

The Conflict in Ukraine: Ecological, Demographic and Social Aspects

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Abstract

All provinces of Ukraine voted for independence in the 1991 referendum. The borders were recognized by other nations, including Russia. Admittedly, a majority of residents in the southern and eastern parts of Ukraine are Russian-speaking; many of them were disappointed that their region had not become a part of the Russian Federation. Some Russian-speaking areas may become parts of RF if the citizens really want it. A workable solution must be found by means of negotiations. The conflict in Ukraine hindered environmental policies in Europe and elsewhere. The conflict between two major agricultural countries has negative impact on the global food supply. As food prices rise, some nations are likely to cope by converting forests to fields. International tensions and conflicts are reasons to boost childbearing in Russia and some other countries. The military needs young people. The necessity of birth control has been obfuscated by conflicting national and global interests; the population growth being regarded as a tool helping to the national sovereignty and defense. The demographic growth contributes to scarcity of fresh water in many regions. The energy for desalination could be supplied by nuclear power plants. Obviously, a durable peace is needed, since nuclear facilities are potential war targets. Large projects could be accomplished by the unified humankind to improve the quality of life all over the world.

Keywords: Ukraine, Russia, Armed Conflict, Environment, Demography

1. Introduction

The declared reason of the “Special Military Operation” (SMO), which began in February 2022, was Ukrainian anti-separatist activity in the Donbas since 2014. Apparently, this activity has been exaggerated by Russian officials and media (discussed below). Combating separatism within national borders is justifiable, exemplified by Russian anti-separatist operations in the Caucasus (1994-2009). The Ukraine voted for independence (~83%) in the 1991 referendum. The pro-independence vote varied from 95% in the west of the country to 76.5 % in the Donetsk area and 54% in Crimea [1]. The 1991 borders of Ukraine were recognized by all nations, including the Russian Federation (RF), which consented to guarantee the borders by virtue of the Tripartite Accords (with participation of the United States) of January 14, 1994, and the Budapest Declaration of December 5, 1994. On May 31, 1997, the Treaty on Cooperation and Partnership between Russia and Ukraine was signed, recognizing the borders. The State Duma endorsed the Treaty in December 1998 and the Federation Council in February 1999 [2]. The United Nations considers SMO to be a violation of territorial integrity and sovereignty, which is against the UN Charter. The Ukraine war, having undermined the principle of internationally agreed status quo, has triggered a series

of conflicts in different parts of the world. The Russian military establishment earns credibility and funding by exploiting supposed threats from the West [3]. Accusations of the former rulers, Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin, of the Soviet Union (SU) dissolution and Ukraine crisis can be heard from Russian officials and media these days. This is rather pointless as all of them had been elected by an absolute majority and were representatives of the same ruling class. The policies were changed according to momentarily prevailing interests: privatization of the state property, absorption of foreign technology, and imperialism, one after another. These are just facts; moral judgments are avoided here.

Admittedly, a majority of residents in the southern and eastern parts of Ukraine are Russian-speaking; some of them were disappointed that their region had not become a part of RF. The Ukraine in today's borders was created by communists disregarding ethnic and linguistic realities. Statistics about ethnic composition are potentially misleading because some residents registered themselves as Ukrainians for reasons of convenience but continued sharing the Russian identity and loyalty. Reportedly, 25.5% of Ukrainian citizens defined their ethnicity as both Ukrainian and Russian in 1997. Around one-third of the population believed that the two

countries should be unified [4]. Numerous Russia-sympathizers probably contribute to the misappropriation of foreign aid, which may contribute to the economic and technological advance but not to the military effort.

Recent referendums in the occupied territories were met with skepticism because residents voted for the unification with RF to avoid trouble as they did not believe that the situation will be reverted. The Soviet-trained collectivism has influenced elections and opinion polls. Almost everybody voted the ruling party in the former SU. Some Russian-speaking areas may become parts of RF if people really want it. A workable solution must be found by means of negotiations. The question is, however, whether there are responsible negotiating partners. The history of the 20th century demonstrated that European leaders sometimes took short-sighted decisions. Undoubtedly, Russians must support civilization; but there should be some certainty that right people and right policies are supported.

