resolving conflict, first by recognizing the independence of the self-proclaimed People's Republic of Donetsk and People's Republic of Lugansk; and second by formally annexing

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both of those territories as well as the regions of Zaporozhe and Kherson, which is a bold move considering not all of the territory claimed by Russia is under its control. Additionally, Russia operates within narratives of its own, claiming that all of Ukraine is under the control of a neo-Nazi government that is openly supported by NATO and the West with some collective goal of destroying the Russian state and society. Like all narratives, there are clear empirical facts intermixed with emotional interpretation. In this, Russia is just as predictably culpable as their Western and Ukrainian counterparts. This article is therefore either an attempt at trying to read states 'right' or, at the very least, understand

why preset biases in narratives contribute to states reading other states "wrong".

To date, there appears to be little evidence that Western narratives about the "Other," of which Russia is a primary antagonist, are going to change any time soon. If anything, Us/Them narratives become more entrenched and intractable when challenged by reality. If we understand narratives as "locking" a state's foreign policy into a commitment that puts the state's reputation at stake, then disengagement could be seen as more costly than maintaining position and persevering. Public support in the West for the war in Ukraine has diminished since 2022 but support is still there, and, like the ways in which people emotionally support professional sports, one does not abandon the team in the middle of the match; if anything, simply to keep the opposing side from claiming victory. Given the number of political and institutional leaders in the United States and NATO putting their reputation and credibility on the line for Ukraine, and given that much of the West's support for Ukraine has become an outsourced proxy war, the narratives can continue so long as casualties remain within Ukraine. With this in mind, narratives remain a critically important way of understanding how the foreign policies of states perceive themselves and their actions, and (mis)perceive the motives and actions of others long after rational calculation would warrant new strategies and new ways of thinking.

Endnotes

- 1 Though often presumed, by "the West", or "Western countries", I am specifically referring to those states generally associated with both NATO and the European Union, and specifically the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, along with East Asian associated allies like Japan and South Korea. In this, the "West" is hardly a geographical designation anymore, so much as it is an association of states with like-minded foreign policies with the United States.
- 2 Brian Schmidt and Colin Wight, "Rationalism and the 'Rational Actor Assumption' in Realist International Relations Theory", *Journal of International Political Theory* 19:2, pp. 158 – 182.
- 3 G. John Ikenberry, *A World Safe for Democracy: Liberal Internationalism and the Crisis of Global Order* (Yale University Press, 2020).
- 4 Ted Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory", *International Security* 23:1, pp. 171 - 200
- 5 Glenn Diesen, *Russophobia: Propaganda in International Politics*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022)
- 6 Milada Anna Vachudova, *Europe Undivided: Democracy, Leverage, and Integration After Communism* (Oxford University Press, 2005).
- 7 EEAS Press Team, "Opening Remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell at the Inauguration of the Pilot Programme", October 13, 2022, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-diplomatic-academy-opening-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-inauguration-pilot_en
- 8 Jeffrey Sachs, "What is to be Done?" *The Economist*, January 13, 1990.
- 9 George Will, "Eastward Ho – And Soon", *The Washington Post*, June 13, 1996
- 10 For an analytical assessment of the weakening of Ukraine's democratic structure and curtailing of political rights and civil liberties, see Branko Marcetic, "The State of Ukrainian Democracy is Not Strong", *Jacobin*, February 25, 2023.
- 11 See for instance, Thomas Fazi, "Anthony Blinken is Wrong about Biden's Foreign Policy", *UnHerd*, October 4, 2024, <https://unherd.com/newsroom/antony-blinken-is-wrong-about-bidens-foreign-policy/>