There is an opportunity today to settle two long-lasting disputes. Considering partial analogy between Donbas and Taiwan, the following peace initiative has been proposed [5]. Referendums under international control should be held both regions with a proposal of 3 options: unification with Ukraine/China, independence, inclusion into RF, or for Taiwan - a protectorate by the United States and/or Japan. Analogous solution was proposed for the Crimea in 2015 [6]. An alternative for Ukraine could be a division between the European Union and RF after referendums held under international control in each province separately.

The Polish territory can be extended in the East in exchange to the German lands in the West of the country. The Curonian Spit and Königsberg must back home.

2. The Conflict

The conflict in Ukraine has not been objectively elucidated by Russian media. Based on available information, literature and own observations, the author believes that the warfare, harm and victims had been overestimated prior to the SMO at least. In particular, destructions in the Donetsk area tended to be exaggerated. Neither damaged buildings nor roads could be seen in Donetsk, Makeyevka, Khartsyzsk and other places in March 2022. The same was observed in 2014 [6]. There was mobile phone communication between adversaries in order to avoid casualties [7]. Apparently, the SMO was aimed among others at the personnel training, absorption of foreign aid and military technology.

There was a tendency to overestimate military activities and harm also regarding other conflicts in the post-Soviet space. Exaggerated dangers together with bribery at frontier crossings with participation of military personnel [8]. have been unfavorable for tourism, trade and, consequently, for the international understanding and trust. This, in turn, contributes to conflicts. Abandoned dilapidated buildings were often bombarded, as it was in the North Caucasus in the 1990s, whereas residents had been warned in advance and relocated. In the meantime, the towns and

villages have been newly rebuilt; some Soviet-time facilities were replaced by modern constructions. The service in overmanned militias both in the Donbas and in the Caucasus has been a remedy against unemployment due to the overpopulation in the latter and coal mines closures in the former. The unemployment in the Donbas was partly caused by a decline in the coal production thanks to ill-considered and corrupt policies during the 1990s [9]. The conflicts have distracted people from internal problems, facilitating screw-tightening, postponing solutions in the field of public health. All participants (both factual and fictive) of the current conflict will obtain the veteran status thus acquiring privileges over fellow-citizens. Some of them will occupy leading positions without proper selection and training. The care of war veterans is showcased these days. They enjoy advantages in the healthcare and everyday life; there are misgivings, though, that the veteran status has been awarded gratuitously to some individuals from the privileged milieu. Many World War II veterans had been factually maltreated in 1990-2004, when the average life expectancy decreased especially in males; by 1993 it had slumped to 58-59 years [10,11]. The public health deteriorated at that time. It is known that many war veterans consume alcohol. During the anti-alcohol campaign (1985-1989) they had to queue for hours at bottle stores or to consume non-beverage alcohol. Inexpensive beerhouses were crowded while visitors usually stood on their feet. Standing for a long time is undue hardship for aged people especially after work. Their counterparts in Europe are sitting in comfortable beerhouses consuming products of better quality than those available in RF. Since the 1990s poor-quality toxic liquids have been sold in ordinarily labeled bottles through legal shop generally with the knowledge of authorities. There have been mass poisonings with lethal outcomes; details and references are in [12,13]. Some legally sold beverages smell technical ethanol now as before. Child, elder abuse, sexual and reproductive coercion have been discussed previously [13-15].

3. Demographic and Environmental Aspects

The conflict in Ukraine has impeded ecological policies in Europe and worldwide. Environmental protection and energy conservation are less popular in Russia than in other industrialized countries. The war itself is damaging for the environment. The conflict between two major agricultural countries has negative impact on the global food supply. The birth control has been obfuscated by presumed national interests: the demographic growth was used to strengthen the sovereignty and defenses. International tensions and conflicts are among reasons to boost childbearing in Russia and some other countries. The military needs young people. The pro-natalist policies are unfavorable in view of the global overpopulation. The demographic growth contributes to the shortage of food and energy in many regions. The ecological damage, dearth of drinking water and food are generally proportional to the population density. As food prices rise, some nations are likely to cope by converting forests to fields. The agricultural production increases partly through the overexploitation and pollution of water resources, groundwater depletion, deforestation and environmental degradation.

In the past, overpopulation was counteracted by wars, pestilence and

famine. Today, scientifically based humane methods can be used to regulate the population size. Under conditions of globalization, an authority based in developed countries could counteract the overpopulation and environmental damage. Among advantages of globalization are the ecological management, governance of the world economy and control of warfare [16,17]. A globally coordinated unemployment protection would inhibit migrations and help people to develop professional skills according to new demands [18]. It appears inevitable that the human population will become reduced during the present century. How this happens may be to some extent within our control. It will not remain so indefinitely.

The undermining of globalization is another nail in the coffin of democracy and human rights. This is not necessarily unfavorable: more order is needed in our age of overpopulation and mass migrations. Great projects could be accomplished by the unified humankind to improve the quality of life worldwide: irrigation systems, nuclear and other energy sources as an alternative to fossil fuels. Nuclear power can be used for water desalination in arid regions; it has returned to the agenda because of increasing global energy demands and declining fossil fuel reserves. Nuclear power plants (NPPs) cause almost no air pollution compared to coal, oil or natural gas [19]. Hopefully, nuclear fission will be replaced in the future by fusion, which is intrinsically safer. The fusion should offer a source of clean power generation with a plentiful supply of raw materials [20]. Durable peace and international cooperation are needed for construction of NPPs in optimally suitable places, notwithstanding national borders, considering all sociopolitical, geographic, geologic factors, attitude of workers to their duties. Considering vulnerability of large NPPs during armed conflicts, attention should be directed to smaller nuclear reactors, which have some economic advantages and can be used also by the military [21,22]. The global development of nuclear energy must be managed by an international executive based in developed countries.

Birth rate inequalities lead to a growth of certain minorities that may become majorities and cause political instability. Differences in population dynamics between ex-Soviet countries and ethnicities within RF are considerable. The greatest ethnic shifts have been observed in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Emigration of Russians from these regions started decades ago having accelerated after the dissolution of SU, while the immigration to RF of ethnically non-Russian people is conspicuous. The highest birthrates within RF were registered in Chechnya, Ingushetia and Tuva; the fastest population decrease - in Pskov, Tambov, Tula and Tver provinces [23]. Migration of ethnic Caucasians from the mountains to adjacent lowlands is going on while Russians are leaving the area [24,25].

The population growth in the Far East has been maximal in Buryatia and Yakutia thanks to higher birth rates of the indigenous ethnic groups [26]. The maximal contribution to the population decline in the period 1992-2019 was made by St. Petersburg with surrounding province, Pskov, Vologda and Novgorod

provinces [27]. In Dagestan, the birth rate of indigenous peoples is approximately twice as high as among ethnic Russians [28]. The birth rate in Moscow is one of the lowest in RF, while the population growth is nearly the highest thanks to the immigration accounting for 83.7% of the growth in the period 2012-2018. One of 7 infants in Moscow is born to a migrant woman coming predominantly from the Caucasus or Central Asia. The phenomenon of “guest” or “parallel” (i.e. temporary or fictive) marriages becomes widespread [29,30].

One more topic should be broached in this connection. Competition for the lebensraum rose as a result of the Jewish “repatriation” to Palestine with its limited water and energy supplies. Such arguments as historical patrimony are not necessarily acceptable to other peoples. Back in the 1860s, the number of Jews in Palestine was ~14,000 or 4% of the total population of 350,000 [31]. From 1948 to 2002 the population of Israel increased from 806,000 to 6.3 million, or 9.8 million if Palestine territories are counted. Combined with immigration, the populace of the arid land, largely dependent on foreign aid and water desalination, is likely to reach 16 million by mid-century [32,33]. Despite existing beliefs, the fertility rate of Israeli and Palestinian women is comparable, being higher than in several Arab countries [32]. More than half of the food consumed in the Middle East is imported. Shortages of freshwater and arable land are getting worse [34]. Due to the burning of fossil fuels for desalination, the agriculture in Palestine is environmentally and economically unfavorable. Nonetheless, the agriculture uses more than half of Israel's water [35]. The disparity between available resources and consumption is predicted to grow. The sources of freshwater are overused and increasingly contaminated. In regard to the Ukraine conflict, the double standards should be pointed out: no sanctions have been implemented against Israel for comparable military operations.

4. Social and Health-Related Aspects

The separation of Russia from the rest of Europe has started after 1917 and continued thereafter [36]. The power holders, so-called nomenklatura [37], allied with the military, have generally been against the coexistence in one legal field with the West. This is not entirely groundless considering formally legal but unfair practices. Should the power in Europe shift to RF, it would entail certain changes: autocratic management style, disregard for laws and regulations, corruption and collectivism. The quality of many services and products will decline: spoiled foods on sale, falsified beer and wine, wrong price tags in shops, misquoting of legal codes by civil servants in their correspondence, backdating of official letters, different kinds of misconduct in the healthcare and medical research. Threats and violence have been used to intimidate certain professionals and students to deter them from criticism of misconduct in medical practice and research [38,39].

The intimidation policy with exaggeration of crime-related dangers is perceptible since the last decades. People have been systematically intimidated by the media, TV series, extortion e.g. by plumbers performing repairs in private apartments. The media factually propagandize criminal behavior, among other things,

approving of violence and lynching in prisons. In a popular TV series, the showman Leonid Kanevsky reiterates phrases like: “He didn't survive his jail term...Prison inmates don't like such people”. Adam, one of the sons of Ramzan Kadyrov, has been promoted and decorated after he had publicly beaten a prison inmate [40]. Adam's sojourn in the prison was illegal but arranged by the authorities. Thereafter, Vladimir Putin personally met Adam. Vitaly Kaloyev was promoted to deputy minister having committed intentional murder. A petition was filed to the government in 2015 to dismiss Kaloyev from his position, reproduced as illustration in the article [41]. In 2017, Vladimir Putin signed a new law decriminalizing some forms of domestic violence. Many people in RF live under supposed or real threat of assault and battery, comparable with corporal punishments of the 19th century. Intimidated citizens are an easy prey for a dictator.

In conditions of the Soviet-trained collectivism and mass intimidation almost everybody voted the ruling party. This is psychologically explicable; but the solid vote makes the whole nation formally responsible. Homogeneity of thinking is a predictor of conformism that is conducive to dictatorship [42]. Dmitri Trenin generalized about the national character: deification of authorities, low value of human life and personality, disrespect for laws, private property and education, hatred and envy of America [43]. Indeed, envy may contribute to hostility. Envious people blame those who make them feel ashamed by comparison [44].

The autocratic management style discourages criticism. In the healthcare, attributes of this style include a paternalistic approach to patients, bossy management, and harassment of colleagues if they do not follow instructions. Under conditions of paternalism, misinformation of patients, disregard for the principle of informed consent, and compulsory treatments are seen as permissible [45]. The following has been reported: overuse of gastrectomy for peptic ulcers, of thoracic surgery in tuberculosis, bronchial asthma and other respiratory diseases, excessive and compulsory treatments of alcoholics. Millions of women in the former SU underwent Halsted or Patey mastectomy with removal of pectoral muscles without evidence-based indications, often without informed consent [38,39]. Endocervical ectopies or ectropions (named pseudo-erosions in Russia) have been routinely cauterized without cytological tests; Pap-smears for early detection of cervical cancer have been performed infrequently and not up to the international standards, cervical cancer being diagnosed relatively late. Justifications of surgical hyper-radicalism could be heard in private conversations among medics: “The hopelessly ill are dangerous” i.e. may commit reckless acts undesirable by the state. For example, glioblastoma patients were routinely operated on, while it was believed by some staff that the treatment was generally useless, just forcing many patients to spend the rest of their lives in bed. Numerous examples and references are in the book [39]. The training of medical personnel under the imperative of readiness for war has been one of the motives. Thanks to the Internet, foreign literature is available in Russia these days, many guidelines being adjusted to international patterns. However, some published instructions have remained without due commentaries.

Finally, the obstacles to the import of drugs and medical equipment should be mentioned. Domestic products are promoted sometimes despite questionable quality and possible counterfeiting [46].

The development discussed in the preceding paragraph will be reinforced thanks to the growing Chinese influence. The war in Ukraine has rendered Russia increasingly dependent on China [47,48]. Violations of human rights, political abuse of psychiatry and widespread scientific misconduct in China are known [48,50]. Reportedly, over 80% of clinical trial data submitted to support new drug registrations in China have been fraudulent [49]. As for psychiatry, the abuses seem to be even more extensive than in the Soviet Union in the 1970-1980s and involve repeated incarceration of human rights activists, petitioners and people complaining against injustices by local authorities. The “patients” undergo physical maltreatment and compulsory medication [50,51].

In fact, Putin acts in Ukraine and on the international arena in the interests of certain non-European agent(s), as apparently did some initiators of the World Wars. European economies were adversely affected by the wars of the 20th century, contributing to industrialization of non-European countries, followed by decolonization and population explosion [52]. Putin's policies go on in the same direction. It seems that Putin is ready to share power with people of non-Russian ethnicity and citizenship just to preserve the privileges of the *nomenklatura*, while the Ukraine war is used as distraction. Crises are used by oligarchy to distract from internal problems.

The nuclear threats and declarations of jihad by Russian officials have appeared against the background of Soviet atheism, while religious vocabulary is misused for political purposes [53,54]. This pertains also to the Patriarch of Moscow, who approves of the Ukraine invasion, demonstrating no willingness to seek peace, and painting the warfare as a battle against “evil forces” [55]. In fact, this is a continuation of the anti-European and anti-American (read: anti-Christian) policy of the Soviets. Preparing the end of the communist regime, the party and military functionaries sent their children to theological academies, some students being transferred directly from Marxism-Leninism faculties. According to an estimate, ~60% today's elites in RF have *nomenklatura* backgrounds this figure is probably higher. Also in Ukraine the “oligarchic-*nomenklatura* holdover” prevailed in politics and economics [56,57]. For inside observers it is obvious in retrospect that *nomenklatura* prepared the end of the communist regime since the 1980s in order to privatize the state property into their own pockets, which was in fact accomplished in the early 1990s.

Certain non-Russian agents may be interested in a continuation of the fratricidal war, and there are misgivings that Vladimir Putin has come under their influence. The well-known ideologist Alexandr Dugin opined: “Every civilization has the right to decide about... death, good and evil” [58]. Indeed, some terrorists have made such decisions. A preferred alternative would be a leadership centered in the most developed parts of the world, based on the principles of mercy, modesty and forgiveness, aimed at preservation of human

life and health. The role of RF as a regional superpower would be honorable and satisfactory for sober-minded citizens. Instead of machismo and militarism, the propaganda should popularize the image of scrupulous and hardworking people.

Wars within Europe implicate bravery of soldiers and irresponsibility of some rulers. Winners of such wars are those who stay outside. History of the 20th century has proven that. The westward animosity is framed as a defensive response to the “centuries of Western hostilities towards Russia” [59]. The Tatar-Mongol Yoke (1237-1480), the most efficient “hostility towards Russia”, has not been mentioned in the context [59]. although it is a real perspective in view of demographic developments [60].

5. Conclusion

Russian rulers are often accused of aggression these days. In fact, they may be pioneers of a new historic period. If the world is indeed becoming multicentric [61]. armed conflicts of various magnitudes may become permanent. In a sense, it would be a return to the 19th century or earlier times. A constructive alternative may be the global leadership concentrated in the most developed parts of the world based on humanism and modern science. The role of Russia would be that of a regional superpower. Great projects could be accomplished by the unified humankind instead of the warfare and military expenditures.

Civil liberties and human rights will be gradually abandoned worldwide if our future is a series of conflicts. This perspective seems to be inevitable unless new moral principles are accepted: no population group, neither ethnic nor confessional minorities, may obtain any advantages because of the numerical expansion. In view of the global overpopulation, those who have had many children should logically live in more constrained conditions. Social consequences of the gender imbalance must be borne mainly by those population groups, where sex-selective abortions have been practiced. Acceptance of these principles could build a basis for international understanding and trust. Without procreative competition, different peoples would be more likely to live in peace. Great projects could be realized by the globalized mankind, being a reasonable alternative to excessive military expenditures. Not only durable peace but also mutual trust is needed for that. Unfortunately, trust can be abused. Ukraine should become a testing ground for the international trust and cooperation.

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